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Strategies of Inwardness:
Narrative Apprehension and the Modernist Quest for the Locus of Authenticity

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Abstract

*Strategies of Inwardness: Narrative Apprehension and the Modernist Quest
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This dissertation reads together for the first time *Heart of Darkness*, *The Confessions of Zeno*, and *The Counterfeiters* to show how Joseph Conrad, Italo Svevo, and André Gide all treated the act of reading as a site of social and political activity. Each posits a theory of reading in order to make his personal values become larger social values. As forerunners of reader-reception theory, their narrative experiments allowed them to move beyond realism, which they saw as suppressing the dialogical potential of the novel. Instead, their manipulations of the reader's response expose readers to alternate possibilities for creating meaning. The argument uses both reception theory to define the reader-to-text relationship, as well as a narratological approach for in-depth study of the structure and function of discourses of representation. The combination enables me to demonstrate how these texts reform their readers' expectations about historico-notional narratives and amplify the dialogical potential of the novel.

These novels all present an unfettered examination of the human conscience based on resistance to authoritative truth. In so doing, they innovatively convey everything as fiction, including the world outside of the text. In the first chapter, Conrad's indefinite significations related to the search for meaning are shown to work in a cyclical fashion with the goal to destroy the collective ethos formulated around iconic historical myths about colonialism. In Chapter two, Svevo's novel reveals how revised significations related to established cultural codes transform the act of reading into a competitive act for

interpretive meaning. In the final chapter Gide's novel addresses the problems of misinterpretation by exposing and questioning authorial production. Gide also raises questions about how to achieve artistic perfection in an imperfect world of multiplicity and inevitable reversals.

In these novels the spiritual and material are no longer separate and the search for answers, absolutes, and the location of meaning becomes an end in itself. They challenge readers to find the heart of authenticity, no matter how abstract. The visionary nature of their work lies in the sincere attempt never to take interpretation for granted.

*Strategies of Inwardness: Narrative Apprehension and the Modernist
Quest for the Locus of Authenticity*

Introduction

According to the literary critic Paul Armstrong, “reading is a social experience in which we find out beliefs and conventions engaged and challenged by other ways of seeing, judging, and behaving.”¹ The significance of reading is in how it can shape lives and approaches to living, as well as the relationship to ourselves and others. Modernist authors Joseph Conrad, Italo Svevo, and Andre’ Gide were quite aware that reading is a site of social and political activity, for they were each making radical narrative experiments that are distinct within European literary modernism. Each a significant author in his own right, their greatest works are best understood within the context of the modernist movement as a whole. In fact, their rapport relates to how they each bring something significant to the movement by exploring how formal textual strategies engage readers’ assumptions and conventions. Their projects intersect in that they each have a special concern for the challenge these forms make to reading habits and the making of meaning. With much complexity and a certain amount of ambiguity the works of each seek to represent the world through questioning the *how* of their own representation.

The choice to read and analyze the works of these authors together for the first time was a logical conclusion, since all of them were alienated in some way within their home nations and, in turn, came to challenge the assumptions of the societies in which they lived by writing personalized, confessional-type narratives that defy the standards of realist fiction. Interestingly, what largely began as a project about the importance of various modernist narrative

¹ Armstrong, Paul B.. *Play and the Politics of Reading: The Social Uses of Modernist Form*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. Print.

developments, such as the use of the subjective voice in order to address early twentieth century disorientation around personal identity, became a study in how each of these authors posit their particular theories of representation and seek to make their own set of personal values become larger social values by engaging readers in new ways. Each has written seminal modernist novels which have the scope and power to reach across history and inform the interpretive ideas of the present. Their self-reflexive fictions experiment with narrative structure and the psychological by challenging the conventions of realism. Reality is shown to be an interpretation and a construct, which forces readers to look at what has, up until that time, been taken for granted in regards to ways of knowing.

While looking across the contributions that the works of these authors make within the first twenty five years of the twentieth century, three interrelated concerns become evident. Firstly, *Heart of Darkness*, *La Coscienza di Zeno*, and *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* all engage readers by illustrating the interpretive adventures of the narrators. For these authors, how we come to understand ourselves and our relationship to the world around us is a production in its own right. Accordingly, investigations into how we understand necessitate the experimentation these authors make in regards to the workings of representation. As a result, strategies and methods to representation become challenges to readers. Each of these authors develops their own particular approach to manipulating reader response in order to educate, or to expose readers to alternate possibilities about the creation of meaning. The argument that connects these three matters is that the novels analyzed establish an exceptional transitional point in the history of representation.

The set of questions that bring this all to light in the following chapters requires a synthetic reading that uses reception theory in order to zero in on the reader to text relationship, as well as a narratological approach that allows for an in-depth study of the structure and

function of discourses of representation. Firstly, reading in this way is essential to demonstrating what these authors understood about how cultural background and life experiences contribute to the meaning of a text. Clearly the knowledge they had related to narrative and readership allowed them to reform the prior historico-notional narratives of their readers. In addition, reading in this way allows for a greater understanding of the dialogical potential of the novel. What is revealed are the techniques that Conrad, Svevo, and Gide all created to move beyond realism, which they saw as suppressing such dialogues through the subordinating action of the omniscient voice. The representational triptych formed by their work shows a unified objective, though the tone varies from tragic to comic, to present an unfettered examination of the human conscience hinged on resistance to authoritative truth. These texts convey everything as fiction, including the world outside of the text, showing that the spiritual and material are no longer separate and the search for answers, absolutes, and the location of meaning is futile.

Chapter One entitled “Rediscovering Conrad and his Readers: Veiled Persuasion and Questions of Interpretation in *Heart of Darkness*” looks at how Conrad’s text questions its own value structure by creating tension in the framework of social meaning. The goal of this chapter is to go beyond questions of how Conrad’s novella exposes a system of representation and to ask how it actually changes it. Accordingly, the theoretical challenges within the text that have previously been overlooked are explored to reveal the ways in which the text calls for a reading act of social compromise. One example of this is in how the formal characteristics of the novella create a cyclical pattern regarding ways of seeing and understanding that prompts readers to question preconceptions around social truth.

By exploring the intersection of where production and reception meet in *Heart of Darkness*, readers are shown engaging with Marlow in the problem of how meaning is made. In

following the descriptions of Marlow's environment and his experience there, knowledge becomes oblique and all sense of the familiar deteriorates. Much of this dynamic develops as a result of how meaning is shown to be trapped by language. Readers are impelled to seek an answer, yet they too find the unanswerable of Marlow's Congo, a space which mirrors the boundaries of his own ability to understand the entirety of his experience.

Another challenge to readers relates to how the text moves away from the tradition of a primary narrative by using multiple narrative voices to show the dialogical nature of meaning. As with other networks of meaning within Conrad's overall theoretical approach, this dialogical structure serves multiple purposes, challenging the locus of authority while also mimicking the novella's own readership. The difficulties inherent in both the storytelling role and the reception role are dramatized using concentric narrators to show the inability to completely reconcile what is truth and what is fiction. It serves to emphasize the dissimilarity in perspectives that are bound together by ideas about dreams, reality, and the believable, as well as to reveal the genre of history writing as narrativization that, as a singular perspective, is never a record of the truth.

Hence, the novella instructs without appearing to be didactic. It illuminates readers by prompting them to question their own concepts of identity and representation by moving beyond any pretense toward objectivity in narrative. The ending note of Marlow's lie to the Intended is a perfect example of this. Marlow's lie attempts to reanimate and attribute meaning to the Kurtz Marlow thought he would find, bringing Marlow's story back to its beginning point. Uncovering the illusions of colonialist adventure, all ironically concludes with an opposing need to cover up the dark side of the colonialist experience. Often thought to be an ambiguous ending and interpreted with multiple hypotheses, what this chapter reveals as most important is the hidden

lesson: Kurtz' story is not complete without the lie and the truth, and both are more or less interchangeable.

Chapter Two entitled "In-Betweenness and the Struggle for Interpretation in Italo Svevo's *La Coscienza di Zeno: An Anti-Case History*" reveals how Svevo's novel uses the rejection of the Freudian paradigm to illustrate a rejection of the modern word of truth. The novel's narrative shows that there seems to be something inherently disruptive in trying to articulate truths. By questioning Freudian culture, which is preoccupied with this need to articulate, the story's use of psychoanalysis functions as a revelatory tool applied to looking at the subconscious in an entirely new way. One concept that this chapter develops is how Freud should be read as imaginative fiction alongside the novel's own postulated theories. With this in mind, the text can be seen to disregard any explanations about human nature that result from an attempt to engineer epiphanies.

Sources of authority are altered by shifts in symbols around morality. Zeno's own narrative is one that allows him to escape the burden of a bad conscience by superseding the standard Freudian paradigm with his own equally inspired explanations. Reality and perspective are juxtaposed and explored via a kind of semantic confusion which allows him to feel motivatedly moral despite his misdeeds, displacing the usual equation that results in guilt when the ego and superego collide. The idiom of Zeno's life makes for the ultimate irony because, the belief in his own inadequacy and the assurance in his ill health allow him to exist in a conscious state of exercising free will since lack and competition aren't a concern for him. Hence, the novel uses psychosomatic illness as fodder for questioning cultural codes around success as related to preconceived notions about competition and health. Undeniably, its world of ambiguity innovatively displaces many conventions with a similar goal as that of *Heart of Darkness*, to

complicate the reading of logically opposing paradigms. In the case of *La Coscienza di Zeno* birth and death, cure and illness, success and failure are all challenged along with truth and untruth.

In reading how Svevo's novel explores chance as an unconscious happening, the deliberate shift away from realism and the omniscient narrative voice is shown as an embrace of life seen as free association. The psychoanalytic myth and mimicry that exist in assessing life according to the maternal and paternal relationships to the child is shown to be an attempt to systematize how the unconscious plays a part in life. After abandoning the possibility of truth, the need to articulate, however imperfectly, is acknowledged as an end in itself, an important aspect of any reading of this novel. The unresolved confessions of Zeno with an insistent brand of logic that is entirely irrational ironically show man is a self-disrupting creature within an ever changing universe.

Ultimately, the novel's focus is the struggle for interpretation. There is tension between what the novel is about and how it operates for the role of interpretation is at once the content and a structural journey. In order to address the inherent irony of this novel, this chapter establishes the connection between the two main dilemmas the novel tackles – the problematic nature of reading and that of writing, both of which exist in an intersubjective relationship to each other. Using the drama of the patient-analyst relationship, both production and reception are explored by looking at how the text seeks to uncover shared expectations.

Chapter Three entitled, "Gide's 'Art du Roman' and the Artificiality of Absolutes," looks at how, much like Svevo's *La Coscienza di Zeno*, *Les Faux Monnayeurs* embraces coincidence as a thematic concept and shows the integrity of a work can no longer be founded on realist

principles. This chapter demonstrates that, for Gide, the move beyond realism goes further than that of Conrad and Svevo in that novel writing is used as an act of reappraising what novel writing is. For example, by following the novel, which is largely made up of the journals of fictional author Edouard, with his own journals, Gide complicates the locus of authority even further than his predecessors. Narrative layers erode each other and characters' agency, including that of the narrator, is often shown to be largely controlled by outer world forces.

This chapter opens up the novel's critical use of both personal narrative and literary artifice in order to convey a crossroads of creative potential that engages readers as integral rhetorical players. The larger theme of the counterfeiter, which seems to exist off the mark of this axis, is a critique that the story makes about self-delusion. Even the narrator Edouard is shown to make some erroneous choices as a writer for he never completes his novel, the one we are reading and reading about. This makes for a direct challenge to readers' perceptions, forcing them to question what a novel is, which proposes creative accidents on the part of the author and the narrators. Interestingly, these accidents are meant to give authority to readers. By tempting questions of how to attain artistic perfection and personal authenticity, the contradictions within the individual and within the process of novel writing are exposed in the reading.

The abandonment of the main conflict that the entire story is building up to has the effect of showing how reality is shaped on both the sum total of multiple acts and on reversals. When Edouard decides that Boris' suicide doesn't seem real and he will not use it in his novel, readers are left wondering why the suicide, and all of what led up to it, happened. This is an important critical point that this chapter endeavors to capture beyond simply pointing out a critique made by the novel about con artists and swindlers. In fact, its criticism is directed both to society and to the world of artistic representation, but the novel's deeper inquiry relates more to how the

mise en abyme form becomes an essential vehicle to achieving authenticity in that it is able to show the interplay between motivations, chance, and situational variables. The real counterfeit is representation itself and the only way to avoid its pitfalls is via throwing off the constraints of duty to resemblance.

Reading across these texts reveals remarkable changes in beliefs around the role of morality. Morality for Conrad, particularly the moral problem of conduct, is still a concern. Even for Svevo this remains disquieting in the sense that his narrator-protagonist must develop his own theories to justify acting in ways that would otherwise create a guilty conscience. Yet an ideological transformation is apparent: if Conrad believed man to be vulnerable to corruptibility and civilization to be under threat, Svevo had accepted that human resolution waivers and good intentions go astray. Svevo's sense of moral reform is related to humanizing the need for an idiom of interpretation and to making this need an end in itself, which goes beyond Conrad's story about the absence of an idiom of interpretation in the context of moral confusion. But by the time we get to Gide, such idioms are shown to be overly moral and are questioned. They must take a backseat to sincerity because all aspects of one's nature, both the devil and the god, are required in order to achieve personal and creative authenticity. Since extremes seem to be part and parcel of human nature, reversals and displacements are vital correctives and idioms must come to reflect that.

Beliefs around causality are related to the change in view on morality. By compounding symbolism and significations, Conrad's readers must draw conclusions as to the cause of the metaphors and come to share in Marlow's confusion as a result. Svevo questions and reinterprets causality via accidents, lapses, and the play on psychoanalysis, and Gide makes causality disappear with the *acte gratuit*, providing a total liberation from motivation or cause.

The reception approach reveals the dynamics of these author's formal techniques and how they affect readers -from Marlow's failed attempt to grasp the essence of his Congo experience, to Zeno's recognition that the interpretation of malady and the malady of interpretation are inseparable, to Edouard's sincere attempt to experience absolutely everything making vices and virtues indivisible. Certainly the discoveries that Conrad, Svevo, and Gide all made propose a challenge to readers to find the heart of authenticity, even if that center is more abstract than we had formerly known it to be. They each urge us to question the conventions of our cultural codes and the authority of uniform historical voices. And with this irreverence toward the past, they stand apart, using it to dramatize storytelling and to create innovative novels, the writing of which functions as a kind of positive betrayal against the standards of the common ethos of their époque. By manipulating representations of contradictory forces in order to provoke epistemological inquiry, they ask us never to take interpretation for granted.

Rediscovering Conrad and his Readers: Veiled Persuasion and Questions of Interpretation in
Heart of Darkness

It is respectable to have no illusions, and safe, and profitable and dull.
-Joseph Conrad

Critics agree that Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* disrupts the narrative tradition by introducing multiple narrators and destabilizing the notion of objective truth, yet many disagree on either, the purpose, the dynamics, or the nature of that truth. Are the imperialist suppositions of the time challenged or reinforced? Is the text didactic or is it an enigma of interpretation that keeps folding in on itself – a kind of nihilistic non-revelation that resists moralizing? This chapter seeks answers to these questions which build upon published scholarship, yet its main concern is with another question: is *Heart of Darkness* meant to simply expose a system of representation or change it? In order to address this query, which refers to notions regarding narrative structure as well as to the social issues at stake in the text, a more synthetic reading is in order, one that applies a reception approach to the text and reader relationship, while also acknowledging Conrad's novella as a dialogical narrative study that works to counter the historico-notional narratives around imperialism. The result is a discovery of how the reader and narrative relationships within operate by nature of their reciprocal processes to form a complex pattern in regards to ways of understanding that denies social truth as a given, thus striving to provide an alternative to the imperialist ideal.

J. Hillis Miller's deconstructive interpretation concerned with the act of reading argues that the text is not looking to provide a specific truth, rather it simply demands to be read and understood in its entirety.² He rejects the prospect of seeking meaning from within the story's

² Miller, *Others*, Chapter 5: "Joseph Conrad: Should We Read Heart of Darkness?" pg 104

events and, instead, claims it is the act of reading itself which illuminates readers by mimicking the unrevealable secret Marlow describes. In this view, the text asks readers to try on the problem for size by partaking in the reception process. This implies an intentional move on Conrad's part whereby the readers get duped along with Marlow to seek an answer to the novella's unanswerable question. Miller concludes the secret that remains obscured throughout is in itself indicative of the empty promises of imperialism. The supposition is that the text does seek objective truth via putting emphasis on what is experiential on the part of readers, thus becoming didactic in its reception. However, in Miller's argument, a study of the language and its significations within the text is largely absent.

Conversely, Peter Brooks' narratological approach argues that language in *Heart of Darkness* is used as a kind of metacognitive tool, elucidating the fact that it is incapable of providing truth unless it is expressed and interpreted in a kind of dialogic palimpsest.³ He focuses on how this story and the stories within are conveyed, and what they can offer when interpreted in unison: the result being that the text works to show "there are no more primary narratives" (385). Marlow's retelling of Kurtz's story, which is also retold, reveals how "meaning is dialogic in nature... born of the relationship between tellers and listeners." The act of storytelling, as related to the overall narrative context, exposes the way in which the text probes narrative truth; it offers its larger meaning through a collage of subjective voices. The focus is on a theory of production and, yet, the ways in which these multiple voices mimic the novella's readership as an important component of interpretation is not addressed.

³ Brooks, "An Unreadable Report: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*"

Paul B. Armstrong's response to the text is by far the most holistic. Like Brooks, Armstrong also focuses on *Heart of Darkness* as a kind of dialogical study, but more to a socio-cultural end than to a narratological one. He refers to the text as a "critical instrument" that exposes the social problems of empire, but one that is challenged to move beyond them.⁴ He concedes that cultural constructs resulting from imperialistic thought result in an objectification of Africans that Conrad, from within his time and place, cannot overcome: Marlow can't escape his own ethics, though they feel empty to him. These challenges then become problems that readers must try to work through since the novella does the work of deconstructing imperialist notions, yet offers nothing in their stead. Armstrong clarifies this point by suggesting that the text is a "calculated failure to depict achieved cross-cultural understanding," concluding that the text presents a problem revealed that is then given to readers to try to resolve individually (431). This statement implies that not only was Marlow flummoxed in regard to offering a solution, but so too was Conrad.

I would argue that as readers are left to try to decipher what the truth is, they are participating in a deliberate move by Conrad to educate them about the flawed representations created by imperialism and that, even though a dialogue with the other remains more or less at the level of unfulfilled possibility, revealing the humanity of the Africans is the result of a narrative complexity that calls for a reading act of social compromise; the text, thus, influences readers to not only become aware of their assumptions around imperialism, but to outgrow them—a result that comes out of the power of engaging with the novella's process, creating a new kind of reader.

⁴ Armstrong, "Reading, Race, and Representing Others", Norton Critical Editions, 4th ed., pg 356

The challenges within the text are as much, or more, theoretical than they are moral, and bringing these to light requires synthesizing analyses of both production and reception. Seeing that this is an ironic literary work rather than a polemic or an autobiography, we can start by freeing Conrad of all responsibility from the Eurocentric ideologies that exist within the text. The section in this chapter entitled “Nature and Culture” underlines the importance of bringing these ideologies to light via the novella’s preoccupation with the absence of a point of contact between the historical and the primitive in order to expose misguided beliefs about identity as a socio-cultural construct. We can then assume an active reading whereby readers seek an answer to the novella’s promise. Even if that promise cannot be fulfilled according to the laws of irony, the significations become altered by using Marlow’s personal narrative to transform the collective narrative around colonial adventure – the outer world of the story is subsumed by the inner world of Marlow’s experience.⁵ The section entitled “The Search for Signs” reveals the text’s suggestions of meaning as abstract due to being trapped by language. An observation of *Heart of Darkness* at the level of symbols alone speaks to how the entire system of imperialist representation is probed and altered by describing things seen through withholding, or the absence of naming. Empire’s influence is metaphorized by the thick fog that surrounds the three-penny steamer Marlow and his crew are running during a skirmish with the natives. The ridiculousness of their attempts to shoot in the dark dramatizes the novella’s paradox by revealing an irresolvable problem related to how the scene is described rather than what is being described. Language is unable to construct an authentic world and the state of things exists in flux, thus there is a fundamental instability in what is known. “Toward Conrad’s Transactional

⁵ See Ian Watt’s article “Impressionism and Symbolism in *Heart of Darkness*” for an excellent explanation of Conrad’s impressionist tactics that obscure the subject through subjective personal narrative that focuses on the conditions of experience. Watt calls this “subjective moral impressionism.”

Theory” and “The Opening Scene and the Reader’s Task” inform as to how exactly readers are engaged in grappling with representation at the level of relative theory rather than with moral absolutes and “A Twice-Told Tale” looks at questions of narrative authority and the novella’s approach to reader reception. The final section “Keeper of the Memory” questions the subject of truth in the text by exploring the doubleness of significations and their inherent opposites to reveal *Heart of Darkness*’ larger conclusion: there is no truth, only ways of seeing.

Toward Conrad’s Transactional Theory

The way in which questions of interpretation within the novella are presented and revealed informs us about Conrad’s own theoretical perspective on the concepts of authorship, narrative voice and the locus of authority, as well as of readership. In looking at Conrad’s application of narrative self-consciousness, what Amar Acheraïou terms “authorial dissemination” in his recent critical book *Joseph Conrad and the Reader: Questioning Modern Theories of Narrative Readership*, Conrad’s fiction demonstrates the difficulty of supporting the concept of complete separation of the writer and the text.⁶ Therefore establishing this connection of writer and text to reader performance (using a transactional theory that gives equal

⁶ Acheraïou’s purposes are mainly to counter and correct the notion of authorial demise. In his move to document the return of the author, whereby “the author neither vanishes nor is impotent within,” he follows in the steps of Sean Burke by debunking the dogma of Roland Barthes, particularly the godlike status “Death of the Author” gives to the reader as well as the interpreter (19). What distinguishes Acheraïou’s study of Conrad and his readership is his assertion that Conrad’s aesthetics and poetic outlook have a “trans-epochal character” and “multi-dimensionality” which complicate attempts at “classifying Conrad within a specific literary category” (192). This conclusion comes partly from a look at Conrad’s own rootlessness as a dual citizen and man of the sea, facts that created a somewhat biased reception of his work in Europe, and partly by looking at Conrad’s use of the transactional theory of reading, which gives necessarily equal involvement to the text, author, and reader.

involvement to the text, author, and reader) serves as a stepping stone to test larger conclusions in relation to how *Heart of Darkness* alters the perception and understanding of colonial history for its readership. It becomes apparent that, through transforming outmoded significations related to European ideals, Conrad goes beyond just exposing, undermining, or questioning the then current notions about colonialism to transform them for readers. This transformation, in both fact and deed, reveals the kind of readership Conrad aspires to produce.

The reception role expands and contracts as it exists across the continuum of the common reader to a preferred reader. Collaborative relationships in the novella between communicators of stories and their readers or listeners are informative and serve to show the ways in which the novella constructs and manipulates without soliciting readers directly –without appearing to be didactic. In essence, the device of using concentric narrators appeals to a fictional audience’s need to participate by engaging them with the listeners and readers in the story. The application of “authorial dissemination” requires looking at how the novella manages to challenge readers’ assumptions about themselves while also pointing back to Conrad as a model. At an esoteric level, Conrad could even be a kind of couched model reader of his own work.⁷ Conrad called his presence one that is “suspected” rather than “seen,” thus Conrad exists in his work in a way that allows him to move about like a specter. Without a fixed location, he becomes ubiquitous.⁸

Conrad’s importance as an established influence on Modernism in his own time cannot be denied; neither can the essentiality of his presence in a dialogue related to the principals of

⁷ “Model Reader” refers to Umberto Eco’s term which is similar to Wolfgang Iser’s “Implied Reader”: a hypothetical figure of the active reader the text addresses. See Eco’s *Open Work* for further discussion.

⁸ Not to be confused with omniscience, since a transactional tripartite reader, text, author relationship reading is being established. See Eco’s *Open Work* for further discussion.

deconstruction since he intentionally worked at the level of subtext by using his narrative to question its own value structures. The novella's attempt to betray any sense of stable meaning reveals its meta-awareness, elements of deconstruction, the indeterminacy of which is postmodern in its ethos.⁹ Returning to Peter Brooks' assertion that *Heart of Darkness* seeks to show that the world can only be known through combined narratives, and building from there: Conrad reveals the genre of history writing as narrativization that is not an actual representation of the past, thus history is never a record of the truth. If there is an attempt within the text to rewrite history, however, it must anticipate Barthes' "Death of the Author" and employ a locus of authority that is difficult to capture.

Subsequent to establishing the challenges in classifying Conrad's work due to its anticipation of the postmodern, comes the question of how his veiled persuasion functions by calling attention to the value structure behind narrative and, in so doing, challenges the norms that readers would anticipate. Going beyond a discussion of the novella's critique of colonialism, the narrative strategies in the novella work to recodify commonly held beliefs that turn-of-the-century European readers had about their own collective identity as it pertained to a sense of participating in a common history. Conrad's techniques transform the historically glorified subject of colonialism by applying narrative modes that essentially predispose readers to read in a certain way in order for them to fully appropriate the novella as representative of history in crisis. In combination with the double narrative frame of concentric narrators, representing both a collective point of view and one that is personal, veiled persuasion effectively rewrites history

⁹ Conrad is, at once, able to break out of the tradition of the conventional author who determines meaning and to counter a later critique of the necessity of dismissing the author's role altogether. A stirring observation by Acheraiou explains the ways in which Conrad has achieved a "trans-epochal" writer status. He also convincingly asserts that Conrad seems to anticipate the postmodern.

by altering his readers' way of understanding and perceiving shared history. Part of this relates to an enduring sense of the uncanny in the novella.

Using Todorov's theory of the fantastic as a "fundamental dimension of modernity" born from intellectual uncertainty where the familiar is broken down helps explain how *Heart of Darkness* works at the level of subtext to question its own value structure.¹⁰ In the novella an uncomfortable repetitiveness creates tension in the social framework of meaning, causing readers to question who they are on a social scale since the values of the mother country are upset. Todorov asserts, according to the logic of suspense, the unexplainable will turn out to be just odd or will show that the supernatural really exists, forming a new sense of reality. Regardless, the unexplainable will be dissipated in some way because it could only continue in a realm that exists before the uncertainty to its nature is dispelled. However, in the case of *Heart of Darkness*, uncertainty remains due to its way of avoiding the familiar as well as in how it dislocates the locus of authority. Slavoj Žižek sees a deeper link to the fantastic in Lacan's assertion that the real can never be dealt with directly, becoming an oblique perspective because it disappears when attempting to grasp it.¹¹ The supernatural in the novella does not strive to be real; it develops a resonance that makes no pretense toward objectivity; it pits a revised sense of the real against the familiar due to the fact that the real is conveyed through impressions, or what Watt calls "moral subjectivism." Knowledge as we know it is cut off; it remains oblique and, therefore, so is any identifying sense of the familiar related to that knowledge. Miller's point about how the novella asks only to be read is an important one, but not just for the reason that it

¹⁰ *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Tzvetan Todorov

¹¹ *Jacques Lacan: Society, Politics, Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek

mimics the empty promises of imperialism, but also in how it changes the reading act and, thus, readers by subjecting them to dizzying circles of concentric narrators and by causing them to search for a source of tangible authority in the text.

The Opening Scene and the Reader's Task

In looking at the novella's first section which introduces Marlow and the principles the society of seamen participate in, Conrad's move to change reader perception requires acknowledging the role of memory. Theoretically, memory is an essential component of the reception approach and can be related not only to the past, but also to a society's sense of the collective self as regards to how it informs perceptions about the future of that society. Hans Robert Jauss, in his text *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, calls the way in which a text interacts with a reader's interpretation the "horizon of expectation." He explains that a literary work, "predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by... overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of that which was already read, which bring the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and... arouses expectations for the "middle and end," which can then be maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically... according to specific rules of the text" (26). When looking at history as a kind of master-narrative, one can see it is pieced together from a bricolage of stories, including imaginary tales and myth, and that the identity of a people evolves and proceeds from that history. To use an expression from Melvin Bragg referring to the sensational magazine fiction that was popular during Conrad's time, the "white Brits triumph style" is not found in *Heart of Darkness*. Therefore, the rules of Conrad's text reorient reader expectations (at the "horizon"

level) because the reception of readers of the time would have been challenged by the novella's lack of a sense of European victory in Africa.

The reader reorientation that the novella produces refers back to what Jauss argues is the task of literary history. He states, literary history is "completed when literary production is...seen as 'special history' in its own unique relationship to 'general history'" (28). Conrad's theoretical approach is indeed a special history that has a role in re-educating readers. The novella focuses on a time when the divide between the high ideals and the dirty work of a mission like King Leopold II's in the Congo was not completely clear to the continental public. Conrad's Congo then becomes a vehicle for the change in that "horizon" of expectation readers are forced to confront.

Within the novella there exists a hierarchy of readers that creates a new paradigm for reading. *Heart of Darkness* positions Marlow and readers in such a way that they are forced to come to terms with the harsh truths about colonialism in both the past and in regard to its implications for the future. This can be seen initially by looking at the ways the frame narrator's descriptions of his listeners' movement and gaze serve as a foundation for demonstrating the necessity of a change in them. The novella begins with a metaphor that elucidates the question of what perspective is most effective for approaching the novella: "The Nellie, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails and was at rest. The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river the only thing was for it to come to and wait for the turn of the tide" (3). Readers discover, as the story begins, that the sailboat Nellie is completely motionless, as are the seamen who are an audience to Marlow's tale. This is important because the opening image serves as a position of stasis, symbolizing the start for, or *vantage point* of Marlow's fictional audience. This vantage point speaks to the sense of a

collective identity that the businessmen share and of their sedentary nature that is more about creating a contained sense of home and country either inland or at sea than having any real deep curiosity about the foreign people and places they encounter. Could this same point be suggesting to readers something about their own limits in their way of knowing about Africans and about the culture of colonial outposts in general?

Subsequently, an image of replication gives clues about the nature of stories and of the storytelling perspective being built upon:

The Sea-reach of the Thames stretched out before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas, sharply clustered with gleams of varnished spirits (3).

Questions of how to approach interpretation of the novella itself abound as a result of this and other similar descriptions that demonstrate a deconstructive awareness. What is evident from within this illustration is that the image is a representation of a representation; in other words, it works to reveal its own duplicitous function as an illustration, as in a painting with “varnished spirits” of what is being observed. The signal to readers is that they are observing a replication of something that is both as connected and disconnected to its subject as is the “sea” to the “sky.” The words “welded together” are an image of construction, signaling a need to look at the component parts of such a view and how it is put together. Indeed, the entire novella will require readers to piece components or bits of the story together in the attempt to derive meaning from it.

The onus of the interpretation of Marlow's experience is, thus, placed upon the reader from the beginning.

The perspective of Marlow's audience comes into focus when the frame narrator describes the gaze of his companions. These companions are described as being "trustworthy" men and, thus, assumedly reliable. By referring to them solely via their professions, namely "Accountant," "Lawyer," and "Director of Companies," their role in society is depicted according to their perceived status. Russell West suggests they are "simply avatars of the Manager, the Accountant, and the 'outraged law' which colonize Africa" (*Conrad and Gide*, 154). I agree that these men, as those who hold position and influence from within their subculture, are replications of the figures in the stations of the Congo and would add that they also represent the real life figures, who the story asserts shall remain nameless. These men, or type of men, as real life readers and as fictional listeners are the ones that Marlow must both appeal to and secretly confront with his story, an appeal that the book ironically indicates may be go right over the heads of his listeners.

In regard to their movement, the listeners are in the act of doing nothing more at this juncture than looking out together from their location on the Thames in a forward direction at a "luminous space" toward the sea, and in the other direction toward London from Gravesend. This stretch of river is a familiar place and, as these men bonded by the sea look back to "the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth," the narrator reports the "mournful" atmosphere and "brooding gloom" behind them (4). Here the frame narrator seems to suggest no particular meaning in relation to the contrast in the imagery of the two directions that map out future lands yet to be civilized as well as already established civilization, yet Marlow will offer a correction

to this by implicating that those who conquered the Thames and those who conquer the Congo are not much different.

The frame narrator's lack of picking up on the contrasts reveals his and the other gazers' inability to recognize the distinct differences between the "luminous space" ahead and the "brooding gloom" behind. When combined with Marlow's first words, "and this also has been one of the dark places of the earth," readers are prompted here to question the overall reliability of the frame narrator and his cohorts. Since the details relayed are indicative of difference, the inability to fully recognize or see is revealed. This also suggests the inability to perceive truth, or simply the concealment of truth, as it exists outside the observable, much like the abstract image of the "spectral illumination of moonshine" that Marlow's tale will work to reveal (HOD,5).¹² The differences are deliberate in this section to show that what is dissimilar, or even opposing in perspective, is often unwittingly bound together in an inseparable knot of indistinguishability, underlining the difficulty of Marlow's task to make them "see."

The difficulty of this task is also revealed at the contact point between the two narratives. It is interesting to note that each time in the novella when Marlow's dialogue takes a turn toward comparing the real with dreams or with the relaying of what is unknowable, the frame narrator or someone in Marlow's listening audience makes a comment such as, "try to be civil Marlow" (34). Passages representing the thoughts of the two concentric narrators, when side by side, have a jolting effect that dramatize the difficulty of both the storytelling role and the reception role, which in turn dramatizes the inability to reconcile the differences between truth

¹² Heart of Darkness: A Norton Critical Edition. 4th ed. New York: W. W. Norton, 2006. This is the edition of the text that is used throughout this chapter.

and fiction. Marlow states, “you fellows see more than I could then. You see me, whom you know...” (27). The frame narrator comments on Marlow’s statement that:

It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already he, sitting apart, had been no more to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody. The others might have been asleep, but I was awake. I listened, I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word that would give me the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night air of the river (27)

When Marlow says, “you see more than I could, you see me,” we are reminded of how his pursuit of Kurtz and of Kurtz’s story was like following a dream, a kind of intuitive listening provided by a voice that came through documents and references rather than from a physical person since he had not yet met Kurtz. In *Lord Jim*, the narrative that lends a sense of Jim’s identity is similarly piecemeal, showing that finite knowledge about another and his story is impossible and that human nature is always contradictory. As a parallel, when the frame narrator in *Heart of Darkness* speaks of Marlow’s tale as one that seemed to shape itself “without human lips,” the metaphor turns Marlow into a kind of phantom, an unreal being that is more a dream than flesh –revered storytellers and the locus of narrative authority thus become metaphors for Conrad’s unique method of “authorial dissemination.” The observation by the frame narrator mystifies Marlow’s statement, “you see me whom you know.” In the attempt to delineate the hierarchy of narrators, these passages actually serve to obscure a readers’ sense of truth versus dream and, thus, of fact versus fiction.

From the beginning of the novella readers' sense of history is obscured as well. The movement of the listeners' gaze is central to this, as is their physical stasis, for the narrator states with some pacification, "We felt meditative and fit for nothing but placid staring" (4). As the businessmen look in front of them toward the sea, images are conjured of the torchbearers of progress who engage "*abiding* memories" that comply with what readers are told is a familiar condition and facile attitude in regard to adventures at sea (my italics, 4). This becomes increasingly evident when the narrator explains, "there is nothing easier for a man who has... 'followed the sea' with reverence and affection, than to evoke the great spirit of the past" (4). These memories point directly to imaginary histories that are closely tied to the unacknowledged hypocrisies of colonial voyages, putting into question agency and accountability regarding the context of English colonialism. Ironically, in direct contrast are Marlow's first words, "and this also... has been one of the dark places of the earth." Marlow's words counter the frame narrator's to show an association with the past that is poles apart; it sheds light on the flawed connection between the ideal and the real and, from the beginning, establishes his own narration as a point of rupture in the so-called permanence of the frame narrator and his gang's steadfast ideals, which increasingly begin to look like illustrative fairytales via this juxtaposition.

Marlow's narration begins by inviting his audience to remember ancient England during the dark days before modern progress. Here the narrative strategy of the two concentric narrators combined works to address those readers who have previously embraced collective memories about triumphant imperialists as civilizing emissaries of light and, in turn, asks them to make a comparison to a different kind of story, one that turns the tables and requires observations of when the natives of Britain themselves were subject to a doomed invasion. Marlow puts a spotlight on the invading Romans, depicting them as having been "men enough to face the

darkness,” referring firstly to facing the unknown, but also to the quandaries of progress that require one side to lose, as well as to the need to admit the malice of the winning side’s purpose. The text’s initial critiques are evident when the Romans are then described as “brute force...conquerors” who derived their strength from the weakness of others. There is irony in how this particular scenario of conquest, with its singleness of purpose presented as an atrocity that “is not a pretty thing” is blaringly honest; it is in direct conflict with maintaining the appearances of a moral cause, the outward show of which one cannot help but recognize serves to cover up deeper, more diabolical motivations beyond those of establishing an atmosphere of “efficiency” in the colonies (7).

Assumptions about civilization and about how it is established as the result of a victorious endeavor, the expansion of knowledge, and intellectual ideals are tested and exposed through this metaphor that clearly lays the groundwork for the questions put to readers, ones Marlow has pondered and essentially poses by default to his listeners. What does the lack of efficiency Marlow will find across the stations he visits say about the larger motivations of this concern? In what way are beliefs in ideals redeeming or not, especially when they are not visibly being carried out in favor of moral posturing around vacant principles?

Questions like these reveal the ideological contrasts between imperialist romance and harsh naturalism. The motivating ideals of the company concerns foreshadow Kurtz’s subsequent methods, setting up the dichotomy between the philanthropic pretense of the colonialist enterprise and aggressive invasion driven by a sense of cultural dominance. The glorification of colonialism and the violence of conquest, on both ends of the narrative continuum, are shown in the novella to be indivisibly connected in an elusive dream-cum-nightmare. Margot Norris in her article entitled “Modernism and Vietnam” aptly terms this nightmare a “movable horror” due to

the way it shifts about. Building from this assertion, one can see how Conrad helps readers recodify commonly held beliefs about collective history via this kind of shifting movement Norris refers to. The shifts undercut significations for terms like “progress” and “nature,” which take on an increasingly negative sense at either end of the spectrum as they expose the horror of the Europeans’ behavior.

Such attempts to recodify are, furthermore, a move to rewrite history. But the novella also seeks to move inward by dramatizing the process of understanding. This combination of what is exterior observation and interior observation is rather dichotomous. Certainly what Marlow experiences is disturbing in nature, but could the attempt to both historicize his experience and interiorize it at the same time be the root cause of Marlow’s difficulties with describing and interpreting things? One definite result is that the reader search to understand and locate the “heart of the darkness” within the story leads to the discovery that this heart or center is a diffuse location built on Marlow’s crumbling beliefs about the value of European social constructs he has relied upon. He is forced to question all that constitutes the values and objectives of modern western thinking, this applies in regard to reconsidering assumptions about savagery, correct behavior, and progress. Just as *Lord Jim* ‘s subject, as stated by Conrad, is the “acute consciousness of lost honor,” Kurtz comes to represent the loss of the imperialist ideal. In both cases the memory can never be fully redeemed.

Among these shifts readers must think about Marlow’s role as the main teller of the tale. Is he a collaborator or a revolutionary? For this question the novella does not provide a straightforward answer since he seems to be performing a balancing act between the two approaches. While working in the Congo and being implicated via his participation there, Marlow oftentimes strives to keep himself at a distance from the atrocities he witnesses by

criticizing the society that bore him, while at the same time, responding with fascination for the “august Benevolence” of high civilizing ideals (HOD, 51). Speaking of Kurtz’s manifesto, Marlow recounts:

He began with the argument that we whites... ‘approach them with the might as of a deity.’ ‘...By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded.’ etc. etc. From that point he soared and took me with him. The peroration was magnificent....It made me tingle with enthusiasm. ...I was to have the care of his memory. I’ve done enough for it to give me the indisputable right to lay it, if I choose, for an everlasting rest in the dustbin of progress, amongst all the sweepings and... dead cats of civilization. But then, you see, I can’t choose (50).

Characterizations of Marlow, particularly in regard to his relationship to and affinity with Kurtz, represent opposing ideologies that blur the division between both active and passive participation and victimization, which could also be delineated as an opposition between the cultural pathology that individuals endure as members of society and the dissonant grip of unbound human nature at the level of the individual will. This dichotomy represents a modern pessimism that is as terrified of progress as it is of the primitive and, more importantly, creates distance between these two poles, serving as a kind of vacuum space that is an essential function of the overall discourse of the text. It struggles to break literary boundaries and reveal meaning from between these poles.

As a result of the narrative arrangement, which prompts one to try to make sense of the variations along the dream-nightmare continuum, readers are allowed to catch a glimpse of the

inscrutability of experience which, in this case, lies somewhere between grand adventures and the more personal ones. Before Marlow ever begins an account of his own journey in the Congo, readers are left to ponder inconsistent descriptions of conquerors as blind savages and as champions who are courageous in their sacrifice. The personal narrative then serves to show that there is no glory in any of it, neither in the gritty naturalism, nor in the “mere show” of the Colonialist endeavor:

Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia and lose myself in the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting... I would put my finger on it and say: When I grow up I will go there. The North Pole was one of those places I remember. Well I have not been there yet and shall not try now. The glamour's off. I have been in some of them and... well, we won't talk about that (8).

The lack of “glory” described in the story of the Romans conquering the Brits is mirrored in Marlow’s observations regarding the fanciful illusions he once had of future voyages. After the disappointment he experiences in the Congo, Marlow will come to understand that his dreams are illusions that cannot be realized due to the inconsistency of their meanings as blank spots, rather than as he once saw them as places where he could make a mark in the world. The fact that Marlow comes to recognize that “the glamour’s off” provides an enigmatic and unorthodox denouement for his listeners in regard to any former expectations they may have had about the conventions of a story that speaks of colonialist adventure. The biggest challenge for readers

then comes from how this story of travel and exploit has been superimposed by Marlow's rather defeatist testimonial.

Clues about the obscure nature of Marlow's report come from the frame narrator's revelations about how Marlow "did not represent his class," just as his story will not be representative of this "class" of stories, the prototype of which is the emblematic account of English voyages as the "germs of empires" (5). Part of this effect is due to Marlow's rather tentative approach. The "strangeness" of Marlow's story has to do with the fact that his tale is not driven by the thread of yarns that turn-of-the-century readers found to be as "venerable" as the frame narrator's description of the Thames, the landscape of which is depicted as a "benign" likeness of nature by using an artificial backdrop with "gauzy and radiant fabric hung... in diaphanous folds" (5). In contrast to this image of nature resembling a representational painting, Marlow's objective is to somehow make sense of his experience and to remove the ersatz veil from the "unpractical spirit of adventure" in order to get at the transitory nature of reality and dispel the idea of the immutability of colonial history (55).

By being informed about what is dissimilar in regard to Marlow's tales, readers can surmise that familiar elements of the adventure genre typical of authors such as Defoe and Kipling, the readership of whom has accepted such popular and dramatized stories as virtual truths, will be dispelled. Katherine Isobel Stevenson in her book entitled *Joseph Conrad and the Swan Song of Romance* agrees that Conrad, "exposes the ways in which history, geography, race and sanity are ideologically conceptualized in the late nineteenth century. These concepts, which went unquestioned in contemporary adventure fiction, are deconstructed in the novella to demonstrate the distance and difference between their existence as concepts and the reality they are supposed to represent" (17). In my view, the particulars in regard to the way in which the

novella achieves this is what is most important. Conrad's quest narrative is positioned in a tradition that goes back as far as the Arthurian Romance, but he makes achieving the grail at the end into a discovery of absence and emptiness. Conrad is able to bore a hole in the concepts listed above and to call into question the rhetoric and ideologies of the Romance genre. He does this via a testimonial that is both formed by and complicated within the multiple narrative layers. Sometimes it is impossible to extricate the experience from the illusion, and moreover, the teller from the tale with references to stories as "voices" and speakers "without moving lips" (HOD, 37). The responsibility of interpretation is always put back to the reader and the grail quest is ultimately the reader's task.

The Search for Signs

Looking at the narrator's retelling of Marlow's explanation of the uncharacteristic nature of his tale can also help explain the novella's overall mystique:

The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted) and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel, but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that, sometimes, are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine (5).

Readers are informed that the meaning of an episode told by Marlow is not “contained.” This most certainly relates to how his story does not convey a sense of either a shared or a knowable history, in the sense of being finite. Theoretically, this underlines how history is no longer represented as a privileged mode of consciousness. The “cracked nut” characterizes this rupture, though it does not necessarily indicate total liberation from traditional narrative form – it is more like a fissure. Marlow’s “meaning of an episode” responds to that rupture in how it moves “outside” and becomes “hazy,” both descriptions of which confront the disingenuousness of narrative containment. Marlow’s narrative throughout is true to this description in that it circles around events via relaying impressions that present experience as subjective.

Subsequently, by Marlow saying, “I don’t want to bother you much with what happened to me personally,” it is possible he is suggesting he could be thought by his listeners to be coming from a position of weakness or limitation: “the weakness of so many tellers of tales who seem so often unaware of what their audience would like best to hear,” a deficit he is aware of as part of a congregation of respected storytellers (HOD, 6). Moreover, this speaks to the challenge of relaying a story of personal, subjective experience. However, Marlow says his journey “seemed to somehow throw a kind of light on everything about *me*” (emphasis added, 7). The “me” is key here, as is the “us” and the “we” in that same first section of the novella when Marlow is being introduced as a third person and is yet to take over the telling of the tale. Marlow is breaking out of his affiliation with the group and inviting his listeners to experience that sense of transformation he has experienced in regard to his own sense of himself, which is the direct result of a transformation in his sense of the collective identity he shares. This revelation then extends to readers as part of that “we” and “us” in that they too are prompted to question their own concepts of identity and representation. There is a sense in this description

that Marlow is linked, if only loosely, to Conrad and that Marlow's influence on his listeners is paralleled to Conrad's on his readers. This section contains within it the entire story of what the novella seeks to describe is happening in the Congo. As those men sit and gaze at the Thames they are being prompted to look into the immense darkness of British colonialism as well as into the heart of both what motivates it and what results from it. Readers are asked almost surreptitiously to look as well.

A transformative effect is revealed by the shift in narration to Marlow's. The frame narration is one supporting a continuing sense of identity as an open-ended future construct - a "sentimental pretense." This pretense is then contrasted with Marlow's discourse relaying an account of conquest and annihilation. The narrative shift is revealing because it places pretenses about identity in relation to the past. Shared cultural codes, such as those relating to an "inscrutable destiny," create a sense of collective identity founded on a future promise, such as the motif of dreams becoming empires. There is a sense of sustained future fulfillment in such a fantasy, however, through Marlow these values will come to appear absurd and ineffective when applied in an African context.

Marlow's personal narrative attempts to address the problems of this new context. His comment that he "could not shake off the idea" of going to the Congo because "the snake had charmed" him, alludes to his initial attraction to pursuing a point of entry from which he can locate a central meaning. Yet, any meaning or sense of control that might be gleaned from within the tale only recedes, largely via erasure, from that point on. Marlow's narrative trails off into the inconclusive, into impressions. Throughout the novella his narrative is connected to remembering and telling about traces of the past, yet, the irony is that this very act of telling informs his lack of control by revealing his inability to grasp any tangible sense of himself. How

can he account for the devotion to “an obscure, back-breaking business” or for the tingling enthusiasm he felt from the “unbounded power” of Kurtz’s writings? (48,50). The closer he gets to the center of what he is seeking, the more he feels like an imposter and the more he feels disconnected with the “truth of things;” he has no control over what will be remembered or what ends up in the “dustbin of progress,” nor does he have anything definitive to say about it (50).

Marlow’s narrative uses a diverse set of rules that provide a context connected more to the act of telling than to what is told. Telling is an active connection to the self even as it decenters meaning. In the text’s preoccupation with the search for meaning, the telling -- an attempt at gleaning some historical understanding and, thus, some sense of self -- reifies the loss of a sense of future promise as well as what is actually lost. A loss of knowledge is key here, because it results in the suffering of a crisis related to both the self and history. Any focus on the ideological nature of statehood as applied to colonialism is challenged by the text’s turn of attention to language and its inability to construct any authentic sense of existence. There is a gap between the world and language. Equally, there is the suggestion that if one stops referring to one’s self or understanding one’s self, which is where all the arrows of signification point in the novella. Perhaps, he would cease to be in the world at all. Thus, things that seem “to shed some light on me (Marlow)” get closer to a sense of realness and an authentic history.

Perry Meisel opens up a similar discussion in relation to the construction of existence and meaning in the story. He asserts that Marlow’s discoveries seem “trapped in a play of language.” His criticism entitled *Decentering ‘Heart of Darkness’* looks at the Freudian and Saussurian concepts of signification that were published during the same period as *Heart of Darkness*, in order to uncover something about Conrad’s epistemology:

the (then current) view of meaning as an antithetical formation.... suggest(s) that signification takes place in a sphere apart from those states of the world to which it refers. If language means by virtue of differential or oppositional relations within the system it constitutes, then meaning is the product of internal resonances within the system, rather than the effect of actual links between the system and real states of the world. Instead of a distance to be lamented and overcome, however, this distance between language and the world is a given since it is the signature of language - of culture - itself. Thus it is the conditions of human usage as a whole that stipulate the kind of problem that Marlow confronts.¹³

The problem mentioned relates to how language and meaning are decentered by “internal resonances” that do not represent real states. Meisel’s discussion also uses references in the novella to “matter” as having a recessive quality; this dynamic makes the otherwise tangible become elusive, again what is important is resonance rather than a real state.

Recessiveness could also apply to the narrative Marlow relays about the Romans who came to Britain, a place outside their center of existence, which foreshadows notions about the Congo’s physical relation to England. For Romans Britain was essentially a periphery of the center of Rome. Similarly, Britain has also become a center with its own periphery that is Africa, at least when referring to the colonies there. “By implication, the Congo will perforce comprise the center of still another, newer circle, and so on, ad infinitum.” Meisel explains this model as both epistemological and political. Every center will eventually become decentered,

¹³ *Modern Language Studies* , Vol. 8, No. 3, Autumn, 1978

“every disclosure of a ground is subject to the recession of that ground.” This sheds some light on how the same structure of disclosure and recession governs the continuous problem of Marlow's quest, and the forever recessive object that is Kurtz and all that he encompasses at the *false* center of that quest.

Along this line of analysis the recessive center is Marlow's journey to the Central Station and then the Inner Station where Marlow discovers Kurtz is only "a voice," only language. Supporting this section's hypothesis about how disclosure and recession govern Marlow's quest, one can keep in mind the Saussurean implications; the text verifies that Kurtz had “kicked himself loose of the earth” and had even “kicked the very earth to pieces.” Kurtz cannot be located and neither can what Kurtz represents. "There was nothing either above or below him," Marlow explains, "and I knew it. I did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air." This analogy applies to Marlow's presence in the Congo as well, as representations repeat themselves. The reality of Marlow's experience recedes, as does the ground, turning into a facsimile of itself. This recession of presence is in evidence throughout the novella, and comprises its overall epistemological principle. The inside meanings of things are shown to be “phantoms” of “matter” that are difficult to locate in that they do not exist.

This chapter's claim that the novella requires readers to abandon their assumptions about history as a collective promise lends a new dimension to Meisel's study of signs. Conrad's concern for representation is layered throughout and representations of representation are made by a network of relations. Marlow's horror is based on these web-like relationships that make for the impossibility of any disclosure of a center. The story appears to offer up some kind of promise, or “matter,” but it is actually deferred. Readers, along with Marlow, then lose the ability to establish an enduring sense of the self, hence the novella's preoccupation with how death is

lacking in glory and absent of wisdom. In relation to death Marlow states, “Perhaps all the wisdom, and all the truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment in time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible” (70). History, identity, and culture are all tied up in language and the loss, or death, of prior assumptions about all three.

Miller explains that Marlow’s storytelling contract is an “endlessly deferred promise” and that even though Marlow establishes early on that the culminating point of his experience will throw “a kind of light,” it never does. Miller asserts that Marlow’s secret is inaccessible in that it is “an end that can never come within the conditions of the series of episodes that reaches out towards it as life reaches toward death” (472). I would add that the illusive secret is a decentered end that works to *destroy itself* as it recedes from its assumed objective and, thus, compromises its own conclusion. This parallel of a death and life continuum with the beginning and end continuum is evident when comparing the following two passages from the novella. The first passage is when Marlow explains his feelings before leaving the continent:

In the street – I don’t know why – a queer feeling came over me that I was an impostor. Odd thing, that I, who used to clear out for any part of the world at twenty-four hours notice with less thought than most men give to crossing the street, had a moment – I won’t say of hesitation, but of startled pause before this commonplace affair. The best way I can explain it to you is by saying that for a second or two I felt as though instead of going to the center of the continent I were about to set off for the center of the earth... For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of straightforward facts; but the feeling would not last long. Something would turn up to scare it away. (13-14)

The second passage is a description of Marlow's experience in the waiting room of the Belgian political offices when initially receiving his assignment to go to the Congo:

I began to feel slightly uneasy... It was just as though I had been let into some conspiracy – I don't know—something not quite right, and I was glad to get out. In the outer room the two women knitted black wool feverishly... Two youths with foolish and cheery countenances were being piloted over... She seemed to know all about them and about me too. An eerie feeling came over me. She seemed uncanny and fateful. Often far way there I thought of these two, guarding the door of darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continually to the unknown... Not many of these she looked at ever saw her again – not half—by a long way. (11)

In both of these passages there is a paradox of oppositions between what is known and what is not, between beginnings and endings, between what is strange and what is usual, and between foolish adventure and an eerie kind of hesitation. There is a sense of loss before anything has even begun, like that of the two foolish youths whose future deaths are alluded to before they ever part. We are told that Marlow's audience considers his tales to be "inconclusive" and to require "tolerance;" this is because readers must grapple with a text that is always self-deferring in the way that it departs from past assumptions about language and the world. To the extent that the secret is inaccessible I agree with Miller, if inaccessible refers to what is abstract rather than tangible since Marlow's attempt to tell the story makes him ever more an imposter, unable to get

at the truth or to arrive at a tangible history which doubles as truth. However, I disagree that the story does not “shed a kind of light.” What Marlow says in reference to himself, and what I have already discussed previously, is that it sheds a kind of light on *me*. The narrative is subjective, it is resonant, and it is personal, suspended in the recessiveness of memory. It operates via Conrad’s *veiled persuasion* which illuminates readers by prompting them to question their own concepts of identity and representation by moving beyond any pretense toward objectivity in narrative.

To paraphrase Conrad, he once said that words are foes and that memories are illusions. Similarly, the loss of former experience, as in *Youth*, points to how what is often still “...expected is already gone – has passed unseen, in a sigh, in a flash – together with the youth, with the strength, with the romance of illusions” (*Youth*, 42). This excerpt from *Youth* is the same ethos *Heart of Darkness* builds from for the descriptions within born from memory are illusory: language is illusory. The design of Conrad’s narrative is decentered, predicated on absence and loss. This is true both in the personal sense that forgetting one’s life parallels ceasing to exist and in the collective sense of an end that works to destroy a sense of the collective future telos in its iconic condition as enduring memory. The destruction of memory is tied up in the destruction of language. Without signs and clear links to meanings all is “monstrous and free.” The title is a perfect example of the challenge of interpretation that the novella presents for it is difficult to distinguish whether it refers to a heart or a center and is more yielding than it is conclusive.

Twice Told Tale

Marlow's is a twice-told tale, a re-applicable historical lesson whereby the reader is implicated as a listener along with the narrator and his fellow businessmen. In her comparative study of *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* Margot Norris explains, "Conrad's critique of colonialism is structured hermeneutically – as an interpretive quest and moral pilgrimage that operates through the telling, and hearing, of a story, twice... Marlow's story thus becomes an education for a multiple audience in different time frames... Conrad's 'frame' narrative allows him to position the reader as a moral double to the unnamed narrator" (*Modernism and Vietnam*, 495). Building from Norris' conclusions, it is important to also explore the stealthy nature of this morally doubling, in other words, to look at how Conrad achieves this and what kind of reception dynamic is created. The novella's didacticism is mostly under the radar of readers because the text is complex, requires rereading, and is not obviously antagonizing prior perceptions about the adventure genre and its political myths. One conclusion that could be made about the role of readers in relation to this text is that the meaning is produced in the listeners themselves. Russell West suggests that readers must take responsibility for what they are receiving and for the meaning-making as they become involved in the production of the narrative. If that's true, the "productivity of meaning" occurs in the moment of the narrative's transmission, in the interpretative re-reading dramatized by the novella's multiple narrators. Conrad dramatizes the interpretive problem inherent in the reception role and gives an initiative to the reader by giving her the opportunity to formulate an autonomous response to the problem. The ambiguity of meaning is inherent in the active process of storytelling, the *bringing out* that occurs via the very nature of narrating, and most of Conrad's contemporary readers were not savvy to how that process involves them.

The narrative strategy surreptitiously achieves a kind of moral doubling: the reader-listener is coupled with the frame narrator-listener who gives subtle hints of self-defacement by referring to himself and his gang as “sedentary” and disdainfully ignorant in their inability to experience more than the “immutability” of “foreign shores” and “foreign faces.” These admitted limitations then come alongside portrayals of Marlow as Buddha-like and resembling an “idol.” The frame narrator’s devoted descriptions of Marlow as extra-ordinary, in combination with his above mentioned interpretation of the seamen as maintaining a stagnant existence, initially transpose the role of the venerated hero onto Marlow himself. Another interpretation could be that the Buddha – idol portrayal is meant to transpose authority on to Marlow, which is more likely.

Marlow’s mission is certainly not to become a hero – it is to tell, and the tale he tells struggles at establishing something about truth as it exists somewhere between a mysterious dream and a harsh testimonial. It offsets the collective beliefs of the frame narrator by countering images of imagination with images that seek to expose the mechanisms by which stories, in relation to both history and fiction, can shape life. The effect of this dream tale, which is at once a nightmare, is to show the dislocation of the individual from society and its shared goals. In other words, what begins as an historical crisis becomes a kind of existential crisis as well. Readers are required to exercise tolerance in order to participate in this education cum tale, since the parallel of listeners inside and outside the novella suggests that they too are being questioned for having the same mistaken perceptions as the sub-culture of seamen. Yet, listeners are compelled to pay attention to Marlow via this ingeniously structured reversal that accents his peerlessness while avoiding overt cultural criticism. Marlow appears to be ‘one of us’ but the codes that define the collective identity that readers relate to do not entirely apply. Due to

Marlow's uniqueness and allure, this construction appears to invite participation in a collective sense of history, though it is actually forcing its recipients to face a kind of *deracinement* along with Marlow and his listeners.

In *Geography and Some Explorers*, a chapter in *Last Essays* that relays Conrad's experiences and observations about his time in the Congo, he writes of his own misguided ideals before embarking on his first expedition in Africa:

One day, putting my finger on a spot in the very middle of the then white heart of Africa, I declared that some day I would go there. It is a fact that, about eighteen months afterwards, a wretched little stern-wheel I commanded lay moored to the bank of an African river. I said to myself with awe, 'This is the very spot of my boyish boast.' A great melancholy descended on me. Yes, this was the very spot. But there was no shadowy friend to stand by my side in the night of the enormous wilderness, no great haunting memory, but only the unholy recollection of a prosaic newspaper 'stunt' and the distasteful knowledge of the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration. (278)

As in the above excerpt quoting Conrad's personal account, his novella conveys this same sense of the need to part from a delusion. The "shadowy friend" Conrad himself speaks of as absent would be what he ideally calls the "worthy adventurer," one who is led by curiosity and a "respectable passion for acquiring knowledge" (278). Perhaps Conrad refers to himself here as the one who once believed himself worthy, or to an historical personage who has been glorified in a kind of fiction, someone like David Livingstone who sought to abolish the slave trade through his missionary work. Venerated upon his death at Westminster Abbey, Livingstone is

referenced in Conrad's *Essays* as having turned from a "great explorer into a restless wanderer refusing to go home" (278). The parallel of the early Kurtz to the actual Livingstone in regard to the former's "splendid ideals" when working for the "International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs" is mostly superficial; however, it is worth noting in making this parallel that Marlow too seeks a praiseworthy example to follow, yet superficial ideas about predecessors with an idyllic cause that one can latch on to for inspiration don't hold up when alone in a jungle where natives are being enslaved and murdered daily by "civilizing" Europeans.

Interestingly, rather than referring to an unforgettable memory of the actual moment he experienced, he refers to the absent memory, calling it "haunting" since, in its absence, he cannot justify his presence there. What he laments is how he thought it would be rather than how he actually experiences it. Without that memory, there not only no longer remains any purpose for him in the mission, there also remains no recognizable sense of self. Upon Kurtz's death, Marlow reacts similarly about whether or not to become the keeper of Kurtz's memory. "Destiny. My destiny! Droll thing life is – that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose" (69). Marlow feels a loss of purpose when discovering that what motivated him was a figment. In Conrad's biographical passage it is evident that his own fanciful memories from his past are replaced by the harsh politics of his present-day, and in this sense, both he and Marlow are in search of a lost past from their place in an essentially vacant present.

Marlow's wish to discover a venerated and notable figure of European descent to follow, admire, or emulate is continually in vain. When Marlow does find Kurtz, he recognizes him to be an "atrocious phantom" with "unsound methods" and he seeks to ideologically remove himself from any such alliance (59,67). Yet, ironically, the Brickmaker of the Central Station has associated Marlow with the so-called "gang of virtue" who he calls the "emissaries of pity, and

science, and progress” (25). Marlow comes to realize that his devotion as a follower, the example of which is his guarded though very real anticipation in regard to finding Kurtz, is as misguided as the “eager fatalism” of his boyish notions about journeying to Africa (55). In this way, even though Marlow seems to exist without any bond of fidelity, he is, in fact, entangled in an “unforeseen partnership” with Kurtz and the new imperialists, a significant doubling mechanism that is at the heart of Marlow’s struggle.

As the keeper of Kurtz’s memory, Marlow is bound to tell the tale and, thus, seeks to know what has made Kurtz, “to know what he belonged to,” and “how many powers of darkness claimed him” (25,48). Explaining his own position, Marlow says, “The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells too, by Jove! – breathe dead hippo so to speak and not be contaminated” (49). He calls on his own “innate strength” like a “power of devotion,” not to one’s self, but to “an obscure, back-breaking business” which is the burying of that contamination as a way to survive amidst the chaos of the world. Yet Kurtz’s lack of restraint forces Marlow to try to account “for the shade of Mr. Kurtz,” a man for whom the earth is “only a standing place” (49). As Marlow tells the story of Kurtz, he is “circumventing Kurtz as though it had been a boyish game” in an attempt to “beat that Shadow,” while at the same time remaining “loyal to the nightmare of (his) choice” (65). Via Marlow’s attempt to “break the spell” of Kurtz’s “immense plans” he acts from both a sense of connectedness to Kurtz’s experience and a place of rupture.

Kurtz is both repellent and attractive to Marlow for the former is corrupt, though he embodies the ideals that Marlow wants to believe in. Kurtz allows Marlow to bring back the myth of European colonization as a progressive civilization. For Marlow, Kurtz allows for this possibility which gives him the sense of recovering his lost ideals. Marlow’s own horror at the

actual state of Kurtz does not prevent him from somehow remaining attached, or rather, from struggling to let go at some level of the value of those enlightenment ideals that cling to the supposed benefits of European culture, though they are evidently flawed. The novella then develops from a condemnation of Leopold's Congo to a psychological journey into the dissolution of self in a foreign land. The African context no longer allows for omission of the corruption of European ideals when applied against humanity there. This undeniable critique of the ideals of Leopold's Congo is applied directly to Marlow's listeners and to the novella's readers. Via the moral doubling of listeners to readers that the narrative frame creates, an ideal reader would come to feel like the "imposter" that Marlow describes himself as being before setting off. This ideal reader is then, too, the self-imposed imposter that is the "couched" elect reader Conrad. Since Marlow's own idol Kurtz has fallen, his authority as idol to his listeners is compromised, having a direct impact on readers who also feel the need depart from an illusion. The spell is then broken on multiple levels where the story's mysterious dream-cum-nightmare and the personal testimonial meet. The reader-as-double loses a sense of the purpose of the pilgrimage of following the story as well.

Nature and Culture

An important question to ask is where Marlow's narrative should be situated in its state of both connectedness and rupture in relation to what the adventure story has come to represent in literature, and what its relationship is to imperialist beliefs. Marlow's landscape challenges the Eurocentric reader with a prehistoric Congo that is skeptical of imperial ideology in its description and refuses total access to foreigners. His "triumphant" aunt seems to epitomize the

very kind of foreign reader-listener of Europe who would find the narrative descriptions uncanny. The narrative works to both shock and charm with its method of dislocation that challenges both cultural bias about the people of Africa that are being colonized and the actual purpose of the colonial mission.

When Marlow recognizes his aunt's misperceptions in regard to the actual nature of his voyage to the Congo, he explains, "there had been a lot of rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman living right in the rush of all that humbug got carried off her feet. She talked about 'weaning all those ignorant millions from their horrid ways,' 'till, upon my, word, she made me quite uncomfortable. I ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit" (12). As a woman living contentedly at home on the Continent, Marlow's aunt takes the brunt no less than the men who work for the Company as a co-conspirator in the horrors of the "fantastic invasion" of colonial empire, for she is shown here to be yet another instrument of the imposition of Western European empire in Africa despite her being at a geographical remove from the labor of the mission.

The lesson here about this "good" and "bright" woman is the same as for the doctor Marlow recounts visiting for a pre-voyage examination in the paragraph before who states, "interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals on the spot" : whether the perspective is related to the narrow theoretical interests of science, the "'magnificent dependency' that enterprise imposes, or that of a more abstract delusion, without a "point of contact" with Africa and the African experience one is senselessly "out of touch with truth."

One of the novella's problems of establishing a point of contact has to do with the people and culture of the landscape of the Congo as they are presented in relation to European concepts

of non-European tribal culture, a predicament which can be greatly informed by the theories of anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss who documents his experiences in the Brazilian jungle beginning in the early thirties.¹⁴ He concludes anthropology can prove nothing about human nature except for the need for order, evident in the games diverse societies play. The games may vary according to this need, yet his conclusion is that all human life belongs to culture. Levi-Strauss' theories about the nature-culture relationship for the Bororo serves as a metaphor in that it opens up questions about these relationships in *Heart of Darkness*. In Marlow's struggle to move beyond his Western-European context, Marlow speaks about his experience of nature in the Congo as an inexplicable cultural confrontation:

We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign – and no memories. The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the

¹⁴ Levi-Strauss' autobiographical account, *Tristes Tropiques*, is an anti-exoticist look at the daily reality of the Amazonian Bororo and their culture. What is interesting is the way in which Levi-Strauss explores and discusses the relationship they form between the physical world and society for this text is perhaps one of the first published documents of tribal life by a European that is not ethnocentric. According to Levi-Strauss the Bororo tribe serves as a good illustration of the need for order that exists in all societies because they perceive nature as harming society via the destruction of human life, the result of which causes entire communities to suffer. Levi-Strauss explains how, after death, nature is seen as in debt to the community, therefore, the Bororo take back from it in a ritual hunt (235). In this example, a balance must be drawn, something which can only be done through a cultural act, further cementing the idea of a kind of universal belonging to and need for culture. The attributing of "culture" to the Bororo is a radical move on Levi-Strauss' part. However, for Marlow, this kind of conclusion is still distant, leaving him with the inability to connect to his own need for order in a place and culture that remain mysteriously exotic to him.

shackled form of a conquered monster, but there --- there you could look upon a thing monstrous and free. (36)

This lack of a sense of containment or contact with the familiar represents a break from any collective sense of a shared history and a definite inability to embrace a culture and landscape that is unfamiliar – it is “weird,” exotic,” and “appealing” all at once, to use Marlow’s words. Perhaps for Marlow the shackles of society do not exist in such a place with “no memories,” making for a condition which transports Marlow’s consciousness dangerously close to a place of no return. This excerpt shows that for Marlow, rather than experiencing a kind of Romantic sympathy for dark forces and natural death, he is experiencing an oppositional sublime where the attraction is challenged by the absence of a point of entry. The stereotypes of Africa as a “dark continent” and as a “blank space” on the map reinforce Marlow’s sensation of feeling small and lost.

Here, the inability to connect to any knowable history essentially wipes away his sense of self. The Romantic obsession with death and its relation to the supernatural and with the danger of majestic nature are inverted in the passage. Nature is not referred to as a cure for the problems of the individual in society and, therefore, the relationship of nature to culture is put into question. Contact with nature creates a negatively afflicted state of imbalance and alienation caused by being exposed to what is unknowable in this nature-space, a dynamic that represents his own internal conflict. Due to Marlow’s inability to redress the balance between the African nature he experiences and its incompatibility to what he knows about human culture, he finds that, “the earth seemed unearthly.” Therefore, through this description, it is apparent the he

questions the concepts of nature and culture as they exist in a Western European context when applied to the context of the Congo.

Looking at the changing anthropological perspectives of the period is important because it reveals something about the epistemological crisis that is portrayed in the novella. Through an anti-historicist approach Levi-Strauss came to the conclusion that there was no need to differentiate between types of societies, namely the primitive (cold societies that exist as harmonious yet are crumbling structures of the past) and the historical (hot societies driven by the need for progress and, often, conflict). Both have a history in the way that history exists as a socio-cultural construct, but the primitive one was still misunderstood when Conrad wrote. Marlow expresses his own awareness of this ideological divide taking place when, in the Congo, he observes “the amazing mystery of its concealed life” (26). At the time of both Conrad and the subsequent Levi-Strauss, these divided histories were Eurocentrically referred to as domestic and exotic. In an attempt to understand the alienation he feels as a result of his encounter with the exotic, Marlow faces the demons of progress and questions his known history.

This attraction to the foreign and exotic, namely “blank spots” on the map, is important for Marlow because, much like Levi-Strauss who desired to confront personal ignorance and who believed that the historical was not a privileged mode of consciousness, Marlow works to confront his own alienation, both intellectually and from what he has formerly accepted as culture. When Marlow is unsure whether to call “the face of the immensity looking at us” an “appeal” or a “menace” he acknowledges what seems to be a combined horror of the primitive and a kind of intellectual catharsis driven by the need to both confirm and overcome his own psychic rupture from within a blank and indefinable space (26).

One could make assumptions that in the Conrad text the subject of the exotic might very well be objectified (perhaps unavoidably), and the natives of the Congo could be said to be essentially erased in this formal approach that focuses the entire anthropological experience onto the idea of personal adventure and personal transformation. In other words, the landscape and the people of Africa become one and the same: they become the objects of personal experience. The conclusion in this chapter, however, focuses on the diminishment of a point of contact as the novella's subject in this regard. Philip Dickinson, in his article entitled "Postcolonial Romanticisms? The Sublime and Negative Capability in Joseph Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' and J. M. Coetzee's 'Waiting for the Barbarians'" elucidates that:

If the colonialist enterprise must often construct the other-as-object rather than the other-as-subject....Conrad figures that right at the heart of his text. (Yet) what distinguishes the Africa of the novella is... its tenebrous immensity. African subjectivity seems to exist in this powerful sense of inscrutable presence...denot(ing) the thing that the concealment of the sublime, or its failure to reveal, lets show just as it conceals. In other words, Africa's incomprehensibility suggests that there is something to (fail to) comprehend. To offer such an unfathomability might be all that Conrad can do, for to offer a coherent sense of African humanity might be to possess, to master that humanity. (Dickinson 4)

Interesting here is the acknowledgement of Conrad's limitation due to a failure to comprehend. I relate this to the absence of a "point of contact," which can be seen to be both a subject of the novella and a formal problem it grapples with as a product of its time.

One can conclude, thus, that for Conrad the ultimate goal is to address, or to redress in some way, this rupture as it exists in its “historical” sense as a kind of unreliability of experience which also questions the need to progress, or the motivation of the need to progress. Marlow is a rather harsh critic at home on the Continent, evident in his descriptions of the Belgian city where he receives news of his post as a “whited sepulchre” and the company office as a “door of darkness.” It could be said that Marlow is still a conformist when in the Congo, a difficulty which comes from his seeming ambivalence toward, or even a lack of interest in the social functions of the people of the Congo, yet this conformist aspect exposes the concept of history as it exists in crisis, it reveals the sense of intellectual vertigo that Marlow feels rather than simply objectifying the Congolese.

To take this point further, the conclusions Dickinson draws about Kurtz’s function in relation to African nature in the novella are not fully explored. Dickinson explains how Kurtz is representative of the sublime: “His self is a force of nature, a source of terror, and somehow divorced from ‘natural’ humanity, from civilisation. And the darkness of Kurtz’s consciousness is associated with Africa. His ‘evil’ is his ‘Africanism,’ his ‘alienised’ subjectivity.” This notion dehumanizes all that is considered African, but it works another way too. There is also appeal in what Dickinson calls Kurtz’s “Africanism.” Kurtz’s tormented death reveals the power of nature in Africa despite his own attempt to master it. It is a triumph for nature. The attempt to contain Africa and what it represents does not work, nor does the attempt to embrace primitive society and establish a point of contact there. Kurtz represents the collision of nature and culture. He is both the failure of the myth of ascendancy of European culture as well as the failure of a misguided belief about nature. Nature tested Kurtz and showed him the weakness in his civilizing beliefs; Kurtz usurped ivory and ruled over a people in an attempt to master nature.

Most likely he believed that the latter act negated the disappointment of the former, but Kurtz simply transformed from the representative of a culture that robs to becoming a self-appointed representative of nature. In essence, he negates himself through this double failure. As stated before, this lack of contact actually serves to reveal something about how dramatizing the lack of cultural understanding and rapport speaks directly to this time of uncertainty in relation to European culture.

Keeper of the Memory

Where then does the truth come from in regard to Marlow's experience and how does Marlow grapple with his own fragile grip on the reality of things? Marlow repeats the story of Kurtz in an attempt to unravel something meaningful in relation to this apparent problem. Since Marlow has been left with the care of Kurtz's memory, knowing what to do with that memory becomes a dilemma. His quandary lies somewhere between the ethics of both the story told and of the act of telling it. That which is unknowable and cannot be told or reproduced is revealed as such by the very act of telling. Perhaps this can be best described with Roland Barthes' idea that to speak of a subject is to postulate a truth; in other words, the act of telling is the best one can achieve.

Telling reanimates and repeats, thus attributing meaning via an echo that attempts to recapture experience, but Marlow remains always behind the uncapturable Kurtz. In this way, the forward movement is at once backward movement and the end starts again and repeats in the telling and the retelling from Kurtz to Marlow to the frame narrator. Thematic symbols function in the same way and are not mutually exclusive in the text; the concept of truth is shown to

possess qualities of both the sinister and of the ideal, for within each signification of things, its opposite connotation is found. This approach looks at both the act of telling and language in a kind of differential structure where one thing is viewed in respect to its relation to its opposing factor. To paraphrase Freud, he has stated that words don't state things but show something about their relationship to their opposites. The opposite is inherent to their entire meaning. Words are always inclusive of the antithetical.

In order to address this paradox of signification within language and the need for retelling in order to lend significance to Marlow's story, looking at the scene when Marlow lies to the woman who was Kurtz's "Intended" about her betrothed's final words is useful:

" 'And all this,' she went on mournfully, 'of all his promise and all his greatness, of his generous mind, of his noble heart nothing remains – nothing but a memory. You and I' ...

" 'We shall always remember him,' I said hastily.

" 'No,' she cried. 'It is impossible that all this should be lost – that such a life should be sacrificed to leave nothing – but sorrow.

" 'You know what vast plans he had. I knew of them too – I could not perhaps understand – but others knew of them. Something must remain. His words at least have not died.'

" 'His words will remain,' I said.... 'To the very end' I said shakily. 'I heard his very last words,' I stopped in a fright."

" 'Repeat them,' she murmured."

"I was on the point of crying at her, 'Don't you hear them.' The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind. 'The horror! The horror!' .. I pulled myself together

and spoke slowly. 'The last word he pronounced was –your name.'” (75-77)

This scene dramatizes the horror and what that represents versus the ideal woman of the Intended, while somehow placing them on par. Readers are told that the Intended had a “mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering.” Just as Kurtz is the European idealist in the field, the Intended is the ideal. It appears they knew so little about each other and yet they were one and the same, both described as being in possession of “inextinguishable” lights that can never die. Kurtz’ legacy lives on in the Intended’s hope and desire to sustain it, for while in her rooms, Marlow states that he “saw them together” and “heard them together... Do you understand?” What is to be understood is that he is facing the darkness again and that in some existential way there is truth in the lie. There is a darkness that is inherent in that light and vice versa.

The images of the Intended standing in a room that “was growing darker” with every word spoken and of her being crowned by an “ashy halo” while she looks at Marlow with hope in her “dark eyes” are examples of this almost hostile union of opposites. Her own voice carries Kurtz’ as if in an echo superimposed with “the whisper of a voice speaking from beyond the threshold of an eternal darkness” (75). Perhaps the Intended’s demand to know forces Marlow to the lie and, thus, to surrender to his own mortality and his own powerlessness to preserve the memory of Kurtz. And yet, how could Marlow repeat his experience of a man who did not even stand on the ground and who was only a voice? Equally, what else does Marlow have but his own voice?

Once more, Marlow is seen as one who is fated to follow and thus continues his partnership with Kurtz as a kind of double. Marlow’s obligation to tell as a need to know Kurtz

is more of a circumventing of Kurtz and his own connectedness to him that can neither be denied nor embraced. The lie is an attempt to redress the balance between both the nature and the culture that Kurtz represents. It is a cultural act that is intended to bring him back to some sense of a shared history, though one wonders what is worth sharing in this case for there seems to be very little solid ground between the imprisonment by, or the emancipation from, the ideals of colonialism. By not telling the Intended the actual words Kurtz spoke, Marlow hopes to retain some tangible sense of himself, but he only undermines this and slips further away from finding an equilibrium between the landscape of the Congo and the cultural context he faces back home.

It makes sense that the novella ends in the residence of the Intended for it is a place that also comes to represent a blank and indefinable space where a formerly privileged mode of consciousness no longer makes sense. Marlow's lie essentially reanimates and attempts to attribute meaning to an *arriere* Kurtz, the one Marlow thought he would find when he set out toward the inner station. The lie brings Marlow's story back to its beginning point, in that as it strives throughout to incrementally uncover the illusions of colonialist adventure, it concludes with an opposing need to cover up the darker naturalist side of the colonialist experience to this woman who represents the Ideal.

There are two noteworthy things that occur in this scene between Marlow and the Intended. Firstly, Kurtz's final words do remain, that is in the negative sense of their absence when they are not repeated. Then they are replaced with another enigma. Clearly, there is a relationship between the substitution of "the horror! The horror!" with "your name," (i.e., that of the "Intended) a name that remains unknown as does the exact origin of what Kurtz was describing. Both are indefinite significations, neither is wholly decipherable nor gives a true sense of narrative closure. There is as much doom in her devotion as there is hope. Marlow is

caught in the cycle, as represented by the “halo” of the meaning of his tale versus her “ashen halo.”

The other important factor that is revealed in this scene is that, when Marlow lies to the Intended about Kurtz’s final words, he destroys something of Kurtz. In essence, Marlow commits a kind of murder himself – one could even refer back to the ritual hunt described in the section on Levi-Strauss where nature and culture are shown from a sociological perspective to be at odds with each other, a clash which can only be redressed via a cultural act. Kurtz’ darkness (i.e., his Africanism) which is divorced from civilization and humanity is destroyed and replaced by a much greater darkness, the one that lives on in his moral ideals. Since Marlow cannot reconcile the Kurtz of high culture with the Africanized Kurtz, he is in essence killing the latter, yet they both exist as if inextricably united. Marlow states, “there is a taint of death, a flavor of mortality in lies – which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world --- what I want to forget” (27). Marlow recognizes the hollowness of life from Kurtz’ strange revelation. Life is portrayed as vacant and empty and Marlow holds that space. History, geography, and even race are exposed as relative constructions. It’s a losing situation, for Marlow’s lie also reveals the state of humanity and the truth of all its pretense. Kurtz was able to speak the truth when he exclaimed “the horror,” a truth that is indivisible from “your name.” Kurtz and Marlow are ultimately united here in that both share in a brotherhood that despairs of all the world, an “immense stare embracing, condemning, loathing all the universe.” Perhaps truth is what is at the end of this expectation for both men and, in this case, it is the crisis of nihilistic emptiness. For readers, all aspects of the text are fodder for their own moral and philosophical inquiry as they are also the fictional secondary audience of the tale. The myth of empire is replaced with this same sense of despair as more than what is personal to Marlow and Kurtz, but as part of the collective

experience, which calls for an alternative - a social compromise, which is the reading act now complete.

In-Betweenness and the Struggle for Interpretation in
Italo Svevo's *La Coscienza di Zeno*: An Anti-Case History

The bulk of published research on Italo Svevo's most influential novel "The Confessions of Zeno" focuses thematically on the text as the first psychoanalytic novel and the first fully modern Italian novel.¹⁵ The feminist subset of this criticism focuses on the role of women in the novel with a psychoanalytic approach to elucidating the protagonist's passion to possess the other in order to attain an idealized fantasy.^{16, 17} There is also a sizable amount of research on Zeno as an outsider which parallels Svevo the author as an outsider - a citizen of the Austrian empire and ethnically German of Jewish descent - who lived on the margins of a society that was largely Italian Catholic. Discussions about this apparent difference have given rise to an abundance of criticism that is focused on the novel's awkwardness due to its Triestine dialectical style and syntax that is more Germanic than Italian, analysis of which asserts Svevo lacked the stylistic purity valued in the writing of those Italian authors who preceded him.¹⁸ However, it seems somewhat trivial to argue points about the novel's lack of syntactical elegance since the entire ethos of the text as a confession is to present the protagonist's ineptness in all its forms without questioning whether or not it is reasonable or correct. Apart from the focus on Svevo's linguistic and cultural differences and research on the novel's thematic reading of Freudian psychoanalysis there is no mention of the ways in which Svevo's "La Coscienza di Zeno" intentionally digresses

¹⁵Svevo, Italo. *Confessions of Zeno*. Trans. Beryly de Zoete. New York: Vintage International, 1989.

¹⁶Svevo, Italo. *La Coscienza di Zeno*. Milano: Garzanti, 1989.

¹⁷ For a discussion Zeno's "myopia as neurosis" described as a phenomenon experienced by all of Svevo's disillusioned male protagonists, who search for some justification of themselves in the women they pursue, see "The Confessions of Italo Svevo" by Elizabeth Fifer published in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 320-331. Fifer states, "Women are not independent of men's fantasy lives. The narrator goes through a meticulous mental preparation for his woman and with great difficulty distorts her reality until it conforms to his ideals."

¹⁸ For in depth discussions on Svevo's use of language and grammatical style see "Schmitz, Svevo, Zeno: Storie di due Biblioteche" by Giovanni Palmieri (Milan: Bompiani, 1994) and "L'Italiano di Svevo" by Flavio Catenazzi (Florence: Olschki, 1994)

from what is now the standard story or myth that psychoanalysis tells by fictionalizing Freud's work.

The traditional omniscient narrator as the essential voice of meaning expounds truth by virtue of possessing clarity of vision -- the all-knowing eye, a perspective that forces characters as well as readers to accept a world of categories and definitions that, much like the teachings of religion, has boundaries and laws leading toward a particular interpretation of how things in the world should work. By the time Svevo published *La Coscienza di Zeno* he rejected the traditional *Ottocentesco* European novel with its omniscient narrator and looked to a new form of representation for novels in the twentieth century. The influence of Sigmund Freud at the time Svevo was writing was widespread in Europe and abroad and, for many, the principles of psychoanalysis became the modern word of truth, offering a discourse that presented the key to understanding the human psyche.

While Zeno's account does take up Freud's idiom of the talking cure as a means to explore psychological questions about the nature of man, in many ways his story is not a Freudian novel but presents itself as an anti-case-history. Understandably, reading Zeno psychoanalytically is requisite to anyone coming into contact with this novel. Yet, Svevo's interpretation of the function of the unconscious and its power is often original and ahead of its time.¹⁹ It requires reading psychoanalysis not as a philosophical truth, but as imaginative fiction. Furthermore, it is not enough to say that in relation to the philosophies from which the novel

¹⁹ It is notable that "The Confessions of Zeno" was published the same year as Freud's "The Ego and the Id" and only three years after "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." Svevo's most well-known book at that time, entitled "As a Man Grows Older," was published one year before "The Interpretation of Dreams" and, though it does not address psychoanalysis directly as a working idiom, it does tackle a similar world as that of "La Coscienza di Zeno" -- one informed by an exploration of the mechanism of unconscious fears and desires. The story of the ineffectual hero with its themes of ineptitude, illusions, speculation, dreams, and mental disturbance was already part of Svevo's toolbox in the late nineteenth century as he allowed readers to explore the unconscious motivations driving ordinary modern man.

borrowed, there is an attempt to falsify them. The suggestion here, rather, is that Freud should be applied alongside the novel's philosophy as a relative fiction, and there is no published reading that clearly actualizes this.

Considering that man needs a way to speak about what he doesn't know, Freudian culture wants to fulfill that need: it is a culture hypnotized by explanation. Zeno's tactics in taking up the cure show he is aware that the treatment of speaking to an analyst is a kind of explanatory game of interpretation -a means of arranging or engineering an epiphany as the patient rediscovers some essential part of his own history from childhood that is reinterpreted on the basis of present experience. But Zeno is interested in the discontinuities of the outer world as much as those of the inner. For him, chance serves as an unconscious event. Life itself is seen as a sort of free association which begs cosmological questions about a person's place in the entire changing universe, not just in relation to the mother and father and the figures who mimic them in a person's present experience. Zeno ceases his therapy because he mistrusts its explanations in relation to those larger questions, not because he does not understand it as his therapist Dr. S thinks. He does not seek to systematize how the unconscious plays a part in life, but rather to simply reveal a preoccupation with the need to articulate as an end in itself. This fact distinguishes Zeno's approach and, accordingly, is key to any reading of the novel.

Adam Phillips, author of "Promises Promises: Essays on Psychoanalysis and Literature" refers to Sigmund Freud as an imaginative writer, an idea which would place Freud's purposes closer to those of Svevo's protagonist than what might have formerly been assumed.²⁰ Phillips writes, "I think of Freud as a late Romantic writer and I read psychoanalysis as poetry, so I don't have to worry whether it's true or even useful." He explains there is something glamorous and

²⁰ Published by Basic Books, New York, 2001.

intriguing about the suffering and dramas Freud writes about that is also slapstick. Freud's texts tell readers that life is tragic, but also that it's absurd, like in a tragicomedy. Phillips' explanation implies that Freud speaks to a condition that is deeply based in human life. The same could be said of Svevo's "La Coscienza di Zeno." It is as if Svevo anticipates the transience of the Freudian paradigm and thus, creates his own where he himself does not worry whether either approach is true or useful. Of course, Zeno does this too, unwittingly by proxy. Through this lens, Svevo becomes more than a dabbler or student of psychoanalysis – he becomes a comic philosopher; and Freud becomes a Romantic poet, both seeking to bring the story of the unconscious into a free space of imaginative adventure as a way of addressing a feeling of modern crisis felt by the anxious self of western culture. It can then be said that both Svevo and Freud reveal how irrational rationality is and that man suffers from motivated irrationality as a self-disrupting creature. Svevo could not have created this effect by making either the novel or Zeno subscribe to the explanations of psychoanalysis, for it is this disunion from the Freudian paradigm that uncovers the inherent paradoxes in so-called truths, and in the problems that result when seeking to articulate them.

For Zeno, truth is a posture of how he would like things to be. Though the Freud story favors a certain sort of literate patient, someone prepared to play word games with the master figure along the lines of a particular narrative, Zeno rejects that narrative-as-gospel and enacts his own version of the cure. In turn, he is able to discover the narrative of his life – the rules of his own game: Zeno becomes the master figure for his readers. Brian Moloney in "Zeno's Truth" explains well how the protagonist's concept of truth is based on semantic confusion for there is a metamorphosis that happens in shifting, for example, ideas about health and duty. This shift allows Zeno to feel authorized to pursue his inclinations, such as adultery, even to the point of

his perceiving himself to have been “dragged into it” (52). Thus, Zeno is able to clear his conscience by ascribing a kind of morality to his acts (55).²¹ Moloney is right and his explanation of Zeno’s use of semantic shifts is useful for elucidating the way in which Zeno has ingeniously hurdled Freud’s super-ego theory, which attempts to explain why man suffers from a bad conscience. Though Dr. S thinks Zeno is dishonest, according to the rules that the novel sets in place, he has simply shifted the meaning of given symbols around morality. This same explanation also points to the way in which the novel employs semantics distinct from the golden rule of psychoanalysis, which requires looking at the first things that come into one’s head to reveal slips and incongruities in language that speak to deeper motivations that are often considered signs of a guilty conscience.

Zeno’s sense of pleasure relies on the absence of guilt, therefore Jan Paul Malocsay is off the mark when he states that Zeno is a “pessimist, a defeated hero” who is “ripened by unsuccess” (36). His article “A Defeated Hero,” suggests Zeno has feelings of dread about his life and that he operates from this sense of trepidation. But Malocsay doesn’t take into consideration the novel’s shift away from the Freudian paradigm focused on guilt as the result of an internal struggle between the ego and the superego. He argues that Zeno seeks mental health in physical health and resolution in defiance of man’s sinful nature, but he doesn’t consider Zeno’s identity formation as being built on a self-preserving belief in his own inadequacy. Therefore, statements about Zeno’s “simple desire to do good” as “not enough” to help him overcome smoking, for example, become confusing because Zeno’s “noble attitude” is really more of an acknowledgment of the human struggle which, according to Svevo’s protagonist, is a symptom of life which is “neither good nor bad; it is original.”

²¹ Moloney gives other examples, such as suggesting the inversion of Darwin’s theories in the novel – that the “unfittest” survive, but concludes that “survival entails no guilt.”

Ironically, Zeno's pleasure is increased by his absence of health which, the novel emphasizes, allows one to exist in a conscious state of free will.²² Deborah Amberson's psychoanalytic reading "Giraffes in the Garden of Italian Literature" agrees; her chapter focuses on Svevo's use of "corporeal arrhythmia" as a means to give merit to man's discontent.²³ While Amberson's terminology places new jargon on what has been largely referred to as Svevo's handling of his protagonist's psychosomatic disease, what Amberson contributes is the recognition that Zeno's model is distinct from orthodox psychoanalytic explanations of the absence of satisfaction as based on experiencing or feeling a sense of lack.²⁴ She explains that his experience of the relationship of desire to pleasure is unrelated to the usual tenets of the pleasure principle.²⁵ His is a "masochistic attempt" to separate desire from pleasure, which creates an open process that actually heightens the pleasure principle via deferral. Interestingly, this interpretation explains why Zeno does not have to worry about lack or about satisfaction in conventional terms: what is desired is always in reserve and excitement is sustained by nature of

²² Svevo's oeuvre enacts a reversal of the Darwinian view of man as naturally predatory. Instead of acting, Svevo's protagonists wait, making them seem inept and incompetent. Yet, from Zeno's perspective, this is preferable since ineptitude equals willful choice. Zeno states in the last chapter of the novel, "Every effort to procure health is in vain. Health can only belong to the beasts, whose sole idea of progress lies in their own bodies... The law of the strongest disappeared, and we have abandoned natural selection." After all, what good is Darwin's fitness and health when a cocksure character like Guido cannot see his own absurdity? Guido is a character who is great, not by choice, and thus fails.

²³ Seeing the value in this irregularity of rhythm begins with recognizing that cultural programs of order and contentment are part of a linear process linked to the ideology of "predatory animals." Predators are healthy in that they are "in action," but they are also unaware of being in this state (49). In contrast, infirmity is a cyclical process that, as a conceptual category, relates to a life lived more consciously in the "presence of material embodiment" (44).

²⁴ In his book "Italo Svevo: The Man and the Writer," published in the sixties, P.N. Furbank states, "Zeno's unconscious mind has found the secret of making any transaction with his conscience produce a balance of pleasure. It is as though the Freudian Id had been able to cheat the Ego, or as if the pleasure-principle had invented a novel means of outwitting the reality principle." Furbank explains that the Super-Ego still punishes Zeno with pain and psychosomatic disorders.

²⁵ According to the pleasure-principle most so-called healthy people achieve satisfaction and pleasure by acting on their desires, and most so-called unhealthy people do not achieve their desires due to a focus on lack (as referenced by Amberson).

the deferral. This constant deferral creates an erratic tempo to Zeno's corporeal embodiment that is all about potentiality and in direct contrast to cultural norms and linear time. For Zeno, desire is the focus, not the object of the desire, since the *who* or *what* is completely irrelevant. This means he does not experience lack or longing; the nourishment of his desire persists and his body "remains... the site of human experience" in its absence of health (56-7).

Seeing how the novel implicitly asks whether the human psyche should be understood scientifically or not, narrative authority becomes an apparent theme. In Amberson's reading Zeno's aberrant temporality supersedes any mention of Zeno's usurpation of the master role from his therapist. One can assume that the therapist represents the moral order; P.N. Furbank explains Zeno's afflicted form to be an embodiment of this same order (180). How then does the novel use the corporeal arrhythmia as fodder for questioning cultural codes? How do the multiple points of view go beyond addressing issues around psychoanalytic inquiry and come to reveal the struggle for interpretation? What role do readers play in relation to this innovative text that raises questions of authenticity, such as how to produce and receive a story while considering the nature of subjectivity? This chapter's goal is to address these questions and how they all point to the novel's ambitions to consider and, thus, humanize individual and societal imperfection in the face of feelings of powerlessness and the variables of chance, while also regarding the authoritative voice of psychoanalysis as an unreliable fiction.

Svevo's Reception Strategy

Readers approach head-on a novel that, by the end, puts its protagonist right back where he started. The story forms an arc that returns to its point of departure, enforcing the notion of subconscious repetition and, in so doing, proposes a particular reading in one regard. Yet, each

episode and each recollection stands in a series of possible relationships that work to remove directional centers by playing on the ambiguity between those relationships, and thus call the text's symbolic references and cultural codes into question. This dynamic opens innovative configurations for reading and probabilities of interpretation that are characteristic of an "open work."²⁶

In Zeno's search to make sense of his thoughts and the events in his life, he writes a journal under orders from his analyst Dr. S. as part of his cure. But ironically, the relationships that exist within Zeno's narrative situation, a self-exploration initially driven by the tenets of psychoanalysis, come to represent a world of ambiguity formed by the displacement of conventions, and thereby complicate the reading of logically opposing paradigms (i.e., birth and death, cure and illness, success and failure, truth and untruth). This complication builds an ironic tension between what the novel is about and how it operates, for the role of interpretation is at once the content (exploring analysis) and a structural journey (proposing analysis). In order to address the inherent irony of this novel, it is important to establish the connection between the two main dilemmas the novel tackles – the problematic nature of reading and that of writing, both of which exist relationship to each other. This interaction of reading and writing constitutes the struggle for interpretation as the novel's main inquiry.

²⁶ As conceived by Umberto Eco, this category of "openness" refers to texts disposed to various interpretations based on the collaboration of a reader who interprets artistic data with an awareness of the work's susceptibility. Using Kafka's work as an example, Eco explains how his use of symbols becomes a communicative channel for the indefinite, open to constantly shifting responses and interpretive stances where narrative situations cannot be understood in the immediate literal sense because there is no key to the symbolism – dissimilar to the allegory of medieval writers with their "rigidly prescribed layers of meaning. Various interpretations of these symbols cannot exhaust all the possibilities therefore the work remains inexhaustible insofar as it is "open." In it "an ordered world based on universally acknowledged laws is being replaced by a world based on ambiguity" (Eco, 54). For a visual figure of two variations of openness see Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, c1979) p. 34

In the preface the framing narrator Dr. S places the reader-at-large – referred to as “someone” who may want to take up the task of trying to make sense of Zeno’s account -- in the precarious position of attempting to “analyze the mass of truths and falsehoods” which have been collected for publication (vii). The reader is then urged to consider the unfinished analysis while Dr. S. makes a show of removing himself from the matter by publishing Zeno’s therapy over as an act of revenge against his uncooperative patient. This revenge publication, at once a final stab from the doctor and his proverbial waving of the white flag, implicates him in that the journal, though Zeno’s creation, was written under his control. The authority of Dr. S., thus remains and is an important variable implying an Oedipal triangle that places Zeno and the doctor in competition. This direct and sustained influence keeps Zeno on the defensive and, for readers, supposedly serves as proof for the doctor’s accusations about his hostility and unreliability (due to his unresolved Oedipal Complex), an important irony which will be addressed below. What is most interesting here is how Dr. S.’s influence attempts to make Zeno a victim and, similarly, how his apparent relinquishment of power is a move toward gathering reinforcements by involving or implicating readers. Readers are given an integral role in creating the story, albeit a complicated one.

In the *The Role of the Reader* and later in *The Limits of Interpretation* Umberto Eco uses the metaphor of reader as detective in order to outline “interpretive cooperation.” Eco’s construction delineates the “model reader” or “intended reader” as part of the author’s strategy, which pulls her in as accomplice, making her an unwitting victim to that role. As an accomplice she is a criminal who becomes suspicious of herself and her role in the text or discourse. Now she is a detective, too, focused on discovering how the author's strategy influenced her to "commit the crime" of ‘writing’ the story in reading it. By this I refer to the observer’s active role

in the observation process.²⁷ Eco's metaphor is applicable on many levels of Svevo's text in that the authorial strategy to pull in the reader can be dissected to form subcategories, including the narrative authority of psychoanalysis – the cure -- which situates Zeno as the reader or addressee of that discourse, drawing him in to the participatory roles of criminal, victim, and detective.

Narrative Authority

Zeno is also victim of his own discourse, the narration of his life as “confession” undertaken in order to acquire knowledge about the self. He in turn creates a fictitious self who, in that act of narrating, recounts to the original self who listens in the hope of learning. Taking the lead from Paolo Bartoloni in his critical book entitled *Interstitial Writing: Calvino, Caproni, Sereni and Svevo*, Bartoloni explains that, “The narration of the ‘I’ is prone to construct a fictitious ‘(I)’, in which the authorial/historical self cannot but defer its authorship to the other who speaks on the page” (p23).²⁸ In Zeno's case these relationships are problematized, as mentioned above, and re-problematized by yet another narrative, since towards the end of the novel, he speaks in opposition to the self he constructed in the previous chapters – there is the Zeno as narrator and the Zeno as character. Within these fragmentations of the narrative in the form of Chinese boxes, the struggle for both the authenticity of self and for interpretation is highlighted.²⁹

²⁷ For two examples of this see Eco's section on Fleming in *Role of the Reader*, p. 163 and also in relation to “Serie” in *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, c1990) p.92

²⁸ In relation to the “(I)” described, this separation also creates a division between the one who tells and the one who listens. Bartoloni cites Eduardo Saccone who states Svevo created a work that demands interpretation: “the foremost interpreter is the “(I)” of literature for whom the tale is narrated... it is Zeno who in the end has the responsibility of analyzing and making sense of his own writing” (p19).

²⁹ It is the reader's job to make any divergence between the two Zeno's clear.

The difficulty between Zeno and his analyst has to do with shared expectations that exist between doctor and patient that Zeno cannot subscribe to as author of his own experience.³⁰ He does not want to enact the kind of self-abandonment the therapy requires because the narrative of the “cure” pits Zeno’s own subjective desires against the doctor’s orthodoxy. In explanation of this, Zeno relays how the Dr. said, “self-examination that was not controlled by him would only strengthen my resistances and prevent my being able to give myself up completely” (382). Here, self-abandonment to psychoanalysis is critiqued in that it creates a forced deference to the Dr.’s rules. Accordingly, Zeno asks, “how can I any longer endure to be in the company of this ridiculous man, with his would-be penetrating eye, and the intolerable conceit that allows him to group all the phenomena in the world around this grand new theory?” (383). Zeno’s questioning of the Dr.’s narrative authority is an attempt to undermine scientific logic. Because Zeno is wary of science as the cure for human weakness, he ultimately views modern psychology as little more than a novel container for yesterday’s merchandise.

Accordingly, allusions to psychoanalysis as “spiritualism” are made throughout the novel, but not merely as a disclaimer about the influence of psychoanalysis; the references are even more compelling when made about the futility of the attempt to know one’s self via such doctrines and the giving over of control to absolute belief systems. Such orthodoxies lead to Zeno’s increased confusion about the nature of his own existence, especially in relation to the operations of his conscience.³¹ Accordingly, Zeno describes his psychoanalytic journey as a

³⁰It is essential to remember here that Zeno re-invents his life story for Dr. S.. According to Zeno, psychoanalysis tells an authoritative story that aims for a deliberate conclusion, one that intends to leave its audience with a didactic nugget of truth. Yet, he doubts the therapy’s legitimacy both in regard to its authority and its purpose to reason away his problems, namely his compulsive procrastination and the incessant need to improve himself. In essence, he appears to be an unobliging addressee.

³¹The title of Svevo’s original Italian edition of the novel, *La Coscienza di Zeno*, would translate literally as “Zeno’s Conscience.” The word *coscienza* can be related to the activities of the mind or even to the

mystifying adventure: “When one starts such an analysis, it is like entering a wood, not knowing if one is going to meet a brigand or a friend. Nor is one quite sure which it has been after the adventure is over” (395). Zeno’s questioning of the authority of this scientific narrative is at the heart of his own discourse which functions satirically in order to reveal the limits of psychoanalysis, with its delineated boundaries that are too neat to draw a picture of man in his state of incompleteness. The discrepancy that motivates Zeno to eventually quit his therapy becomes clear when he compares a controlled chemistry experiment with the inconsistency in the results of Dr. S.’s experiments:

I felt quite touched as I remembered...retorts and reagents. There is no resistance in the retort, at least it yields to the smallest rise in temperature, and shamming is out of the question. Nothing took place in that retort to remind me of my behavior with Dr. S., when, to please him, I invented fresh details from my childhood in

soul of the individual in regard to having knowledge or awareness about dealing with limitations or problems (i.e., the superego’s command of or caution to the ego’s desires and the difficulties this represents). Moreover, the concept of honesty is implied in the word (i.e., in good conscience) and can refer to feelings of moral goodness, or conversely, to self blame and guilt about having erred in some regard and to the weight of being aware of such wrongs (i.e., a preoccupation that begins during childhood when Zeno asks himself: “am I good or naughty?”). The feelings related to having a sense of conscience can tip the scales, so to speak, of interpretation, and therefore, undoubtedly relate to uncertainty or a kind of internal battle between right and wrong. This uncertainty is undoubtedly important because it underlines the ambiguity of the operations of the conscience, of its ability or inability to perceive events accurately and to throw off Zeno’s sense of equilibrium to such an extent that he calls himself sick and seeks psychoanalysis as a cure. The English language translation has been widely published, however, as *Confessions of Zeno* and is problematic as such. Clearly, the relationship to feeling a sense of burden and the need to relieve one’s self of that painful yet indistinct feeling that relates to guilt is why the English edition is presented with the title utilizing the word “confessions,” but it is too closely related to the absolution of sin as a practice of Catholic faith and to the admitting of or the signing away of one’s decided guilt to be accurate to what the original title seems to intend. Regrettably, the choice of the word “confessions” for the English title disregards all sense of the dubiousness of moral choice and of recodifying relationships that serve as metaphors for right and wrong that is intended in the original title. Besides, “conscience” is an interpretive state of being, whereby “confession” is an event that one enacts. The “intense curiosity” that Dr. S. says Zeno has in regard to himself, shows Zeno as focused more on discovering who he is and what his beliefs are via an evocative journey into the depths of his own psyche, rather than focused on the events themselves.

order to conform to Sophocles' diagnosis. Here was only the truth. The thing that had to be analyzed was imprisoned in the phial and, incapable of being false to itself, awaited the reagent. In psychoanalysis, on the other hand, neither the same images nor the same words ever repeat themselves. (395 bold mine)

Part of the problem of the resistance that Zeno finds himself unable to overcome is related to remembering and forgetting. Thoughts, as Zeno experiences them, are “something quite apart from (himself)” (3). Memories are metaphorically described as the reagents of pure experience in that memory alters the actual event via an interpretive process, and when that process is further altered, even adulterated by a false memory that is negotiated through therapy (i.e., transference), Zeno finds that, “not all those moments can be pure, with such manifold chances of infection” (4).

Tempo di Zeno

Recall or remembering is likened to the application of the reagent, a process described as a detection step, a kind of measuring process the mind goes through in order to reach the truth of experience. This “reagent” is the reactor that converts the original experience into an altered memory image. Zeno describes his own reactions to Dr. S.’s experiments as, at times, a black out of memory and, then, a made up past that is a combination of the way things are now with the way things once were, as well as images that seem totally unrelated and more symbolic than real.

He admits to falsifying them at times to please the Dr.. Unlike the retort in the experiment, Zeno *is* capable of being false via his own resistance. Zeno's narrative is, accordingly, unreliable as it skews the relationship of knowing to not knowing, via the duality of the historical self versus the fictitious one -- presenting its readers with a kind of anti-omniscience that then plays upon the problem of remembering and forgetting in relation to time as lapses.

In so doing, it presents reality as subjectively piecemeal via recollections that disorient chronological time. For example, Zeno is not capable of experiencing life in the present. When he thinks instead of his past and what "could be" an associative logic is formed. This *tempo di Zeno* is based on repeated substitutions that cover thirty some odd years but occur in an exchange of time as it is presented often out of order (i.e., the death of his father, of his father-in-law, and of Guido – all of whom he measures himself against at various points; the discovery of Guido's lover versus Zeno's lover; the last cigarette versus the last time together with Carla), by theme (i.e., "*fumo*", "*matrimonio*", etc.), and as an exchange or substitution of people (Carla believing Ada to be his wife instead of Augusta, the stranger's funeral that Zeno attends in place of Guido's; the sisters whose names all begin with the same letter and from whom he is not able to choose a fiancée except by cancellation)³². The disorganization of events in time emphasizes Zeno's psychic association with an alternative temporality – an occasion when he will get better: "*quando sarò guarito*," "*quando guarirò*." Paradoxically, this projected future is not a move forward in that it actually blocks his ability to progress and to experience life as cumulative, which is inherent in the structure as one of lapses.

Lapses viewed as contamination of the traditional chronological narrative then reinforces the need for Zeno to take the 'cure.' He spends the bulk of his time imagining how to come out

³² The doubling that occurs in events reinforces the order, or re-ordering, that Zeno's recollections don't.

from under the delusion of his current blocked state, the perfect instance of which is his desire to quit smoking. With every cigarette he smokes he relishes it as his last, yet the promise and delight of reveling in that “last cigarette” (“*come se fosse l’ultima*”) is what keeps him coming back for more. He is more attracted to the possibility of bettering himself than the actual definitive act, which sets in place his compulsive behavior of repetition and of othering himself. As the “heroic mood” of his resolutions is repeatedly renewed, Zeno continues to recreate himself under the guise of discovering a better Zeno, a highly subconscious act.

Zeno’s being unfaithful to the cure is also mirrored in his relationships, evident in the repetitive Oedipal triangles. His lack of faith is a cycle of inhibition and indulgence as he goes about seeking truth. Inebriation from wine becomes a metaphor for such indulgences and “fancies which spring from wine are as real as actual events” (217). “Wine is a great danger not because it brings the truth to light; but, on the contrary, because it reveals what is past and forgotten and plays no part in one’s present conscious will. All the fantastic ideas one has toyed with in the more or less recent past, and has long since forgotten, come crowding to the surface; it traces afresh what one has erased, and reads whatever is still perceptible in our hearts...our whole life story is written there, regardless of the emendations of time” (219). The parallel of wine’s ability to conjure fantastic ideas and Zeno’s actual attempt to erase them plays with the difficulty of locating his authentic self since, in this way, he remains as always other than what he is, or what he thinks he should be. The difference between his subconscious and his conscious will further underline the conflict between his desires and his demands to manipulate time.

Via the overall structure of the narrative as de-cumulative, the past is shown to be ultimately negligible because it doesn’t contain anything concrete anyway. Consequently, the irony that results in the relationship of the cure via exercises in regression to Zeno’s illness and

his alternative temporality is linked to the narrative distortion between past and present, evidenced in the complex relationship between remembering and forgetting. By mimicking memory's non-linear nature, the representation of Zeno's consciousness is shown to be not as simple as adding up a sequence of reversible steps. Therefore, the future where things have yet to happen, is more than just an escape; in the fabricated sense of improvement it offers, it is a location of creativity.

Ultimately for Zeno, to confess is to invent his world by writing it,³³ it is a creative act interrelated to the human animal's changeability and continual evolution and, moreover, it is the challenge of literature, which works to create something from nothing -- to find meaning in what has no meaning. Furthermore, it is an authentic act, a new birth that Zeno carries out by re-writing his life in order to pick "in full winter the roses of May," creating an innovative territory in opposition to the deception of real life – "*la vita orrida vera.*"

Desire is what repetitively motivates Zeno toward "fresh sensations" in the future and "new discoveries" about his past, thus, the evocation of Zeno's memories represented as invention creates a parallel between remembering and lying (as "dream-pictures" or "memory-pictures" that can be surveyed from all sides), both of which link back up to the motivation of desire as a generative force. The associative thread that results connects the invention of the imagined future with remembering and health and being alive, all of which relate to a kind of authenticity in representation and as the creation of living spaces that hold "light" and can be "walked through." Conversely, the already unattainable past relates to forgetting and illness and, ultimately, death because any intervention in the creative process is a threat to life itself.

³³ Zeno writes, "invention is a creative act, not merely a lie" (384).

However, the two threads are not meant to cancel each other out in that suffering remains part of the human experience.³⁴

The Myth of Psychoanalysis

In the relationship between the cure (psychoanalysis as a method to healing subconscious contamination) and the illness (his attachment to the complicated and psychically recurring past) both aspects stand as equally valid sides of the complexity of human nature. In due course, Zeno does recover his health, not thanks to the “re-education” of psychoanalysis, but despite it. He is able to detach from his preoccupation with pain and disease, instead, embracing his condition (“*Io amavo la mia malattia...vi scopersi come una programma di vita... finalmente ne ero libero.*”) in a reaction against psychoanalysis, which by inflicting a cure has tried to cure him of life and, thus, of his own humanity. There is no treatment for ineptitude; there is no remedy for life. Zeno realizes, “pain and love – the whole of life, in short – cannot be looked on as a disease just because they make us suffer” (p. 413). The cure is shown to be a definite attempt by science to disillusion Zeno by relieving him of his own desires but, in reality, only making him “worse than before” – also by making him increasingly aware of the problem of his forgetting as yet another kind of debility. Zeno asks how his condition might possibly have improved when the therapy was little more than an attempt to control his free speech, adding to his list of illnesses by setting up a contradiction between the freedom to invent his own story and the duty to comply to another’s.

³⁴ In “Death, Desire, and Repetition in Svevo’s Zeno”, Anthony Wilden explains this relationship of past to present by viewing time as a kind of character. “Using Augustinian categories, the present of things future (hope) becomes the present of things present (perception) through reference to the present of things past (memory). The process is dependent upon human discourse which defers *meaning* upon hope, perception, or memory.” A game is going on between compulsive repetition and the desire for immobility because Zeno “seeks in vain to correlate the future with the past according to a specific model” (MLN, 98-9).

In order to achieve all this, the therapy asked him to accept a formula: he wanted to kill his father and sleep with his mother, and to believe that men are destructive toward their male progenitors due to lusting after the mother-womb that creates them. Yet, in the context of Zeno's sense of life as one great creative lie lived in the pursuit of desires and longevity, the Freudian scenario appears to be just another kind of illogical fancy conjured up by another man's desires and then applied generally as a kind of cure-all that does little more than replace one imaginative story with an alternative one. Only the alternative resembles a caricature of Zeno. This carries weight, interestingly, in the cross purposes of the two tales -- one is meant to cure and the other is meant to be cured, mirroring the confrontation he faces between the two sides of his conscience, the one that is good and makes resolutions and the one that is naughty and breaks them, which reinforces the dilemma of the duality of human nature and its inherent ambiguities.

Readers are then confronted with the possibility of Zeno's imagined illness versus his diagnosed one. Moreover, the question is posed to readers about whether they ever actually believe that Zeno wants to get better. If Zeno's illness is indeed imaginary, it is a symbolic illness -- a fact that requires readers to keep in mind that this is all invention, all fiction. These revised significations reach toward an elusive and multi-layered truth, leading to the idea that being false is relative since no definitive answers can be drawn about either the moral nature of man or the authenticity of narrative. Zeno embraces his condition and quits psychoanalysis, and yet, what is most important here is Zeno's passage from writing for treatment to writing for himself. This is what I alluded to in the introduction by explaining that the novel puts Zeno back where he started. However, the significations have changed by illuminating the inability of language or discourse to render authenticity. Zeno reveals the psychoanalytic discourse that had persuaded him to evoke his childhood is really "nothing but graphic signs, mere skeletons of

images” (385). He clarifies this when he says, “my desire created these images.” Ironically, his desire created his “illness” as well.

One way to understand the multiple levels of irony that Svevo develops in the novel as a way to highlight the struggle for interpretation is to map out, in brief, the main Oedipal triangles in Zeno’s relationships as well as the one incorporating readers.³⁵ According to Anthony Wilden, the novel depends upon this repetition of Oedipal impulses, but with a more subtle psychoanalytic interpretation of its own “about the master-slave dialectic of analysis and the problem of counter-transference” that extends the whole process of analysis to life itself (MLN, 100). The following is how I delineate the relationships that form Zeno’s impulses:

1. Cigarettes, Zeno, Father: Zeno’s competition with his father places cigarettes, as the symbol of his rebellion, in the function of mediator of his desire for mastery over him. Zeno will repeat this triangle by doubling the patriarchal placement with Guido and Giovanni while incorporating various mediators. This initial struggle is the central event of the story (i.e., Lacan’s primal scene), setting in motion Zeno’s compulsion to continuously repeat a traumatic event whereby he puts himself in the same situations in hopes of achieving a different outcome.³⁶
2. Authenticity of discourse, Dr. S., Zeno: Dr. S and Zeno are in competition for the mediator that is the authenticity of discourse. By pitting himself against Zeno, Dr. S.

³⁵ The four points outlined are my analysis.

³⁶ Zeno’s father’s death is an estrangement considering the bizarre circumstances by which the father is unable to speak or impart anything of value -- no dying words. Zeno also seeks mastery over this sense of estrangement.



becomes the victim of his own patient whose narrative ambiguity the novel shows to supersede the authority of the cure (by privileging the in-betweenness of the psyche over the logic of science). Equally, by employing the discourse of psychoanalysis for his journal, Zeno is subsumed in yet another layer of discourse that forms a split in his narrative perspective.

3. Desire of a desire, Zeno healthy, Zeno sick: Zeno is in competition with dual aspects of himself -- the one who competes with the one who denies competing, for the mediator that is the desire of a desire (i.e., the time when he will get better). This divided Zeno suffers more from resolutions than from cigarettes or relationships with women. As a result, he renders himself unable to act by pitting his 'good' conscience against his 'bad' one. This cycle comes to represent the conflict between both his imagined story and his historical one.
4. Text, Reader, Writer: Mirroring the Oedipal triangles above, the text itself takes on the mediator position of questioning the authenticity of discourse. The reader is then in a struggle with a contender who is difficult to define and who is made up of the multiple voices of the text (author, editor, and the opposing discourses of the narrator) to discover where the truth is coming from. Since the Dr. is Zeno's only intended reader, this detail reinforces Zeno's sense of estrangement from his society, the Dr.'s role as a pundit for that society. For readers it makes the act of reading a competitive act for interpretive meaning. Not only must readers struggle to locate the truth among the multiple and often inconsistent lines of discourse, they must also struggle to locate themselves within those discourses.

In this analysis, each level of storytelling and the presentation of storytelling is both undermined and validated at the same time. The creative impulse that results from the need to fulfill desire, the same creative impulse that generates fiction and makes us all natural storytellers is ironically exposed through the Oedipal triangles, then calling on readers (the *us*) to participate in the jumble of logic that is Zeno's life and the representation of it that is the novel itself. Readers are essential in this interaction because, to sum up the above line of inquiry, the ultimate desire of a desire is to not only have a voice, but to have one that can be heard or, in this case, read.

The literary device of the report of patient to psychoanalyst never does actually honor psychoanalysis but, due to both Svevo's and his narrator's mistrust of the cure, is more of a satire that turns the Freudian narrative into a farce made up of inadvertent parallels (i.e., Zeno unwittingly marries a mother-figure in Augusta who has the same smile, he believes himself to have been responsible for his father's turbulent death scene due to his death-wish which he repeats with Giovanni and Guido). Svevo's anti-positivist principle of uncertainty is clear here in the use of Freud's theories and their impact on early twentieth century thought as a framework with which the events of Zeno's life seem to comply, but only in the ironic sense that Zeno's actions reinforce the transference of the Dr.'s expectations without the Dr. recognizing that fact.

Throughout, the tension between Zeno and the Dr. drives the narrative forward by employing the way in which the two men's discourses exist as opposites along a continuum. The Dr.'s function, ultimately, is that of the straw-man with whom Zeno seems to have little intention of playing by the rules, while the Dr.'s larger function remains hidden to himself and, by publishing Zeno's journal in order to expose his patient to readers-at-large, he ends up exposing himself along with psychoanalysis. It becomes apparent that Zeno never really refutes the Dr.'s

original position but, rather, changes the argument and its role. The significations become altered, so that, instead of understanding himself to be a victim of the cycle of breaking his resolutions, Zeno recognizes himself as having been a sufferer of the resolutions themselves in a situation where his conscience was getting the better of him. He explains, “when one ceases to feel oneself a victim (he can)... take a large, impersonal view of things” (398).³⁷

In this way, the novel then becomes more than Zeno’s settling of scores, but rather, Zeno’s self discovery -- the reminder of which occurs when he states, “one must always explain the matter clearly to one’s adversary, for only so one can be sure of understanding it better than he,” turning him into an investigative anti-hero who questions himself from within his own sick bourgeois society, the society the Dr. also represents. With its own “truths and falsehoods” on the eve of the Great War, Zeno secures his right to a neurosis, which he writes from within the world of his experience. The novel then reveals itself as a work in progress, in transition -- one that comes to represent man in a process of losing himself to find himself. Zeno reflects, “When the Dr. gets the last part of my manuscript, he will have to give me back the whole. I should be able to write it all over again with absolute certainty now; how was it possible for me to

³⁷ In the following passage Zeno acknowledges that suffering is not a deformity and that guilt and innocence, as for sin and purity, are merely societal constructions. And yet, isn’t society (as in Greek tragedy) largely responsible for its calamities and illnesses? He relates that he can even feel purified by a so-called sin if he understands such transgressions to be shared sufferings and individually insignificant: “I thought I might find some way out of the difficulties that hung over me... I was even bold enough to begin attacking our social system, as if that were responsible for my shortcomings. I thought it ought to be arranged as to allow one to have intercourse occasionally with other women without having to fear the consequences. Even with women one could never love. I felt no trace of remorse. Therefore, I don’t think that remorse springs from regret for having done something wrong, but rather from a recognition of one’s own sinful nature. The higher part of one’s body bends down to observe and judge the lower, and finds it monstrous. The sense of horror it experiences at the sight is what we call remorse. In classical tragedy the victim did not return to life, and yet all remorse vanished: which meant that the deformity was cured and it was idle to lament any longer. How could I have any room for remorse now that I was hastening with tender joy and affection to rejoin the wife of my bosom? I had not felt so innocent for a long time” (202).

.....

understand my life when I didn't know what this last part was going to be?" (414). Again, Zeno's time as de-cumulative corresponds to the chaos of life and, as a result, to the need to revise and continue.

The Writing Cure

In relation to revision, the critical article entitled "The Late Svevo and the 'Literaturization' of Life," Susan Perschetz Machala takes the approach of looking at the relationship between Italo Svevo as biographer of his own life and Svevo as author of the lives of his protagonists, Zeno in particular, as they combine to form a subjective reading of how life imitates art, blurring the distinction between writing a character's life and representing one's own. Drawing from Svevo's journals that exhibit his personal philosophy, Machala explains that fiction becomes the means for Svevo to reconstruct his own life by giving it a new 'literaturized' form.³⁸ Accordingly, autobiography and fiction become virtually inseparable for Svevo. This reading is useful for analyzing how Zeno's act of writing, the prescribed journal exercise, is transformed throughout the novel from being a tool for the cure to becoming a subjective meditation on life that counters the negative effects of the cure. In the final chapter Zeno infers this when he writes, "I think that writing may help to work off the mischief that the treatment has done me. Anyway I am certain that this is the only way to give prominence to a past that is no longer painful for me to dwell on, and to banish the hateful present as quickly as possible" (382). This quote confirms how the novel reveals the act of writing as an exercise that, in the end, is not

³⁸ Machala's parallel of how an author's memories and dreams, as well as those of his protagonist's function creatively becomes a way to act out the role of how one's life should be or could be and, thus, creates a fictional 'reality' that reads as more truthful than the lived one. The purpose of this approach is to reveal the factual yet elusive life *lived* as artifice, while giving preference to the one that is retold, making representative stories -- the result is that the artful versions of what happened take on increased value.

meant to be objective. The value of writing is placed on the *recording* itself and on allowing what is evoked to be the essential aspect that endures.

Svevo wrote in his diary that the act of describing one's life is not focused on the one who lives but on the one who describes -- "*Non colui che visse, ma colui che decrissi.*" Recording becomes a kind of "gathering" of life, a "cyclical process of living, writing and reading one's life," which allows for the opportunity to repeat and the writer to correct oneself, the goal of which is neither to achieve clarity nor obscurity in representation, but to favor the creative act of writing and reading oneself as a means for overcoming the horrors of the world (Machala, 438). This process is a direct move away from the Realist approach of retelling the gritty and tragic details of factual experience to a privileging of subjective experience and the securing of a refuge in the world and in literature for the self. As a result of this gathering and recording, the repeated versions of life experienced in writing bring about a modification, a revised and improved version of the actual events lived through.³⁹ There is also the benefit of the security of temporal distance from events that, when recording them, offers both order and control in the conjuring of things rather than relying on the happenstance of causal relationships to somehow bring that feeling about -- transforming something involuntary that happened into a voluntary memory. This written record helps to neutralize the painful past as well as fear of the future.

In other words, actual events have little value without having first been assimilated and structured. Zeno's narrative verifies this need when he explores his love for Ada, a love that by

³⁹ Machala states, "The more he writes, the more valuable this written record will become." It is crucial to realize that for Svevo, as Machala explains, "this kind of imaginative crystallization of parts of one's life is not meant in any way to falsify one's personal reality, but to render it more *complete*," thus striving for a greater truth, one resulting from feeling rather than reason (438).

the end of the novel is described as a kind of sympathetic memory. Zeno explains, “it is a strange feeling to love a woman whom one has loved passionately but never possessed, and who now means nothing to one. On the whole the situation is the same as it would have been if the woman had yielded, and it is interesting as proving once more how little importance we ought to attach to certain things that for the time being fill our whole horizon” (269-70). The necessity of assimilation, in this case in regard to the relationship between what happened and what has never happened for Zeno with Ada, points to the importance of privileging the representative story and, thus, to render the fabric of life in its state of changeability, a task that would be unattainable if told in an unprompted or spontaneous way.

Instead of aspiring to reassemble an objective reality, Svevo focuses on making the presentation of subjective reality seem real by concentrating on the internal reality of man where the situation is the same, meaning that living, writing, and reading bring about a representation that is harmonized; how characters perceive themselves becomes more significant than how they are perceived by the world. The perfect example of this self-perception is the aging Zeno’s view of relationships with women: “I am getting old and it is some time now since women ceased to take any interest in me. If I were to lose interest in them, there would be an end to all relationship between us” (399). The ceaseless curiosity about himself that Zeno has, that which the Dr. shuns as egotism and hypochondria, is important in that it allows him to gather conclusions that give him control and ownership over the confusion of life.

Zeno’s deliberate ritualizing of experience is a way to separate him from quotidian reality while ironically grounding him to it in a new way. Time that is remembered co-exists with the time of remembering; the time of writing, the time of reading, forms a recodification of societal norms in favor of the newly “literaturized” ones. By seeing fiction as the only truthful means of

writing or recording autobiography, Svevo is able to revitalize himself through the lives of his fictional characters. This correlates strongly with Zeno's own revitalization process; Svevo writes to create a sense of identity and a feeling of expansion, just as Zeno writes.

With this in mind, it is also interesting to think about Svevo's authorial role in relation to the framing narrator because, if Svevo renews himself via his characters, then he also becomes a fiction, on the level of life imitating art. Dr. S thus becomes an aspect of this dynamic, pointing to evidence of Svevo's relationship to the doctor. One could say the "S" of Svevo and of Dr. S works to form an extended metaphor for the shifting analogies already observed in relation to writing (i.e., writing as a tool for the cure, and writing to overcome the cure, writing as a representation, and writing as a gathering of experience and a record of oneself). Svevo is both captive to authorship as a conceit of knowledge and, alternately, free in his recording of an interpretation that is shown to be unstable in regard to locating knowledge. Remembering that the Dr. is the representative influence for what constitutes Zeno's story as it is presented, a function which is put into question in relation to the control and power employed over the creative process as synonymous with both living and storytelling, a critical eye then turns to the ability or inability to create such an authoritative voice. In other words, the "S" of Dr. S and of Svevo becomes a dual symbol in that it plays with the authorial cliché of unmediated omniscience and the instability of representation across the scale.

Since Svevo often published his own work, the publisher might even have an intended link to this critique seeing how Dr. S publishes Zeno's journals. By casting the novel as a publication that is an act of retribution by the framing narrator toward the main narrator, who is also the fictional author, for not complying with the established rules of the psychoanalytic narrative that comprises the novel's action, the structure satirizes the task of storytelling, in this

case as autobiography that is undermined on many levels and by many, the very people who are marketing it and creating it as such. The shifting symbol of the “S” serves to reinforce this dynamic and to expose the rigidity of the frame itself.

Imperfect Language for Imperfect Lives

When thinking about the volatility inherent in the act of representation, language is called into question. It is valuable to look at how the diverse functions of metaphor and language, as the world of ideas, can be differentiated from action in relation to how the literalized metaphor fails to grasp the passion and creativity that once fashioned the metaphor as an initial comparison. Zeno’s real life versus his imaginary written one is synonymous with the literal and the live metaphor in that his sense of the act he desires to carry out is genuine and vivid, but his inability to recreate that unaffectedness afflicts him at the level of language. The metaphors he has appropriated and, thus, lives by, namely those of resolution and self-improvement, have stilted his otherwise innocent passions. In disgust over his attempt to talk to Guido’s mistress, Carmen, with the intention of benevolently sharing her for the sake of Guido’s wife Ada, Zeno writes:

The bestial words we allow to escape us prick the conscience more than the most unspeakable actions our passion inspires. Naturally, by words I mean only those that are not actions. Actions... are performed to produce some pleasure or some benefit and then the whole organism, including that part which should set itself up as judge, participates and becomes consequently a very benevolent judge. But the stupid tongue acts on its own for the satisfaction of some little part of the organism that, without words, feels defeated and proceeds to stimulate a struggle after the struggle is over and lost. The tongue wants to wound or wants to caress. It moves always amid mastodontic metaphors. And when words are red-hot, they scorch their speaker (295-96 Zeno’s Conscience).

There is an obvious incongruity here between spoken “bestial” words and imaginary words that are not acted upon, the same incongruity that exists between actions that can be either imaginary or real, both of which are initially inspired by passion but the latter of which spoils the freedom of the initial virtual identity. Clearly, speaking is an action, an action that is a struggle because of words going beyond the imaginary and getting in the way. Zeno reiterates, “I was afraid to take part in general conversation because it gave me no time to clear up my thoughts” (216). The struggle is to make words that “benefit”, instead of that “scorch” and judge, and to craft metaphors that are not mammoth and overpowering in their influence over their speaker. Language is imperfect and is itself a disorder because words cannot be withdrawn, revealing the powerlessness of both his declarations of innocence and of guilt.

Zeno has not yet found a voice among this tangle when he is motivated by an imaginary comparison between his mistress, Carla, and Guido’s mistress, Carmen. He destroys his fantasy by making a proposition to Carmen. He appeals to her as a “friend” and a “mentor” in order to approach her with an air of sincerity but he is afflicted by his inability to recreate what he initially intended as a genuine and compassionate act. Both men do cheat on their wives, but for Zeno his intentions were never to deceive. His actual affairs are blemished due to a sense of self-deception as self-conscious contamination, shown in the fact that he is able to experience pleasure from his pure intentions toward his mistresses until he acts on them. The remedy then becomes to turn his pure intentions toward his wife: “How could I have any room for remorse now that I was hastening with tender joy and affection to rejoin the wife of my bosom? I had not felt so innocent for a long time” (202). Zeno’s words have entangled him into a reductive state whereby the positing of an affair versus the carrying out of one is comparable to the enjoyment of an imaginary cigarette that burns when becoming a chain of real ones, “every puff I felt my

tonsils burning as if they had been touched by a red-hot coal” (11). The same is true of his marriage to Augusta, whose beneficial function is as an idea for Zeno, one that will bring about renewal for him, but only in a recurring state that is linked as much to dissolution as it is to rebirth. Upon feeling a “prick” to his conscience, Zeno senses the limitations that occur from enacting the theories that take over his experience.

Svevo's Metaphor-Analysis and the Mystification of Meaning

In *The Analyst's Metaphors: A Deconstructionist Perspective* British social scientist Donald L. Carveth's explanation of the necessity to deconstruct the reductive theories that direct experience parallels Svevo's endeavor to recodify societal norms through his literaturization of experience. Just as Svevo seeks to demystify Freud's metaphor of the mind as machine and to debunk the master-slave mythology, Carveth reveals the dead metaphors that often dictate approaches to psychoanalysis are actually only replicating the neurotic's problem of being possessed by the metaphor. Comparison is meant to “take the form of analogy” -- the opposite being when similarities are “absolutized and the representations of different objects are identified or merged” -- a process that is described as a regression “from live to dead metaphor.”⁴⁰ He asserts that psychoanalysis, conversely, should use metaphors critically and function as “metaphor-analysis” -- an exercise in becoming conscious and self-critical in the employment of the metaphors people live by. Carveth explains, “not only is psychoanalysis ‘the talking cure’ based upon the method of free association, but... transference and metaphor are two words for a

⁴⁰ The remaining section of the quote reads: “Since all knowing is mediated by metaphors that are inevitably partial and selective, our knowledge is necessarily relative and incomplete. It would seem that we must abandon our quixotic attempt to discover the meaning (as opposed to a range of complementary meanings) of anything, not least ourselves.”

single associative process.” In working this out, one can see that the talking cure requires transference onto the analyst in a complex process, which assumes the removal of the symptom.

There is also the same kind of transference originating from the metaphors applied by the analyst. Carveth stresses that psychoanalysis must avoid such “grandiose positivist aspiration to achieve an unmediated and absolute grasp of the Real (i.e., a godlike omniscience) [and] must be... replaced by a principle of uncertainty--a sacrifice through which, from a conceit of knowledge, we might advance toward a rudimentary knowledge of our conceit.” Human subjects are frequently “governed by a distinctively human semiotic determination by the symbolic structures that live us” whereby one lives in the grip of a "dead" metaphor and is “unfree” to think and act along different lines. Wittgenstein reiterates this in saying, “a picture held us captive and we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.”

In studying how metaphor regresses through literalization there is a parallel in psychoanalytic theory dealing with regression from conscious to subconscious mental activity. Part of Zeno’s challenge is to overcome this regression and to question the idea that his identity exists explicitly inside the metaphors associated with subconscious determination, which he comes to see as a form of contamination. Toward the end of the novel he strives for a larger truth, one outside of reason. He is able to reflect on the metaphors that possess him by replacing subconscious “identities and antitheses” with conscious “analogies and distinctions.”⁴¹ Two phenomena that are different in some respects, but that are complicated in that they are “not absolutely antithetical. Just as a contrast no longer denies all possible similarities, so one

⁴¹ These quotes are applied from relationships established by Carveth. The full quote includes : “The positing of the meaning of any signifier, text, or psychic reality itself reflects a regression from live" to "dead" metaphor, a literalization of meaning, and a mystifying insistence that analogy is identity or that a complex system of signification is reducible to one of its elements regarded as an essence.”

metaphor no longer swallows up all other possible analogies.” What Carveth conveys Svevo illustrates.⁴²

In Svevo’s novel, the causal relationships recodify commonly held social beliefs that readers have by remaining open in their signification, which produces ironic tensions built on misunderstandings, indecision, and instability -- such as the spatio-temporal *first* and *last* cigarettes, and reveals events as a series of accidents rather than as logically evolving. Likewise, the sense of language in words such as conscience as a kind of bad faith (implying suffering and disappointment) and its counter meaning as good faith (desire for a better life and for creative license), in regard to sources of authority and requirements for morality, are effectively skewed as paradoxes between opposites. There is emphasis on the fact that humans want to delude themselves about the nature of desire and to try and justify what they fear most. Zeno is able to combat this by using a lie as an instrument of truthfulness. His evolving inventions are his truths. Truth is a highly charged word in this novel in regard to how it posits deception and, thus, fiction as a kind of truth. That seems to be the question that Svevo’s novel is asking above all else. Its inquiry does not lead to a solvable quotient pointing to fiction as the equivalent of truth, but more to an equation that looks at life as deception and, in relation, at life as a creative process that mirrors fiction.

Carveth’s deconstructionist approach to psychoanalysis as metaphor-analysis was written almost a century after Svevo’s *La Coscienza di Zeno* was published, a fact that underlines Svevo’s genius in his own need to analyze the metaphors we live by via his treatment of

⁴² The analogic flow retains its distinctions. Carveth asserts that to think otherwise, “is a fallacy that appears to be motivated by the wish to evade the anxiety and depression that are frequently associated with the uncertainty intrinsic to our human condition as ‘world-open’ and symbol-using animals. In the view of the early Sartre, the search for ‘essence’ results in those varieties of ‘bad faith’ in which we seek to evade the inherent tension or ambiguity which, as subjective objects or objective subjects, is an ineradicable aspect of our ‘existence’.”

language, symbolism, transference, psychotherapy, and the interpretive process, as he illustrates their relationships and how they are all inherently flawed, as is the entire process of analysis to life itself. That identity requires meaning is shown to be a fallacy, the meaning of a thing is revealed in the same light, as they both remain ambiguous. In this way, the novel emphasizes the mystification of meaning and interpretive instability, in that the interpretation of malady is but the counterpart of the malady of interpretation.

At the level of symbols, the novel calls on “encyclopedias” that point to “histories” about alienation.⁴³ Zeno’s name links him to Elea’s *reductio ad absurdum* or “proof by contradiction” as well as to the word “xeno”, meaning stranger, which parallels his sense of alienation from his own past, from the business world, from his family, and from the health and confidence that others, like his wife Augusta, seem to experience -- clearly Augusta and Zeno are on opposite ends of the spectrum from A to Z. Equally, Zeno is alienated from his roots when the war prevents him from returning home in the final chapters. In relation to the world as contaminated, Cosini in Italian means “little insignificant things,” a pejorative term tying him to the insignificance of the middle-class values that he and those around hold in the face of World War. Despite these two names, Zeno rises up as one who has pierced through hypocrisies of the human condition and who looks at death, though he fears it, as the only serious and guaranteed thing in life. Everything else seems immaterial.

This is evident in the last section of the text which occurs during the early days of the Great War and makes a move to depict a larger picture of man in his state of ineptitude: “I am not so naïve as to blame the doctor for regarding life itself as a manifestation of disease. Life is a little like disease, with its crises and periods of quiescence, its daily improvements and setbacks. But unlike other diseases life is always mortal. It admits of no cure” (414). Zeno turns to

⁴³ Terms used by Eco in *Open Work* to describe a kind of literary hypertext and knowledge gathering.

challenge society itself as leading a life that is “poisoned to the root” due to industrial progress because machines create an unhealthy world whereby vast suffering and inflicting death on a grand scale is justified. These machines, which “bear no relation to the body”, have made “the law of the strongest” disappear. “We have abandoned natural selection. We need something more than psychoanalysis to help us” (415).

La Coscienza di Zeno is Modernist in its ability to put into relief the subjective and often contaminated world as it challenges narrative form in service of the search for narrative truth. It exposes its protagonist as one who feels out of synch with reality and who, therefore, doesn't have the ability to act in the world. The novel's final prediction of Armageddon as inflicted by humankind emphasizes the delusion of desire as justification for complete alienation and suffering. Wars are fought on a combination of good faith (desire for a new life) and bad faith (suffering), in the hopes of securing a better future, a time when this next war will be the last and will signal the beginning of a new era. But science will not cure the human condition, for Zeno projects that this war will be one in a series until there is nothing left. As long as mankind exists, health remains a fiction and good resolutions a fallacy. Just as Zeno never does quit smoking, humankind will most likely continue to do battle and death will come before the cure.

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Gide's "Art du Roman" and the Artificiality of Absolutes
in *Les Faux Monnayeurs*

The true hypocrite is the one who ceases to perceive his deception, the one who lies with sincerity. ~André Gide

To date most critical studies of Andre Gide offer a largely historical reading with a consensus that Gide was an important evaluator of the ethics and intellectual assumptions of French culture at the turn of the century. Though it has been suggested he was a cultural anthropologist, his role was more to sound the alarm, documenting the anarchist tendencies running through the undercurrent of society which surfaced as a threat to the "grand bourgeoisie" and to the privilege of what Roger Shattuck called "The Banquet Years" in France. Germaine Bree calls attention to Gide's warning in his *Journals* where he reacts against the idea of "culture" in the mythic guise of a call to preserve the past.⁴⁴ Gide understood that inherited culture did not guarantee the quality of a civilization: he recognized that "culture" was an oxymoron in that it provided a perceived tranquility while also obstructing creative forces of the future that yearned to break free. For Gide, the very ethos of this double edged word provided a sense of stability while also producing a society crippled by rigidity.

Clearly Gide approached the state of French culture as in need of revision, though the large scale philosophical changes he proposed weren't always a deliberate move on his part since Gide the writer was an individualist committed to creating a literature that observed and expressed the contradictions between conservatism and rebellion as they existed within himself. These two impulses were the result of his own intellectual restlessness and provided the

⁴⁴ "Culture and Counterfeit" by Germaine Brée, *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 5, Number 2. Criticism and Culture (1972), pp. 72-79

inspiration for a body of work that is more personally than socially driven. The conflicting tendencies he observed within society were directly related to what he observed within his own contradictory nature.⁴⁵ In reality, Gide's was an ethics of the unpredictable in the individual, revealing the extremes between relaxed hedonism and puritanical guilt. As a result of this unavoidable contradiction, he saw sincerity as of a higher order than morality, and sincerity could only be achieved by acknowledging and giving equal emphasis to all aspects of one's nature.⁴⁶ Man should seek the extremes of his own nature because each corrects the other.

The focus on sincerity over morality strongly relates to Gide's approach to the novel structure. The integrity of a work is no longer focused on a Realist principle loyal to facts and creating completely realized characters but, rather, is in favor of embracing coincidence and the understanding that knowing one's self isn't entirely plausible. This move beyond Realism allowed Gide to approach novel writing as an act of reappraising what novel writing is. For example, Albert Guerard has observed from Gide's *Journals* about *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* that the historical author often changed the trajectory of his novel in the middle of the project without returning to revise what had already been written. Guerard sees this as a deficit to his technical achievement. Rather than condemning this fact as faulty, however, a favorable view would be to understand that this method was a way of redefining progress for Gide, both in the artistic sense and in relation to the development of human nature. Aren't we all cobbled together by living according to the contradictions of choice? Is any story more or less authentic on its own without

⁴⁵ Reference to Gide's many facets as, for example, an imaginative writer, an intellectual and critic, a homosexual, a Protestant, and a Communist.

⁴⁶ Gide saw morality as a substitute for naturalness, a preferred fiction

the other, subterranean root stories at its base?⁴⁷ These are questions that one could easily imagine Gide grappling with as he wrote a novel that has been called a kind of anti-novel.⁴⁸ A classification that is not accurate, since it would be nonsense to surmise Gide's literary development was an exercise in breaking rules. On the contrary, Gide was applying opposing rules and exposing them as they co-exist in their counter relatedness.

Gide's concept of reader reception reflected his preoccupation with the aesthetic value of process. In his related *Journal* which appears at the end of each edition of *Les Faux Monnayeurs*, Gide explains his ideal notion of reception: "It is appropriate, in opposition to the manner of (Henry) James, to let the reader get the advantage over me--to go about it in such a way as to allow him to think he is more intelligent, more moral, more perspicacious than the author, and that he is discovering many things in the characters, and many truths in the course of the narrative, in spite of the author and, so to speak, behind the author's back." Critical narrative choices are based on this awareness of reader imagination as a key to the development of his new novel form, constructed around how the *author* receives the novel.

This chapter offers a revised reading of Gide's reaction against Realism, which is more multi-faceted than previous criticism has shown. When related to characters' agency, to name a few examples, harsh realism shows the myth of control, resigned realism shows self-defeat. Similarly, the narrative itself wants to play a joke on Realism as a variable perception because each version of it erodes another version, and another. Will reality and desire ever meet up?

⁴⁷ The root stories being the news story that inspired the novel as well as the intended continuation of the stories of other characters from his body of works, such as Lafcadio, who in fact never appear.

⁴⁸ Jean Paul Sartre gave this generic classification of "anti-novel" to *Les Faux Monnayeurs* in his introduction to Nathalie Sarraute's *Portrait of a Man Unknown*, 1948.

Fictional author Edouard cannot gather a sense of what reality is so he seeks to control it via manipulation. As an author, he rebels against the doctrine of realism in novel writing, only to discover that his antithetical alternative has left him with a theory of the novel, but no novel, at least not a viable one.

In “Gide’s Fictional Technique,” Justin O’Brien asserts, “It was a brilliant idea to set Edouard the novelist at the center of (*Les Faux Monnayeurs*)... when Gide puts a novelist resembling himself at the center... engaged in writing a novel (with the same name) and recording and commenting on the action in his diary as it unfolds. Such a device offers the incalculable advantage of narration by indirection.”⁴⁹ O’Brien’s terminology “narration by indirection” is useful in capturing the corollary between the perception of one’s experience and the artifice that is literature, a crossroads where Edouard gets stuck. However, the use of this term is not used to address how readers, or receivers of information, come to understand details about individuals based on how those individuals describe the world and others rather than by how they describe themselves. A revision of the novel’s narrative “indirection” is key to understanding Gide’s explanation of how readers perceive having the upper hand “in spite of the author.” Equally, it is important to appreciating where his concept of production and reception meet, a critical crossroads that is largely missing. Gide’s most remarkable innovation was how he worked within this realm of reciprocal processes where, metaphorically speaking, he gave

⁴⁹ Justin O'Brien, "Gide's Fictional Technique," *The French Literary Horizon*, Rutgers University Press, 1967, pp. 91-102. O'Brien explains, "(Gide's) very first work, published in 1891, shows a young romantic hero writing the novel we are reading. And in his Journals for 1893, Gide has noted: 'I wanted to suggest, in the *Tentative Amoureuse*, the influence of the book upon the one who is writing it, and during that very writing.... Our acts exercise a retroaction upon us.... In a work of art I rather like to find transposed on the scale of the characters, the very subject of that work. Nothing throws a clearer light upon it or more surely establishes the proportions of the whole...'"

equal reign to the devil and the god in his work in order to achieve something he perceived as mystical.

Harold McD. Brathwaite makes a case, in regard to Gide's artistic inspiration, for the seminal influence of Charles Baudelaire's use of surprise on Gide's development.⁵⁰ His thesis related to the use of surprise helps explain Gide's choices in developing a fictional structure that uses no foreshadowing or plausible transitions.⁵¹ He explains Gide was attracted to an antithesis within Baudelaire's character that held aesthetic value, much of which was grounded in the element of surprise that occurs when these contradictory forces are combined.⁵² The argument the two writers share is that the imagination imitates and the critical spirit, which brings to light human contradictions, creates. Ultimately, the exclusion of imagination, deliberately or involuntarily, was no barrier to good writing. Gide saw in Baudelaire that there was a critical spirit directing the creative one.⁵³ For Baudelaire as for Gide, the achievement of beauty is a conscious and calculated effort of the artistic will to organize and structure the

⁵⁰ "André Gide vis-à-vis Charles Baudelaire: Two Literary Artists", Harold McD. Brathwaite, McMaster University, Open Access Dissertation and Theses, 1969.

⁵¹ Brathwaite notes Baudelaire's assertion that there are "deux postulations simultanees" in every man, "l'horreur de la vie et l'extase de la vie." Translation: There were two simultaneous postulations in every man, the horror of life and the ecstasy of life.

⁵² Gide wrote, "Issue d'intimes contradictions, chez Baudelaire... une complexite deconcertante, une cabale de contradictions bizarres, d'antagonismes presque absurdes." About the appeal of Baudelaire's notion of surprise, Gide wrote in his *Journal*: "l'art"serait, malgre la plus parfaite explication, de reserver encore de la surprise."

⁵³ Indeed it is by refusing to be didactic that art can aspire to ultimate purity. Similarly, Justin O'Brien reports that Gide was "never quite able to believe in reality and its independent existence. . . , to him the artist had to be 'somewhat of a mystic' who saw the screen of phenomena." One of Gide's canons is that there is no art without transposition,' and he twists the proverbial adage to give expression to his belief--"Dieu propose et l'homme dispose." Brathwaite convincingly concludes that Gide's view is almost identical to Baudelaire's regarding the search for beauty and perfection as a means to an end that will result in catharsis.

phenomenological world, and for Gide to position himself and his narrator as both an observer and an actor in the event of novel writing is evidence that calculated efforts in creativity were *modus operandi* for him.⁵⁴

Gide's approach to "demonetize beautiful feelings" and dramatize the way social and ethical restrictions check and suppress one's possibilities is, for the majority of critics, the revelation of a tragedy. Regis Michaud writes that Gide, "would have us believe... there is no prospect of change and progress in what we are. In a world where everybody cheats, an honest man can only be a mountebank. So let us not be duped."⁵⁵ But what is often not mentioned critically is how this same effect is also sympathetic in that it enlightens us to seek reversals in order to generate and regenerate the creativity that is chaos. It is an approach that Gide applies equally to the individual and the literary work: life itself is a satire. Furthermore, *Les Faux Monnayeurs*, what Gide calls his first and only novel, showcases his version of what he believes Baudelaire achieves in the "Flowers of Evil." The novel is revolutionary in the way it engages a critical spirit to challenge readers' perceptions of what exactly a novel is, part of which includes an ironic series of *creative* accidents on the part of the author and the narrators, *accidents* which intentionally give authority to readers. It exposes, at once, the contradictions within the individual and within the process of novel writing, while also probing the questions of how to attain artistic perfection and personal authenticity. A certain disinterestedness, or critical distance, on the author's part in the lives of characters allows one to reflect more deeply on the

⁵⁴Naomi Segal in "Gide and the Feminist Voice" notes that Gide found creative gratification in restraint, as mentioned in his *Journals*.

⁵⁵Regis Michaud, "The Leadership of André Gide," in his *Modern Thought and Literature in France*, Funk & Wagnalls, 1934, pp. 72-95.

chaos of life and to represent it in art more fully, conceivably with even more authenticity. This chapter seeks to reveal how Gide gives readers the upper hand and how it is important to recognize that within Gide's concept of production and reception imagination exists more in the realm of readers, who think they know better what the author should do. The goal here is to move beyond present criticism about Gide focusing on him as a critic of society and its calamitous moral void and to present an anti-realist innovator who, in exploring his own intellectual restlessness, made the writing process its own end.

Mise en Abyme: A Filter Against Realism

In exploring the challenge that *Les Faux Monnayeurs* makes to the novel genre it becomes clear how the *mise en abyme* form is the essential vehicle to achieving authenticity in this work. It shows the interplay between motivations, chance, and situational variables. The context of the counterfeit coin and its application to economic exchange serves to expose fraudulent equivalencies related to family, the self, society, politics, religion, art, language, and communication. The "counterfeit" theme is intensified via the novel's form and gives structure to the labyrinth of an imperfect world even as it's falling apart, a world where excessive self-interest leads to duplicity, cruelty, and a lack of sincerity. In the section of the novel entitled "Edouard Explains His Theory of the Novel," Edouard, a character who is writing his own novel entitled *Les Faux Monnayeurs*, explains his philosophy of how a novel should be formed. It is difficult not to read Gide's own approach to the novel as the basis of Edouard's theory, since he too wrote a book called *Les Faux Monnayeurs*, the novel in which Edouard is featured. Therefore, this section will not attempt to look at similarities and differences between the two but, rather, will endeavor to explain the relationship of the two writer's approaches to each other as a way to probe the overall themes and questions of the novel.

The overarching theme of the novel is the problem of authenticity, evident from the title. Edouard expresses his disdain for Realist fiction's lack of authenticity because it creates a mere representation of life. He begins his theory by explaining, "the novel, of all literary *genres*, is the freest, the most *lawless*..., it is for that very reason, for fear of the very liberty (the artists who are always sighing after liberty are often the most fearful when they get it), that the novel has always clung to reality with such timidity... for all its throwing off of constraints, it is a slave to resemblance. The only progress is to get nearer still to nature. The novel has never known that 'formidable erosion of contours,' as Nietzsche calls it..." (171). Thus, according to Edouard, the novel has yet to realize the way in which art can depict life, not as a literal resemblance but from a place that captures a more universal truth. Edouard asserts further that the novel has the capacity to achieve something deeply human, but that the challenge has often to do with *orgueil*, referred to in the text as a kind of egotism that occurs when authors attempt only to mimic life as in a photograph. He speaks of the solution as illusive and transitory that cannot be captured in detail but, rather, in something more akin to impressions.

The predicament of the above excerpt relates to the question of how an author can express truth without getting caught up in making certain choices, namely focusing on the specificity of events and of detail, a tactic that is shown to be related to the Realist and Naturalist schools. According to Edouard, art must capture generalities while also speaking to more than just resemblances. It must be freed from "a certain sort of accuracy," relating to an attempt at truth telling via the replication of facts, and should rely more on "the reader's imagination" in order to become more "pure" and less forced (67). In this chapter Edouard is often caught up in a paradox; he speaks with exaggeration for he wants to leave out what he considers to be supplementary to the essence of the novel and, yet, wants to include multiple subjects and

themes that are unwieldy in that they undertake too much in the efforts to be visionary. One could easily say that he is an extreme version of Gide, since Gide has been quoted from his own journal to the novel as wanting to open his work to all possibilities, but considered this desire an impossible folly (11, 30). Edouard, like Gide, invents an author whose subject is “la lutte entre ce que lui offre la realite et ce que, lui, pretend en faire,” a quote which reveals Edouard’s difficulty in choosing which portions of reality will be selected and then stylized into art (233).⁵⁶ For Edouard, the book itself should be a study in how to do that and, for Gide, the book serves, on one hand, to delineate events and, on the other, to outline the struggle of the author’s process.

In support of dissociating Gide from Edouard, Karin Nordenhaug Ciholas’ analysis of “Edouard Versus Gide” in the critical text entitled *Gide’s Art of the Fugue* tries to demonstrate Edouard’s function is not to speak for Gide as author.⁵⁷ Ciholas takes up the argument that those critics who believe that Gide uses Edouard as a “mouthpiece” are in the wrong and that “complete identification” of the two is an erroneous assumption (30-1). Ciholas believes that Edouard is neither an ideal for Gide nor a portrait of Gide himself but states, “It is my contention, rather, that Gide, as a novelist, and Edouard, as a character-novelist, stand in direct contrast to each other. Edouard’s profession and the fact that he intends to write a novel on the same subject are the only real bonds between them” (32). Ciholas admits that Edouard claims to shy away from Realism, concluding that he “waits for reality to happen” in order to write about it and, thus, is working in a Realist fashion despite his purported disagreement with the tenets of that school. However, on the first point, one could assert that the bonds between the two writers

⁵⁶ Translation: He invents an author whose subject is the struggle between what reality offers and what he makes of it.

⁵⁷ Ciholas, Karin Nordenhaug. *Gide's art of the fugue: a thematic study of "Les faux-monnayeurs"*. Chapel Hill: U.N.C. Dept. of Romance Languages ;, 1974. Print.

go much further than Ciholas suggests and, on the second point, that Edouard often rejects actual events as worthy for his novel (i.e., Boris' suicide, the actual counterfeit coin, the nature of his relationship with his sister as potentially unbelievable, etc.)

I agree with Ciholas' assertion that Edouard is not meant to represent Gide, or even vice versa that would undercut the entire structure of the novel. However, the assertion that the two are in opposition is too strong and, as a result, misleading. An example Ciholis gives as evidence of this opposition relates to disparate perspectives of author and character-author about the novel as genre. Gide's earliest statement about the novel is quoted in *Gide's Art of the Fugue* :

Le roman doit prouver a present qu'il peut etre autre choses qu'un miroir promene le long du chemin – qu'il peut etre superieur et a priori – c'est a dire deduit, c'est a dire compose, c'est a dire oeuvre d'art (32)

This statement by Gide from 1894 that a novel must prove itself to be other than a mirror carried along on a path, that it must be better than what has come before, and it must be deduced, composed, and a work of art is juxtaposed with Edouard's statement that refers to his journal, where he takes notes for his novel:

C'est le miroir qu'avec moi je promene. Rien de ce qui m'advient ne prend pour moi d'existence reelle, tant que je ne l'y vois pas reflete (32)

The excerpt from Edouard has been formerly translated as, "It (my journal) is my pocket mirror. I cannot feel that anything that happens to me has any real existence until I see it reflected here" (144, AA Knopf, 1947). I have translated this same excerpt referring to his notebook as, "It is the mirror I walk with. Nothing of what happens has any real existence for me as long as I don't see it reflected there." I offer this revised translation as an important component to argue against Ciholis' idea that Gide and Edouard's approaches to the novel are in total opposition. It seems

more that Edouard, via his negatively posed statement, is making a declaration about his own subjectivity, as well as his wavering conception of reality. The reference is not to the mirror itself, but to his written words. The word *reflet* in French means something not precise, a reflection – the return of light which makes an impression. Edouard is not attempting to reflect what he sees into written form but, rather, sees his writing and the deductions he has made “there” (much like Gide, “c’est a dire deduit”) as a way to make events seem more real.

Edouard’s journal serves as a kind of filter for Gide. The multiplicity of point of view in the novel is essential to its subject since both Gide’s novel and Edouard’s novel use *misee en abyme*, a term that Gide himself coined which evokes the idea of an abyss into infinity, as a way of incorporating a layering of perspectives that are dependent upon each other in order to create meaning. Therefore, it would be a misetake to assume that Gide and Edouard are either aligned or opposed. These two authorial approaches are not separate but, in essence, are different layers which work together toward the same objective.

In a work of criticism entitled *The Mirror of the Text* Lucien Dallenbach asserts the relationship of the two novels is a paradox. He explains that the “main organ of reflection,” which is the journal as mirror, “has less the role of integrating an external reality into the novel than of abolishing the opposition between within and without, or rather achieving a kind of oscillation between them” (31). It creates a filter which provides the narrative with “more information by intercepting what passes through its field of vision” (31). In other words, there is the filtering of events through the subjective point of view or individual lenses, true of the multiple characters and narrators, which is the actual subject of the novel. Gide’s main technique is to highlight subjectivity as a motivation for all of his characters in the novel, mostly through the use of interrelationship and how it compromises an individual’s authenticity.

However, unlike Gide, Edouard's subjectivity remains unexamined by him for he is unable to create a living, fully formed narrator and characters and, thus, has no filter for his own novel. As a result, Edouard's art remains in question throughout.

This brings up another interesting point: each time readers can identify important relationships between the two authors, they can also find a reversal or disidentification between the two. Dallenbach outlines several examples of the way the outer narrator criticizes Edouard, one of which relates to a critique on the attempt to reconcile the pure novel with Realism, tying back to how Gide does not delegate to Edouard the "conduct of the narration" (32). Gide and the outer narrator are writing the story and, thus, exhibit that the idea of the novel is not more interesting than the work itself, not what Edouard prescribes. Therefore, Edouard's idealized theory of art and emphasis on the history of the novel over the creation of the novel shows his approach to be a dubious one. This becomes evident when Edouard experiences extreme discomfort in talking about his work to Laura, Bernard, and Sophriniska:

Mme. Sophriniska, who had been invited to tea, was emboldened, with Bernard's and Laura's encouragement, to beg Edouard to tell them about his next novel – that is, if he had no objection. 'None at all; but I can't tell you its story.' And yet he seemed almost to lose his temper when Laura asked him (evidently a tactless question) what the book would be like? 'Nothing!' he exclaimed... Edouard was very sensitive. As soon as he began talking about his work, and especially when other people made him talk of it, he seemed to lose his head. (170)

As shown in the above excerpt, Edouard is more interested in the novel from a theoretical perspective, than the novel itself. After all, he has no story. Shortly afterwards, during the same conversation, Edouard admits that he doesn't even know who his characters are.

Therefore, it seems that the greater divergence between the author Gide and the author Edouard boils down mainly to the fact that the character-author becomes caught up in constructs rather than completing his novel. The narrator explains of Edouard, “If he allowed his mind to follow its bent, it soon tumbled headlong into abstractions, where it was as comfortable as a fish in water. Ideas of exchange, of depreciation, of inflation, etc., gradually invaded his book and usurped the place of the characters” (176-7). Since Edouard is wedded to his theories, they become a vehicle not for his work, but, instead, for self identification. The creation of his “art” becomes an act of narcissism and is, ironically, greatly removed from the kind of purity he proposes.

Edouard’s listeners all argue that the public is bored by reading about intellectuals who theorize themselves. Laura states, “one only manages to make them say absurdities and they give an air of abstraction to everything.” Sophroniska states, “this novelist of yours won’t be able to avoid painting yourself” (173). If Edouard’s novel ever were to be completed, it clearly would not have much of a readership due to a lack of character development and audience awareness. According to Dallenbach, the author of *Les Faux Monnayeurs* takes over from Edouard in that “he writes the work that Edouard plans, discusses, but is careful not to write. The two novels are separated as potential is from action, the two authors as theory is from practice” (33). Since the outer novel is finishing what Edouard cannot, this is the inserting of the smaller into the larger that is the *mise en abyme* form. By accruing the disparities that appear to be “so many complementary aspects of the same work” that *Les Faux Monnayeurs* can present “what normally cannot be seen: the genesis of the book of the same title.” The trick is that it can state the theory it illustrates structurally without becoming a soapbox for Gide, thus finding a balance between theory and practice – its potential is its action and vice versa.

The Objective Novel: Author at a Remove

On November 1, 1922, Gide writes of Edouard in his own journal to *Les Faux Monnayeurs*, “He will never succeed in writing this pure novel. I must be careful to respect in Edouard everything that makes him unable to write his book. He understands a great many things, but he is forever pursuing himself – through everyone and everything. Real devotion is almost impossible for him. He is a dabbler, a failure. A character all the more difficult to establish since I am lending him much of myself” (400). Perhaps the line between Edouard’s ideas and those of Gide relates more to what extent either of them counterfeits. Edouard’s downfall is that he imagines others from a standpoint of self and, by being dogmatic and redundant, is a bluffer as an artist. He cannot reconcile his doubts about reality with his loathing of the indecision that causes those doubts. Gide worked against this in his own writing through the interplay of using Edouard as both an object to critique and using him as the subject, the novel about the novelist. Essentially, Gide plays both sides, bringing dimensions of characters and the interpretation of events to light via interrelationship and shifts in point of view. In other words, he gives precedence to letting the work speak for itself across its adumbrations and appears to abandon putting forth his own point of view in favor of those of the characters.

When Ciholas’ asserts that “The artistic creation depends upon Gide, whereas Edouard depends upon his art,” he does not recognize that Gide’s dependency is more process oriented and Edouard’s is to sublimate art to his whims (32). Gide depends upon the work of art that is his novel, and the novel depends on the subjectivity of Edouard and the interrelationship of the

characters within as a vehicle for the story's evolution. Another interesting lens for phrasing the above statement would be that the artistic creation *makes* or creates Gide, whereas Edouard *makes* or creates his art. In *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* Jung has said the same in relation to Goethe's *Faust*: "It is not Goethe who creates *Faust*, but *Faust* which creates Goethe" (170-1). Jung explains this in terms of how the artistic creation outgrows the artist "as a child does its mother" (170). The great works becomes an expression of something that is "profoundly alive" and speak to some larger generality, what lives within the "soul" of an entire community.⁵⁸ He refers to these works as "symbols" and "primordial images" that "restore the psychic equilibrium of the epoch" (171). Edouard's problem is that he cannot learn to become the instrument of his work, to subordinate himself to it; he tries to interpret it for us, whereas Gide allows any exposure to the form to do that work. Readers are then forced to let the work shape their understanding of things, as the experience of the process of writing itself once did for Gide.

The same dynamic theories that the novel objectifies also serve as subjects. In order to address more thoroughly the nuts and bolts of what has been described above, this section will return to the critique against the approach of the Realist movement. Just as the character-novelist Edouard verbally criticizes Realism, the structure of the actual novel is a manifest reaction against it. The main techniques Gide uses to create a new kind of novel are somewhat

⁵⁸ "The secret of artistic creation and the effectiveness of art is to be found in a return to the state of 'participation mystique' – to that level of experience at which it is man who lives, and not the individual, and at which the weal or woe of the single human being does not count, but only human existence. This is why every great work of art is objective and impersonal, but nonetheless profoundly moves us each and all. And this is also why the personal life of the poet cannot be held essential to his art – but at most a help or hindrance to his creative task...His personal career may be inevitable and interesting, but it does not explain the poet" (Jung, 172).

similar to what Edouard himself proposes when he cites Nietzsche's "formidable erosion of contours" as a goal. One example of this is in the intentional choice of the novel to avoid final and conclusive solutions by placing more focus on the storytelling process than on the outcome of events. This is achieved mainly via the self-reflective nature of the text which is the direct result of the superimposed layering of narratives, letters, and Edouard's journal entries, as well as the inclusion of Gide's own journal entries at the end. As a result, the fictional world seems to take on a life of its own.

One example of this is in the concluding chapter of part two, "The Author Reviews His Characters." This is a chapter in which the unnamed narrator expresses disappointment and surprise over the conduct of Edouard, Bernard, and Olivier, in particular. No events, future or past, are explained or elucidated, but this section's function seems rather to serve primarily as exposition that mirrors Edouard and Gide's journals to their novels and an opportunity to further expose readers to the multiple dimensions of the novel. It is a parody of narrative intrusion and shows the narrator's -- now self-proclaimed "author's" -- subjective voice.

Another interesting aspect of this speaker is that he admits to having no idea what is about to happen or what the underlying motivations of the characters are. He begins with a metaphor about a traveler who rests in the dark atop a hill and "wonders with some anxiety where his tale will take him" (202). He worries that Edouard has committed an imprudence by sending the fragile Boris to the Azais's school; he states, "Edouard has irritated me more than once. Why does he try to persuade himself that he is conspiring for Boris's good?" (202-3). He worries that Edouard will not be able to save Olivier from the superficial Passavant, then resigns himself to the fact that Olivier "is still young and one has the right to hope" (204). He continues about certain characters, saying "it was not I who sought them out; while following Bernard and

Olivier I found them in my path. So much the worse for me; henceforth it is my duty to attend them” (204). While this narrator is able to tell of the inner feelings of many of the characters throughout the text, he is unable to predict the outcomes of events and thus, is only partially omniscient, or not omniscient. By placing an emphasis here on the storytelling role as that of a bystander to events, the text plays with reality and the idea of agency. The characters are given the uncanny ability to act, seemingly of their own volition, without the tyrannical hand of a divine creator. In the layering of acting narrators and self-motivated characters as such, Gide increasingly recedes from view as a result. Therefore the novel puts on the façade of being natural or pure, objectifying itself thus, while becoming, in essence, a novel without a father, both in the seeming detachment of the authors in question and in the way that it breaks away from the structural heritage of its predecessors. The novel, in turn, is a kind of rebellion in itself as it strives toward finding its place amid a new paradigm.

A Culture of Rebellion and Individualism

The novel’s rebellion of form repeats more evidently as a subject, seeking some middle ground between idealism and constraint within family structures and society at large. The critique of the bourgeois is a theme that is not new at all in French literature and, to name at least one instance, can be noted in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* in the way it uncovers the smug contentment and complacent hypocrisy of the upper-middle class. At the beginning of *Les Faux Monnayeurs*, this theme is shown to be tied into questions of legitimacy when Bernard Profitendieu discovers a seventeen year old unsigned love-letter addressed to his mother revealing that his father is not his natural one and, thus, his family name is a lie. In a letter to the

senior Profitendieu, a name which in the meaning ‘to benefit from God’ refers to a usurpation of the highest patriarchal lineage, Bernard writes:

I have become aware that I must cease to regard you as my father. This is an immense relief to me... I have for a long time past been thinking myself an unnatural son; I prefer knowing I am not your son at all... I prefer to receive nothing from you for the future. The idea of owing you anything is intolerable to me and I think I had rather die of hunger than sit at your table again. I sign this letter with that ridiculous name of yours, which I should like to fling in your face, and which I am longing and hoping soon to dishonor (14,15).

In the above passage, Bernard attacks his father for the constraints patrimony imposes and seeks to separate himself from any former bonds to the Profitendieu name. His “hunger” to know himself anew is strongly connected to the severing of familial and social conventions. In regard to his mother he includes, “tell her ...that I bear her no grudge for having made a bastard of me.” He expresses a sense of gratitude for the chance she has given him at achieving a state of naturalness, one that only being fatherless can provide for Bernard believes, “there is no better cure for the fear of taking after one’s father, than not to know who he is” (15,3). The transgression of falsehood seems to lie mainly with the father since the novel critiques many of the paternal lineages to include the Profitendieus as well as the Moliniers and the Vedels, not specifically for having committed infidelities and perverting the course of justice but for having hidden such activities behind a façade of bourgeois respectability.

Bernard’s break from his family, which occurs in the first chapter, is important in that it symbolizes the need to separate oneself from false representations in the search for knowledge, particularly in regard to the self. The narrator explains how the senior Profitendieu recognizes Bernard’s daring nature: “Yes, it is a cruel letter – but there is a wounded vanity, defiance – bravado in it, too. Not one of his other children – his real children – would have been capable ---

anymore than he would have been capable himself – of writing it” (16). Bernard’s audacity in this section to both reject his family name and leave home without money is indicative of his authentic nature as an illegitimate child as well as his immaturity, which, in the positive, shows he has yet to be corrupted or to have become complacent with his family’s wealth and what it represents in society. Bernard is the novel’s representative of the power of potential in action and its ambassador of freedom, which seems to be possible only in regard to the youth.

In the negative, Bernard’s bravado leads him to usurp the property of Edouard, which shows a fine line between the illegal activities of his father and his own deeds, but Bernard’s actions are shown to be relatively harmless due to his motivations. Through a series of coincidences, Bernard finds Edouard’s journal in a valise which he absconds with from a cloakroom. He thinks, “how to make Edouard understand I am not a thief... what proves that I am not a thief is that these papers interest me more than anything else” (75-6). Bernard’s pursuit here is driven more by an impulse for acquiring knowledge and the outer circumstances of his actions are shown to be a kind of child’s play, if anything, when compared to the deceit of the older generation. The sins of the father, in this case, must not necessarily be the sins of the child.

The horticultural metaphor that Olivier’s brother Vincent explains to Passavant is directly related to the struggle of all youths in the novel and particularly to the figure of Bernard and his own development away from the family base. Vincent explains, “The buds which develop naturally are always the terminal buds – that is to say, those that are furthest away from the parent trunk. It is only by pruning or layering that the sap is driven back and so forced to give life to those germs which are nearest the trunk and which would otherwise have lain dormant. And in this manner, the most recalcitrant plants, which if left to themselves, would no

doubt have produced nothing but leaves, are induced to bear fruit” (136-7). Therefore, the Rousseauian “natural child” – one who is good by nature, that is before any corrupting influences intercede—should develop with less difficulty, having greater strength as he thrives at a distance from the parent trunk. Those offspring that are closer and in the fold must be “recalcitrant” and rebel, in a sense, via some kind of obstruction that will prevent them from remaining as otherwise dormant buds. Bernard has an optimum advantage according to this prescription for he is both illegitimate and a rebel. However, his rebellion is not a static single-toned one. Like the bud that blooms to show different stages of the same plant, so too does Bernard.

Bernard’s motivations run in a completely different direction in the second section of the novel. Upon discovering Edouard’s journal and the story therein regarding Laura’s plight of being married to Felix Douvier and, at the same time, being pregnant with the illegitimate child of Vincent, Bernard feels compelled to get involved and test his metal. While in Saas –Fee he writes to Olivier about her, “When one is with her, one feels forced, as it were, to think nobly. When I am with her there are heaps of things I don’t feel inclined to scoff at anymore and which seem to me now very serious” (157). His love for the pregnant Laura causes him to question his former notions about liberty. Along these lines Bernard tells Laura, “I have already changed a great deal; that is, my mind’s landscape is not at all what it was the day I left home: since then I have met you. As soon as I did that I stopped putting my freedom first. Perhaps you haven’t realized that I am at your service?” (182). His desires shift from irresponsible rebellion to devotion for he finds the former to have been a limited approach. Laura’s unwitting influence acts on him like a kind of law, the conventions of which he appears to embrace idealistically in the hopes of helping the downtrodden and loving her fatherless child, despite it not being his

own. But when he writes earlier, “the difficulty in life is to take the same thing seriously for a long time,” one can see that there is something more going on here than meets the eye. Bernard is awakening to what Gide refers to as the freedom of change.

Of course, there is an element of satire in regard to his utterly Romantic devotion to the much older and more seasoned Laura who recognizes the impetuosity of his youth, yet she lauds him for his naturalness, stating, “I only care for you as you are naturally. Leave repentance for me. It is not for you Bernard” (185). Laura wants to make sure Bernard’s transformation of wanting to reconcile with his adoptive father is not merely because he wants to win her “esteem.” It is probable she imagines that he perceives something about his own value in relation to her and, thus, she is insisting he should make his own choices, free of guilt and obligation, with no concern for what others might think or require of him. However, his newly acquired noble feelings have an almost transcendental power to affect the way he views the world and the people around him. Through the spontaneous confession of his heart to Laura, Bernard is gaining the ability to see through the appearance of things like conventions, titles, institutions and, thus, is able to understand something about actual values.

He contemplates the triviality of blood ties when compared to fidelity, which has infinitely greater value. Acknowledging the nature of the senior Profitendieu’s commitment to him, he is able to recognize that, “my supposed father who stood in my father’s place, never said or did anything that could let it be suspected I was not his real son..he showed a kind of predilection for me, which I felt perfectly, so that my ingratitude towards him was all the more abominable” (184). The pursuit for Bernard remains to discover something about his true identity, yet in this section, it is with an extended focus -- from recognizing the falsehood of what is seemingly apparent in an external view, to integrating an awareness about the deception

of the self and hidden values. He comes to realize that, in the case of his relationship to Profitendieu, there is no necessary correlation between being a biological father and the fulfillment of that role, making such equivalencies a pure fiction.

Along these same lines, in regard to the State Bernard proclaims:

I had never thought about it before. 'The State is nothing but a convention'...What a fine thing convention would be that rested on the bona fides of every individual! ...if only there were nothing but honest folk. Why, if anyone were to ask me to-day what virtue I considered the finest, I should answer without hesitation – honesty. Oh Laura! I should like all my life long, at the very smallest shock, to ring true, with a pure, authentic sound. Nearly all the people I have known ring false. To be worth exactly what one seems to be worth ...and one is so much occupied with seeming, that one ends up by not knowing what one really is (185).

Maybe too there is no necessary correlation between the conventions of the State and truth since he sees it to represent a symbolic coinage based on an illusory system of exchange. But what if its individuals were “bona fide” and carried some higher promise? There is an emphasis here on the ethics of the individual as related to group interests. Bernard is able to recognize that all are the victims of their own perceptions and, thus, their self-deceptions and that, perhaps, since the State is only conventionally formulated, as is the self, maybe such structures would be different if made up of authentic individuals. It seems idealistic, but is clearly an attempt at some greater sense of clarity amid the chaos of a distressing reality that is puzzling and uncertain, symbolized by the concept of an otherwise empty repository.

Bernard refers to himself using the metaphor of the counterfeit coin to encompass the novel's entire theme of questioning truth and exchange, and equivalents of value. Jean-Joseph Goux in his critical text *The Coiners of Language* addresses this discussion by touching on the important differences between Edouard's and Bernard's two approaches to concepts of value,

stating, “behind the rationalist blather and the alienation of conceptual thought, there is the truth of the heart” (51). This is significant, for through the use of this metaphor of the coin “ringing true,” Bernard is able to point readers’ attention to something beyond the static ideas and mere symbols of an empty repository as used by Edouard to something like a stockpile in a reserve, the legitimacy of which will prevail against the counterfeit forms on Bernard’s path when elucidated on this personal level.

In an article in *The Montreal Review* entitled *Four Reflections on ‘The Counterfeiter’s’* Robert Wexellblatt expresses his disappointment at the sudden change in Bernard’s perspective, which he views as seeming to undermine the novel’s theme of the authenticity of the individual via a break from the dictates of society and the father. Wexellblatt writes, “Bernard has bought his ticket to the middle class-or back into it. We are assured that Monsieur Profitendieu loves his adopted son and that Bernard has been terribly unjust to him, and so it is emotionally fitting that the novel’s end should reverse its beginning as Bernard returns to his father. And yet it feels disappointing. After all, Gide’s point with Bernard’s illegitimacy, one would have thought, was that he should *not* return to the father, that he should find the rule of his future life precisely in himself and not in his father, that like those deep-water creatures Vincent describes, he should live by his own lights” (2). However, I disagree with this statement.

Firstly, it would be mere cliché if Bernard’s return was a form of simply changing from taking an anarchist’s stance to that of a conformist. Moreover, Bernard *is* “living by his own lights” in making the choices that he does. I am in favor of the idea that substitution of one thing for another is not at the heart of the theoretical argument posed in the novel and initially revealed in the chapter *Bernard and Laura*, where this change takes place. In taking this stance, it becomes apparent that Bernard must somehow resolve these contradictions of opposites to find

some intrinsic value in his situation and in his experience rather than acting out a simple rebellion based on replacements of one empty sign for another – money or no money, father or no father. Bernard is able to probe into the deeper questions that allow for making the conclusion that he is not who he thought he was and, equally important, he is, as a result, able to bring himself to a place of pre-conditioning. Therefore, what is happening for him has nothing to do with simply turning in another direction, or moreover turning back, it has to do with adopting an entirely new understanding of what the values he has been living by really mean at the core and how to move beyond appearances.

System of Exchange: A Monetary Metaphor

In order to fully reveal the novel's exploration of the theme of authenticity, it is necessary to return to the chapter in the novel on Edouard's theory, which comes just before the chapter when Bernard confesses his love to Laura. Firstly, the juxtaposition of these chapters sets up a clear distinction between the value systems of Edouard and Bernard and how they operate. Edouard's emphasis is on the abstract or the absence of the real and reliable, such as the novel of ideas and the false coin, while Bernard's true feelings for Laura point to the transparency of things, including the language of the heart for which he comes to find an actual reserve of meaning. Speaking of language, contrary to Bernard, language remains elusive for Edouard, who the narrator tells readers, "felt humiliated by Bernard. He expressed himself too well..." (201). In fact, Edouard struggles throughout with all forms of expression -- personal or artistic, which is evident when he writes in his journal, "whoever really loves abandons all sincerity" (63). He believes such expression to be a kind of bending to the other or a false belief in the fashioning of another to oneself. Looking back at the larger themes, token money is then shown to represent

false language, and words and the expression of feelings are shown to elucidate something about appearances and personal value.

How Edouard reacts to the counterfeit coin presented by Bernard elucidates this distinction further. Firstly, Edouard asks his listeners to “imagine” a false ten-franc gold piece and to think about its value when Bernard then produces a real counterfeit coin, providing an actual object, not just an idea. “Just hear how true it rings. Almost the same sound as the real one,” says Bernard (177). Bernard emphasizes the perception of the coin over what they all now know about it. He tells Edouard not to rub on it so the gold will remain – “one can almost see through it as it is” (177). In this conversation Bernard looks at the question of the relationship of “being” to “seeming.” Value can be based on appearances and thus on seeming; it can also be related to some interior state, like that of the “being” self. But Edouard doesn’t believe in the being self, as such. He writes, “How vexing this question of sincerity is! If it is myself that I consider, I cease to understand its meaning” (64). When he is alone he feels that he ceases to exist and when with others, he professes to live through them, “by procuration, so to speak, and by espousals” (64). Edouard has arrived at a place where no significations can be wholly applied and all values are arbitrary.

In contrast, Bernard is able in the following chapter to move from the kind of suspicion that Edouard experiences to a state of trust, due to the fact that he embraces a superior law, his love for Laura, which allows equivalencies to change and show their true nature. For Bernard this dynamic permits reconciliation between what he feels and thinks. As explained in the theoretical analysis of Goux, through Bernard’s love he is able to “reconcile himself in a single movement with language, the father, the proper name, the State, all of which are directly and continuously subsumed in a metaphor of authenticity” (57-8). Goux describes this “movement”

as a single metaphorical axis. Bernard comes to his inner resolution through letting go of his own abstract ideas about a “supreme good” that must be followed via acts of rebellion and, instead, acknowledges a closer signifying relationship between his desires and a higher law that relates to his authentic being.

Edouard and Bernard represent a crisis of faith and an embracing of faith. Edouard expresses the former when he exclaims, “in the domain of feeling, what is real is indistinguishable from what is imaginary” (65). To apply this back to Goux’s thesis, Edouard and Bernard represent conceptual language and feeling language, in that order. Edouard will not experience a reconciliation between opposing factors due to the alienation that ensues from placing all value on things as they exist from within the system of exchange. However for Bernard, who tells Laura, “I was playing the part of a dreadful person and making desperate efforts to resemble him. It was you, Laura, who taught me to know myself; so different from what I thought I was,” all that he had initially considered phony becomes a source of potential legitimacy (182). He is able to reintegrate himself through the dissolution of abstractions in favor of the recognition of his feelings and, moreover, in the admission of his love, even if it will remain a platonic one since Laura does not reciprocate his feelings. Bernard does not judge himself based on Laura’s response or see himself through the lens of what he imagines her judgment of him might be, but rather, looks to his feelings and the expression of them as having intrinsic value. He comes to practice a kind of self-acceptance as a being who is whole and who is innately good.

To explain the monetary metaphor further, from an intersubjective perspective, value often becomes tied to appearances – in other words, what others perceive the value of something or someone to be as it relates to their own needs and wants. Goux elucidates this, stating that

“Gide presents characters whose being is entirely mediated by the system of exchange value” (55). When people put on a façade of being a currency of great value they end up as estranged from their true worth. In this sense, value does not coincide with the inner being but rather with a “token”, a false coin that only has an operative value in an illusory system of arbitrary values based on buying and selling in order to maintain the appearance of having some worth. According to Goux, the implications of this are huge: Gide understands that when one identifies himself with monetary exchange, this becomes a false state of objectivity. General equivalencies develop into a norm of values. Yet Bernard finds a perspective beyond that of general equivalents. This debunks Wexellblatt’s statement about Bernard’s return to the life of the bourgeois as hollow is an argument which cannot be accurate seeing that Bernard’s viewpoint is no longer incongruent to his desire, allowing him to maintain a state of naturalness-- his gold standard, as economists call it. Bernard’s duty is to himself and his choices are no longer the result of external impositions. Edouard, on the other hand, is a slave to convention when related to personal relations, and yet, lacks any discipline or sense of duty to the conventions that would assist him in writing his novel. He seeks freedom in the wrong place.

In regard to interrelationship, Edouard speaks of the total dissolution of one’s true nature when the feelings of the heart are activated. He calls this the “decrystallization” of love, a reversal of Stendhal’s treatise on passion-love, a term that he called “crystallization.” Grounded in the Romantic era, it is a condition by which a suitor attaches every illusory perfection possible on to a lover and identification of the ego with the beloved is made. Edouard recognizes the problematic nature of this kind of passion-love in that a misunderstanding of the other and the other’s feelings occurs, and yet, he cannot resolve the dilemma inherent in it, “to take on the shape of the person he is in love with,” in any other way than rejecting these dynamics all

together. Speaking of Laura's possible return to her husband Douviers, Edouard writes, "Douvier is worth more than she thinks" (66). He believes she will, in the end, discover more virtue in him thanks to her having fewer illusions of love. Edouard has no other remedy for such abstractions whereby a "lover cannot show himself as he really is – and moreover he does not see the beloved – but instead (only) an ideal who he decks out." For him there is no alternative to this personal deception and falsehood, or to the lack of correspondence between symbols and guarantees. Once the delusion is uncovered, affectionate interrelationships cannot bring any lasting happiness.

The monetary metaphor also relates to how Gide's novel is able to address the issue of the depersonalization of the subject. In the case of Edouard's novel this dynamic translates into the disappearance of character, for his own novel never comes to have any but, rather, strives to encompass everything, and from a literary perspective the outer novel as a whole, according to Goux, becomes a record of "the usurpation of bourgeois individuality" by the "political-economization of social relations" (55). Hence, individuals come to personify their motives in order to become a vessel for something larger -- the collective pattern. The novel calls this pattern in to question as being is degraded to the false value of seeming. The structure that is society comes to represent a collapse where all meaning has become convention in a yielding of individual value to that of the collective.

Sincerity and Personal Authenticity

Gide talked both about serving general interests by being particular and of finding oneself by giving up oneself. Only integrity, as displayed by Bernard, can counteract the counterfeit objectivity of seeing oneself as divided among the fulfillment of varying pretentious roles and

assumptions. On the contrary, Bernard is the author and master of himself for he says, “I can only give the whole of myself” (187). There is something mystical too in Bernard’s beliefs about authorship, which is evident in his statement to Laura that a good novel gets itself written almost naively and that “one must believe in one’s own story” (187). These statements speak of the belief in authorial sincerity and in the indivisible self. Bernard even suggests to Olivier that he could help Edouard finish his story, but the belief systems of the two are too polarized.

Though he may sometimes be considered immature, or at fault, by other characters in the text, as well as by critics like Wexellblatt, his faith in honesty, in believing in “one’s *own* story” means he has faith in the connection of words to things, “restoring belief in the truth of representation” and in a repository of a language that is untainted (57). This gives power back to the individual against the intrusions of the social order and also provides a way of validating oneself and one’s own voice that goes beyond unlimited individualism to one that requires some social responsibilities, not to be confused with social demands.

In the hopes of gaining a sense of individualism, reaction against inherited and social ties is the imperative that drives the youths of the novel away from the family fold, a fact which seems at first glance to provide the text with some optimism in regard to the next generation. Yet, personal development that is not natural, or that is not coming from the interior of the characters, is shown to be harmful. Speaking of the youths, the narrator observes during their first meeting together at school, “every one of them, as soon as he was in company with the others, lost his naturalness and began to act a part” (5). The dynamics of the collective expectations that often result from interrelationship are shown here to have a negative impact early on as these schoolboys mimic the social order. Unlike Bernard, his friend Olivier Molinier

falls victim to false values for he is not able to reconcile his attempt at independence with his naiveté born from the need to imitate others, in particular, his new boss Robert Passavant.

It is important to note how Olivier is similar to Edouard in the way he foregoes the truth of his feelings for fear of how others perceive them. The two are alike in how each lives in constant fear of being rejected by others and, thus, comes to see himself through the imagined eyes of others. Early in the novel, when Olivier meets Edouard at the station, the narrator says of them, “we should have nothing of all that happened later if only Edouard’s and Olivier’s joy at meeting had been more demonstrative; but they both had a singular incapacity for gauging their credit in other people’s hearts and minds; this now paralysed them; so that each, believing his emotion to be unshared, absorbed in his own joy, and half ashamed at finding it so great, was completely preoccupied by trying to hide its intensity from the other” (69). Edouard had reserved the position of his personal secretary for Olivier, yet due to the inability of either of them to express their affection and respect for each other openly, Bernard comes to fill the secretarial role to Edouard, leaving Olivier to work as editor for the literary journal *Vanguard* founded by Passavant. The resulting problem for Olivier in regard to this arrangement is that, despite his move to become independent outside the Molinier home, his greatest influence is now a man whom Lady Griffith describes as having “all the qualities of a man of letters – vain, hypocritical, fickle, selfish....” for he steals all of his ideas from others (42). Unfortunately, Olivier will take the easy road and learn to follow suit.

The scene when Bernard and Olivier meet again for the first time since their conversation when Bernard explains he has just left home for good is a particularly poignant one, because the two have come to value entirely new things over the course of the summer. The occasion is the day of their baccalaureate examinations. After the morning tests, they

analyze amongst themselves a quatrain about a “Parnassian butterfly” from a poem by La Fontaine. Olivier sees this as an opportunity to impress Bernard with his newly acquired knowledge, and yet, he takes the entirely wrong approach, the revelation of which exposes his false sincerity and leads to a loss of his sense of the reality of things and then to his personal, yet necessary, crisis of identity.

Olivier lifts a quote from Passavant, who himself had lifted it from Paul-Ambroise Valery, something that Bernard recognizes immediately for “Olivier’s voice did not seem at home” in the words (243). Olivier’s pilfered observation is that, “the man who goes deep, gets stuck, the man who gets stuck, gets sunk – up to his eyes and over them; that the truth is the appearance of things, that their secret is their form and that what is deepest in man is his skin” (243). Bernard finds such “fine sentiments” when put to words to be absent of sincerity. He refutes Olivier’s statement and defends La Fontaine against Olivier’s false assertion that speaks from a platform of “French wit” as the “justification of... superficial minds,” reminiscent of the salon acting as a judge of an individual’s value within society (245). Bernard believes La Fontaine to have been animated by a spirit of “investigation.... of devotedness, of patient thoroughness... the real spirit of France,” emphasizing free enquiry over passive acceptance of social moors (243). Bernard, with his social consciousness, sees La Fontaine as embodying a greater France as he questions the mundane frivolities passed on from Passavant to Olivier.

Some background on both the verse and the original intent of the comment by Paul-Ambroise Valery will help to clarify the dynamics of this discussion between the two youths. La Fontaine’s poem refers thematically to the lightness of the poet himself, like a bee who moves from flower to flower, as he changes his style during his career. This image is also meant to be indicative of the fickleness of man as he changes over time. The critique by Valery then refers

to poetry as an art that allows the mind of the poet to triumph over the problem of form. What is troublesome in Olivier's statement is the mimicked assumption by Passavant that Valery's critique and the poem itself seem to laud superficiality. When Bernard speaks of La Fontaine's later regret and apology for the "lightness" he proposed having, he is referring to La Fontaine's change late in life after a difficult illness to embracing religion and to admitting some weakness in his own character. It is difficult to know at this point in one's reading what exactly Bernard supports from a political, as well as a religious perspective, but what is made plainly clear from his reaction to Olivier is that the theme of *Les Faux Monnayeurs*, the outer novel, is continually layered into the statements of the characters and, in this case, shows the continuing presence of the often unconstructive impact of modern society as corruptive to the individual. This underlines the assertion that truth cannot be taken for granted as absolute, just as appearances are often falsely taken as reality.

This theme is evident also through the narrator's explanation of Olivier's thoughts and intentions in this scene. All that he says and thinks at this point is merely to win the appreciation and respect of his friend, yet Olivier himself has embraced a counterfeit reality based on the appearance that Passavant is a man who should be respected and thus taken seriously, which in turn seemed to validate him. Readers are told that, "Olivier had not particularly meant what he had just said before. He had yielded to his desire to be brilliant... his great weakness lay in the fact that he was in much more need of Bernard's affection than Bernard of his. His meeting with Bernard would have seemed less sad if he had looked forward to it with less joy" (245-6). Olivier's false sincerity born from the expectation of receiving some further validation from Bernard is clearly a form of self sabotage, and yet, Bernard seems to have no such requirement of his friend. His only moment of constraint is when he interrogates his own motives. Unlike

Olivier, Bernard is maturing. He is discovering himself, and is learning to take responsibility for both his thoughts and his actions as he casts off preconceptions about the world and his place in it while denying any form of privilege that would connect him to those for whom he has little respect, Olivier now included.

One example of this is Bernard's rejection of the opportunity offered by Olivier to publish an article in the *Vanguard* "no matter what" (251). Olivier had assumed that the two friends would make their literary debut together in the journal's first issue, but without Bernard, the publication is devoid of meaning for him. Clearly, for Olivier, the whole endeavor was initiated out of vanity and the writing itself is unimportant compared to seeing his and his friend's name printed there. This causes Bernard to question his desire to write, when he states, "one can express oneself better by acts than by words" (252). He worries that because he can "turn sentences easily" he might take things a "bit too easy" (251). His struggle is to find a responsible way to use his new found freedom and a worthy discipline in which to apply it. Suddenly the privilege to write just any *bon mot* and receive recognition for it seems empty to Olivier as well. Yet, in contrast to Bernard whose fervor in speaking about Dmitri Karamozov's fictional mention of suicide as a fanciful thought that comes when one is bursting with the joy of life, Olivier will misinterpret his friend's words as literal and actually attempt suicide after realizing his love for Edouard and, in a state of depression, fearing the subsequent inevitable descent from his newfound place of joy. This shows his lack of self-esteem based on reliance on others and his damaged sense of self. Unlike the changes in Bernard that are shown to be largely positive, Olivier is transformed negatively due to his naïveté and false sincerity, which almost cost him his life.

Competition and Arrested Development

All of the youth in the novel are in the position of seeking an escape from the dictates of their families and the establishment that came before them, but the outcome is a gloomy one. As they search for a new ideal, all but Bernard find no real freedom due to their misunderstanding about what exactly that entails and their lack of any sense of responsibility - on a deeper level, responsibility always relates back to the search for the authentic self and how to apply it.

Wexelblatt explains that, "What is wrong with most of the characters... is that they don't change at all, that they adhere to attitudes that limit and pervert their freedom" (2). They come to adopt their own attitudes of resignation that seem little better than what they are escaping from.

Olivier's falling prey to the elitist Passavant is a perfect example of many of the youths' failed attempts at glory. Passavant is a man who lives by his title alone and uses it to finance a review that is unoriginal in that it is developed from what he calls his "secret jewels," which are actually just the stolen ideas of others. Olivier will lose his sense of himself as a result of pursuing freedom too uniformly and, thus, too easily. Equally Georges, Olivier's brother, will suffer the same fate as the result of stealing and passing counterfeit coins, all in an attempt to escape parental control without realizing any deeper personal change. Due to his desire to impress his friends and defy his parents, he will be forced to return home from boarding school and, thus, will end up back where he started, in a place of arrested development.

In the same chapter where Bernard and Olivier meet for their exams, there is a break in the scene to when the young Georges Molinier passes his first counterfeit coin. Leon Gherindisol, cousin of the mastermind of this operation Strouvillhou, remembers Strouvillhou's earlier words about their objectives: "The best thing would be to form an association to which no one should be admitted who didn't furnish pledges. When (their) parents understand they are

in our hands, they'll pay a high price for our silence" (248). Strouvilhou explains to his initiates that the pledges will, "create ties of reciprocity between citizens; by doing so societies are solidly established" (249). As a result of this scene and its juxtaposition to the interaction between Olivier and Bernard, a question becomes apparent. What happens when the characters, as individuals and as participants in a group, choose to act in a way that compromises society rather than serving it? In the case of Georges and his band, their childish and rebellious games imprison them via a commitment that is shown to have a far reaching negative impact as they fall prey to Strouvilhou's misanthropic scheme against society at large.

This kind of social critique touches all of the characters as they struggle between the opposing poles of idealism and constraint. To name a few, Rachel's virtuous self-sacrificing nature compels her to continue serving her family despite being treated poorly, Armand -- who doesn't want to fulfill the role of pastor like his father -- leaves home and goes to work for Passavant only to hate himself further, Sarah recklessly fights against her puritan roots only to end up drunk on Passavant's lap and labeled as loose and immoral, and finally Boris is unable to escape from his tormented psyche and - seeing no other option - walks knowingly into a trap, thus, choosing death. Circumstances seem to conspire against all of these characters, the message here being that change cannot be enacted from the outside, or realized when incorporating the dictates of the world at large. The forces of society and established convention are too great. Clearly change must come from the inside in order to survive, and yet, the counterfeit attitudes of characters like the emotionally bitter Lillian, the arrogant Passavant, the prejudicial father Molinier, and the moralizing Vedel and Azais continue.

Lillian is a perfect example of the kinds of stagnant attitudes that lend a melancholy tone to the novel. The premise of survival of the fittest is critiqued throughout in that the text seems

to question the dynamics of the individual in society and the choices individuals make in order to thrive at all costs. Lillian's life boat story is a metaphor for the individual's need to endure regardless of the circumstances or what may be required in order to do so. In an attempt to make Vincent understand that the pregnant Laura and her subsequent needs will strip him of his independence and opportunity for success if he doesn't cut her off, she tells him about her experience: "I was on the Bourgogne...on the day of the wreck. I had noticed a little girl in the (rescue) boat...; and when I saw the boat overturn I had made up my mind that it was her I would save. She was with her mother, but the poor woman was a bad swimmer. I jumped straight in..." (57). Lillian explains how she saves the girl by bringing her safely back into the boat, now filled with forty people. "But that's not why I'm telling you the story," she continues. "Two sailors, one armed with a hatchet and another with a kitchen chopper... were hacking off the fingers and hands of the swimmers who were trying to get in..." She remembers one of the sailors telling her, "If another single one gets in we shall be bloody well done for" (57). Her experience is macabre, yet she embraces it, implying that this act by the sailors was something that "had to be done" and that hurting others in order to get ahead is simply the way of the world. This conclusion broke something inside of her, "delicate feelings" that were hacked off in a kind of dismemberment, similar to that of the victims she describes; the sinking of the Bourgogne comes to represent for her the intrusive presence of others as they have tried to enter into her heart and destroy her.

Lillian's story questions assumptions about what it means to be better equipped for surviving, and much like the theories of Strouvilhou, shows that the only way to get ahead is by dominating over the weak. Yet this approach is in itself feeble because the need to dominate objectifies others, revealing personal flaws. In the case of Lillian, she makes a conscious choice

to abandon any sentimentality that may prevent her from getting ahead. She believes any alternative would imply mediocrity. For her life is about competition, a victory over others in order to become a conqueror over one's emotions in any given situation or relationship. An extreme approach, absent of humanity, Lillian's example entirely obliterates any practical approach to how individuals in a society may work together. Without the tension that exists between these two poles, she has no depth and only evil remains. She will come to instruct her protégé Vincent to imprison himself via this same philosophy, a way of life that will lead to her own ruin when Vincent eventually decides to do away with her in order to ensure his own survival while they are travelling together at sea. There is no satirical feel to this retribution on Vincent's part, for Vincent dies from the novel too as he disappears, moving further away from his own lights.

Laura comes up against the same theme of survival since she only just endures the negative impact of her affair with Vincent. She is the other woman in Vincent's life and, on the reverse end of the spectrum from Lillian for the most part. Laura's depth of sensitivity and consideration for others makes her a source of inspiration for Bernard and Edouard. However, she possesses an overabundance of jaded realism as well for she believes that her fondest desires have no basis in the reality of the world in which she lives. Everything she has come to wish for and believe could be possible is taken from her, such as her fiery affair with Vincent and her unrequited love for Edouard. She, thus, reaches the conclusion her future holds no promise. She tells Bernard, "Do you know what my mistake was? To think there was nothing more for me" (186-7). In essence, she has lost faith in her future. She chooses to return to her husband Douvier, whom she does not love, and thus accepts a substitute for a greater happiness.

Though Laura does not resign herself to evil and vice, as does Lillian, she does resign herself to a feeling of meaninglessness, believing herself to be of as little worth as her meager dowry.

Women and the Social Facade

It would seem that for Gide women are good in so far as they make good wives and mothers, and yet this goodness is always presented negatively, as willful submissiveness. In his article *Four Reflections on 'The Counterfeiters'*, Wexellblatt argues that Gide, “portrays women who are vastly superior to their fathers and husbands, but whose goodness is expressed in covering up for unworthy men. This is true of Pauline Molinier, Rachel Vedel, and Laura Douviers, the ‘good women’ of *The Counterfeiters*. There is nothing remotely maternal about Lillian Griffiths.... and so she is condemned. Indeed, whenever a female character acts outside the confines of social norms she is either condemned or quickly punished.” (2). It is true that all of these women mentioned are, in a sense, victims to the men who betray them or who do not fulfill their needs – they come, in some fatalistic way, to comply with the “law of the jungle,” seeming to imply that they are the weaker ones in a male world. However, these women are placed in such a way around their male counterparts as to help provide a larger critique of both the dynamics of intimate relationships and of the society they inhabit.

In this way, women in the novel function similarly to the youths. Rebellion and escape are either proven to be futile or not an option within this value system. The basic attitudes toward life that the female characters come to observe are indicative of the novel’s overall theme related to the struggle between desire for an ideal or the resignation to a disappointing reality. It seems there is no real difference between the fate of the female characters and that of any of the other grouped characters, including fathers, the aged, and the youth in terms of the

larger influence that the dictates of society makes on them. Are the youths Olivier, Armand, and Boris any less the victim at the hands of their dictatorial elders for being male? A similar question could apply to fathers and husbands like La Perouse, Profitendieu, and Douviers. Monsieur La Perouse battles with the paranoia he feels stemming from his wife's constant nit-picking and insults, even though at the core they may not be entirely unfounded. Of the middle-aged generation males, both Profitendieu and Douviers must intentionally forget the extramarital affairs of their wives and take on their children who have been conceived from other men. Of course such a decision is tied up with the need to keep up appearances and, thus covering over what might be damaging to the family's social façade, a cover that the women will mimic. Just as the critique of paternity separates the fatherly role from the biological act it spills over into a critique of women's condition as the noble keepers of the social facade. Consequently, perhaps the assumption that the women in the text are considered superior or innately good for being submissive, and bad for not, is a forced one and there is again a danger in the relationship between the narrators and the author that critics will confuse the thoughts of the narrators with the overall intent of the text.

The greater argument seems to relate back not to the more subtle idea throughout of weak links, but to false chains. Are women meant to be a weak link, or are they part and parcel of a larger chain that is problematic, and thus pawns to society's counterfeit belief systems? The novel itself seems, in fact, to sympathize with the plight of women, a factor which is tied up in the critique of the father and of religion, and that of the institution of marriage. Marriage as an institution is shown to be a means of attaining property and representative of inheritance. Women's roles as mothers and wives are reliant on this world view that superficially validates their existence. Robert K. Martin, in his article entitled "Authority, Paternity and Currency in

Andre Gide's *Les Faux Monnayeurs* writes, "the system of financial exchange is crucial to sexual politics, for it is an exchange of women, *between* men...since all fatherhood is putative, like all money, the pressures placed on women must be sufficient to preserve the system's fictionality as truth" (11,14). Family structures and marriage, as well as paternity in the text are all critiqued as institutions based on an implied deference and order. Therefore, the struggle that the female characters experience has more to do with a faulty social system than any attempt on Gide's part to enforce their condition. Clearly the text that shows any prior assumptions about marriage as a dependable foundation, either in regard to fidelity and familial harmony or as a source of emotional stability are false.

Though the text itself is critical of the dynamics women face, Edouard is only sometimes cognizant of their situation. When he pays a visit to his sister's husband Oscar Molinier, the brother-in-law makes a mockery of himself by blaming his wife for his own lack of authority. "When we are young," Molinier tells Edouard, "our one wish is to have chaste wives, without a thought of how much their virtue is going to cost us" (211). Oscar explains that, due to his personal appetites, which imply his lust for women, he has lost control in the household in an effort to appease his wife. He feels taken advantage of in his attempts at procuring Pauline's forgiveness because she is a threat to his authority. His faulty criticisms of his wife Pauline do not slip by Edouard, however, who finds his comments appalling. "It was clear under the apparent incoherence of his talk – his desire to make the responsibility of his own shortcomings fall upon his wife's virtue. Creatures as disjointed as this puppet, I said to myself, need every scrap of their egoism to bind together the disconnected elements of which they are formed. A moment's self-forgetfulness, and they would fall to pieces... I merely felt disgust for him.... I could only imagine him ridiculous." (212-3). Molinier comes across here as

a trivial man who mimics the role of both father and husband, being hardly present, and even seems ridiculous as a lover of a kept woman for his divulgements to Edouard are nothing but a show. His talk of respectability and the importance of heredity are a sham and Edouard recognizes this, though he does allow that Oscar Molinier could be “put up with” as a father and a retired bourgeois, even if not as a lover.

A subsequent chapter when Edouard meets privately with Pauline clarifies the role that religious values play in her general acquiescence to Oscar despite his disappointing behavior.

“But one becomes resigned, slowly. And yet one didn’t ask so much of life. One learns to ask less...less and less.” The she added softly: “And of oneself, more and more.”

“With ideas of that kind, one is almost a Christian,” said I, smiling in my turn.

“I sometimes think so too. But having them isn’t enough to make one a Christian.”

“Any more than being a Christian is enough to make one have them.”

From a psychological perspective, just as the children in the novel construct a persona to help them cope with family life, school, and facing the world, so do the women construct a persona for coping, one not unlike the personal sublimation that occurs from adopting certain religious values. The key to understanding the dynamics described in the above dialogue is evident in the statement, “one didn’t ask so much of life” to begin with. The message seems to be that as women seek to be legitimated via the institution of marriage, they will continue to be forced into a state of resignation. The requirement to become a mother and wife and to be linked to a man in order to have any worth is based entirely on a false judgment about the overall value of the female self, one that becomes a personal judgment even though it is dictated by society. In other words, it is a double-edged sword because this requirement then relates back to a woman’s sense of what she deserves or not and these judgments become a lens for the way a woman sees

herself in the world. This act of self-rejection and the limiting of one's authentic desires and needs as a person, not only as a woman, seems to apply to the female characters almost across the board.

Though Edouard recognizes the counterfeit nature of all that Oscar pretends to be, he cannot completely sympathize with women, namely Laura or his sister Pauline, because of his failure along with many others to see truth. However, in an earlier chapter when Edouard is again theorizing about his novel, he imagines the impact his writings could potentially make on future generations. He writes, "an insight, composed of sympathy, which would enable us to be in advance of the seasons—is this denied us? What are the problems which will exercise the mind of to-morrow? It is for them that I desire to write. To provide food for the curiosities still unformed, to satisfy requirements not yet defined..." (88). This passage touches on how the outer novel looks at what is "in advance of the seasons," perhaps with the aspiration that issues shown within the text around gender and sexual orientation will one day have different requirements and, thus, come ever closer to the fore of social interest and understanding. Yet Edouard's writings, the inner novel in progress, lack the feeling required for achieving such an insight. In the manner of Edouard throughout, he undercuts this astute observation by including an addendum: "How depressingly, tiresomely and ridiculously sensible everything I have hitherto written seems to be to-day!" (88).

The future moment that Edouard ponders is far away for Pauline, however, for she will be forced to abandon not only her hopes for marital bliss but some aspects of her role as a mother. She will come to leave her son Olivier in the care of Edouard. In this way, Oscar Molinier's paternal authority is challenged again. In Edouard's total care Pauline knows that Oscar will receive as much nurturing as she herself could give while being free of his father's

influence. This also includes being free of Passavant's influence since working for him was agreed upon by his father. There is the implication that Pauline is aware of the deeper affection her son and her brother have for each other as well as the positive effect Olivier will make on Edouard as a source of inspiration for his work. She tells Edouard, "I prefer granting with a good grace what I know I shan't be able to prevent" (296). Despite the fact that Edouard's account of this interaction does not reveal Pauline's deeper motivation, one can surmise from her dialogue that she wishes for both her son and her brother to have a greater opportunity to know themselves and live authentically than she has had.

It is ironic that when Pauline expresses her frustration about being in an "eternally... false situation," Edouard misinterprets her reaction as jealousy. He observes, "it was as though by granting me at first what cost her more, she had exhausted her whole stock of benignity and suddenly found herself with none left." (297). It is clearly difficult for her to give away her son, but having no faith in family and no understanding of Pauline's further loss of the sense of herself by turning over her son to him, Edouard becomes petty, lost in the sea of his own subconscious guilt over the true nature of his affection for Olivier. He sees Olivier as in need of him, and so is sensitive to the young man's feelings, and yet his own desire for the youth throws him off balance. He is not honest with himself, and thus cannot be sensitive to Pauline.

His statement strikes home further by showing complete ambivalence toward Pauline. "In reality, I ask myself, what can be the state of mind of a woman who is not resigned? An 'honest woman,' I mean... as if what is called 'honesty' in woman did not always imply resignation!" (297). Even if Edouard can understand the ridiculousness of Oscar blaming his errors on his wife's virtue, he still cannot comprehend why Pauline is resigned to expressing herself, or knowing herself, through the mantle of virtue. Just like his statement before about

how having Christian values is not enough to make one virtuous, resignation and honesty are not necessarily inherent one in the other. Think of Lillian who was both resigned and dishonest in regard to her motives. As Martin stated, women seem to be stuck in a trap of distorted significations that “preserve the system’s fictionality as truth.” Despite Edouard’s abhorrence of the restrictions of family and his difference as a man who is attracted to men, he is still operating inside that fictional landscape where his perspective is driven by the reaction of others to his own self interests. Bernard is the only character who, through his authenticity, really *sees* the female being due to his relationship to Laura. While speaking of her, “this was a matter of real life, of veritable pain,” it is clear he sincerely identifies with her feelings as an individual rather than through the system of exchange (119).

The Devil, God, and Moral Order

Other textual examples that provide support for the novel’s negative stance as regard marriage in general include Edouard’s time spent with the La Perouse family. When visiting the elderly couple Edouard writes, “she thinks herself a martyr, while he takes her for a torturer. As for judging them, understanding them, I give it up... here are two beings tied to each other for life and causing each other abominable suffering. I have often noticed with married couples how intolerably irritating the slightest protuberance of character in the one may be to the other, because in the course of life in common it continually rubs up against the same place. And if the rub is reciprocal, married life is nothing but a hell” (145-6). The La Perouse couple represents the decrystallization of the passion-love relationship taken to the extreme. What were once perhaps idealized images of the other are now only reasons to blame and control. Not only do they no longer know themselves as a result of identification with the other, but they are physically captive in their own home, which is described more like a prison environment than a

household. The two plot against each other to such an extent that no civility remains. This scene serves to show how married life can stifle individuals with duty, as well as showing the frustration that is born from unmet expectations and a certain blunted acceptance of discord. For Monsieur La Perouse this relationship runs deeper still in that he believes himself to be betrayed, not just by individuals and society at large, but by God.

Through the complete loss of his sense of dignity as well as his true essence, Monsieur La Perouse will come to identify God as a force of evil, like the image of a devil. With a complete sense of resignation in regard to his loss of personal agency he tells Bernard, “no one is interested in an old man... I am no good to anyone” (108, 233). The novel surveys the opposite poles from adolescence to old age and the tone in relation to the elderly La Perouse is one of futility. La Perouse exhibits life in a state of disintegration; his belief system has failed. Ironically his person and attitude are at once rigid and disorderly for he has discovered his sense of moral order to be meaningless, and yet still tries to hold on.

As La Perouse questions the significance of his life and his established sense of what he has valued, he comes to the conclusion that, “I have been a dupe during the whole of my life. Madame La Perouse has fooled me; my son has fooled me; everybody has fooled me; God has fooled me... He made me take pride for my virtue” (108, 9). He explains that, through living an austere and stoic life, he has been the victim of his own arrogance. Seeing how he has avoided all vanity and hedonism in favor of an aesthetic lifestyle, and yet has found his spiritual reserve to be empty, he wonders what it was all for. He believes his will to be but the threads of a marionette over which he has no control and, thus, declares himself already dead. What he prays for, yet never receives, serves to deepen his sense of utter dejection. In essence, the joke has

been on him. He did everything he was *supposed* to do, and what did it get him? Divine authority never interceded to help.

The devil, on the other hand, is a figure he has come to know and recognize. He tells Edouard, “Have you noticed that in this world God always keeps silent? It’s only the devil who speaks.... At least, only the devil we can succeed in hearing” (364). At this point it seems apparent that the devil is representative of the ego and that La Perouse has been deluding himself by living a lie in the guise of divine rule. Yet, this analysis is complicated when La Perouse revises his former statement, “the devil and God are one and the same; they work together. We try to believe that everything bad comes from the devil, if we didn’t, we should never find the strength to forgive God. He plays with us, like a cat tormenting a mouse ... and then afterwards he wants us to be grateful to him as well. Cruelty! That’s the principal attribute of God” (365). One possible interpretation could relate to the author who is a cruel god, moving characters around like pawns with a curiosity that turns to wickedness in the desire to see what will happen to them while remaining silent without taking any real responsibility for them. The devil is also a creative force, spirited, youthful, and dynamic. Gide once said, “there is no work of art without the collaboration of the demon.” There is the sense that one must allow this force some creative license in order to attain a state of creative authenticity. Ironically, the very same force that allows one to overcome creative boundaries simultaneously erodes when the conscience is abandoned – think of Vincent’s theoretical genius that somehow leads to an evil transformation that allows him to commit murder. Is the positive potential in such a contribution also degenerating in that the release of the creative force also brings about the release of demons? The path to either heaven or hell is shown to exist along one long continuum.

Another analysis of the speech by La Perouse relates to what is beyond understanding and why. His sense of estrangement from *God the father* shows that religious structures, and the like, are not a solution to human problems. Furthermore, Boris's death shows the same of the doctrine of psychology as unable to pierce through the mysteries of human existence. The often tragic events in life appear to have no logic or reason and circumstances can lead things to turn out quite differently from what one has expected, and often badly at that. Comfort, however, will not come from a supernatural source but, rather, from the inner nature. A person's struggle happens in the world of his or her own making, namely in the mind and in human attitudes. In the case of La Perouse who has renounced his authentic self in favor of a hypocritical construct, he serves as an example showing the poles that exist between deprivation and fulfillment.

The devil represents the pursuit of self interest over self restraint and the union of the devil to God becomes a metaphor for the two poles that exist in man and in the world at large; any attempt to solve this via a counterfeit value system is futile for this two-headed hydra can make one a fool. After all, does not the devil play a role in the mythical creation of man who struggles between harmony and disharmony, balance and counterbalance? The inconsistencies that exist within the human character show deep inner division. But is it the fault of someone like La Perouse who refuses to see beyond the persona of relinquishing free will, or is it the fault of society, oppressing instincts and destroying man's true nature? Perhaps, in an attempt to look more closely at the human predicament, the novel exhibits that the answer is both.

Martine Sageart writes, "In *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, the devil is a polysemous entity, ethical and aesthetical. A scission principle, a contradiction principle par excellence – he is the evil which includes the good, he is causality associating with inconsequence, he is the dream of reason –, he is also the active principle of creation, its dark, unconscious side. While sparking

the novel's fireworks, he rubs his hands in the dark, he is devilishly Gidian, he bears another name, Irony." This definition of the use of irony in Gide is entirely apt for La Perouse, the music teacher who equates harmony with vice, who sees duplicity all around him: "'Harmony!' he repeated... 'All that I can see in it is familiarization with evil –with sin. Sensibility is blunted, purity is tarnished. Our whole universe is prey to discord. How long shall we have to wait for the resolution of the chord?" (131). What could be more ironic than the pride he feels for his virtue contrasted to his self-effacing gloom? His very identity is tragically tied up in such contradiction.

Religion and its followers receive perhaps the harshest critique of the novel. Religion is a source of hypocrisy in the guise of sincerity and honesty. Followers base their existence on the cultivation of a façade in front of others and in relation to themselves. Self-examination and religion are not synonymous, therefore the challenging of religious doctrine in the novel, or any doctrine for that matter, implies coming closer to knowing oneself. Yet, the deeply embedded programming of such dogma and its "uncompromising inflexibility" and "parsimony," as Edouard describes, is difficult to shake off (90).

In the case of Armand Vedel whose father wants him to become a pastor, he has developed a "desire to spoil everything he most cares for" as a result of his lack of self esteem born from a childhood bound by religious oppression (102). In other words, Armand is caught somewhere between blatant rebellion and religious condemnation. He embodies the dichotomy of the Vedel family's polarized intentions and actions when he goads his sisters to act out their desires and then immediately punishes them for it, calling them all "sluts." Speaking of Rachel he tells Olivier, "Her modesty exasperates me. It is one of the most sinister jokes in this world below that every time anyone sacrifices himself for others, one may be perfectly certain he is

worth more than they” (226). Armand understands the self-centered motivation behind personal sacrifice, the manipulation of and pressure placed on to others disguised as benevolence, the irony in being charitable to strangers but not to one’s own family, and yet, his anger and self-deprecation force him into the same trap, being polarized between extremes, which in his case is between seeing truth and then misinterpreting it. His blindness in the abstract mimics his sister Rachel’s physical blindness.

Edouard describes the pitfalls of religious dogma plainly in his observation that, “the deeper the soul plunges into religious devotion, the more it loses all sense of reality, all need, all desire, all love for reality. I have observed the same in Vedel upon the few occasions I have spoken to him.” He applies this further to encompass the entire Vedel family, saying, “the dazzling light of faith blinds them to the surrounding world and to their own selves....I am amazed at the coils of falsehood in which devout persons take delight” (97). This underlines the difficulty as a religious follower of attaining true sincerity of thought or feeling. In the novel, religion acts similarly to passion-love based on an ideal that one tries to live up to, unfortunately destroying any chance for authenticity. Religion, like passion-love, has the effect of making true sincerity impossible.

Desire, Self-Love, and Agency

There can be some complication in understanding the relationship in the novel of love to passion-love, the latter of which is synonymous for the most part with desire and religious devotion. The problems around these significations do not have clear cut boundaries, but do have much to do with the levels to which one can remain a free agent. For example, when Bernard professes his feelings to Laura his love does not equal desire; it is a pure and cathartic

kind of respect and reverence that mimics religious faith, but without being similarly dogmatic. He aspires to help her and expects nothing in return, yet, he gains much in terms of freeing up his own personal expression. A sense of moral responsibility appears to be more or less synonymous with love in this case, most particularly as it is born from self-love, but is also antithetical to absolute freedom, which the relationships in the novel show to be an impossibility.

Edouard also feels a strong link to Laura, it is not based on any kind of devotion however, but relates more to the influence she has formerly exerted on him as a kind of muse or mirror as well as to what Edouard has personally gained or lost from this interaction. He interprets her influence as mostly restrictive in regard to his writing in that “this book of mine has crystallized according to Laura; and that is why I will not allow it to be my present portrait” (88). Edouard’s theorizing of his feelings causes him to objectify his emotions and remain unable to grasp reality. Ciholas zeros in on this when stating of Edouard, “his relationships with others tend to disintegrate as soon as he realizes they exist” (53). Therefore, Edouard cannot know any form of long term devotion or any sense of responsibility to others. His emotional life is as an observer of the relational categories described above and not as a participant. His desire for freedom and to know and understand all keeps him strangely alienated.

During Laura’s wedding, Edouard sits in a pew next to Olivier and thinks, “I suddenly found myself thinking of my religious awakening and my first fervours; of Laura and the Sunday school where we used to meet..., of our zeal and our inability, in the ardour which consumed all that was impure in us, to distinguish the part which belonged to the other and the part that was God’s” (90). It is difficult in this passage to differentiate what Edouard experienced in regard to Laura that was not influenced by a shared religiosity between them

since his early feelings for her were identical to the religious fervor that he has now abandoned as unconstructive. Edouard continues, “And then I fell to regretting that Olivier had never known this early starvation of the senses which drives the soul so perilously far beyond appearances” (90). There is a link to feeling a “starvation of the senses” and the joy and passion that is both “paradisiacal and foolish” which Edouard, in a kind of foreshadowing of what the youth will encounter, wishes Olivier could experience. He contemplates his desire for his nephew throughout, but the relationship is not explicitly described as going “beyond appearances” for Edouard seems to serve as a friend and educator to Olivier, for the most part, and his feelings, which clearly never reach full expression beyond vague yearnings, are not exclusive since there will also be Caloub, the next possible source of his emotional curiosity and desire.

When Bernard receives a visitation from the angel the question of personal agency is explored further. The derivation is from the biblical story of Jacob who is forced to struggle with God, represented by the angel, in order to discover his own faith. The message for Bernard is applicable in a considerably different way in the novel, however. While with the angel at the Sorbonne church he first observes the nature of the state of religiosity and the self-sacrifice of offering himself in a kind of loving dedication; this forces him to look at his affection for Laura and to understand at what level it may or may not have been altruistic. Then he confronts the right wing doctrine of nationalism. Bernard asks the angel if he should pledge himself to the doctrine of the youth leader they are both listening to who professes “the duty of every good Frenchman is to be a combatant” (322). The angel responds, “Yes, ...if you have doubts of yourself.” Bernard discovers that he has no doubts and rejects the imperative to sign away his own judgment to the “judgment of one’s superiors” (323). Finally he is faced with the squalor

and poverty of the slums of Paris in a scene sympathetic to a socialist doctrine. He sees the rich and indifferent amid the poor and wretched and begins to understand the necessity of charity.

Each of these encounters with the angel symbolizes Bernard's effort to attain maturity and autonomy. He has professed to have no particular faith and so the angel is representative not of God but of the challenge to know oneself and to find a worthy application in life. He reifies his sense of personal agency during this encounter, evident in the fact that "the angel departed without either of them having vanquished the other" (324). This scene, in the struggle with the angel, symbolizes the overall difficulty in being sure of oneself and, most likely, the angel is a counterpart to the devil who flits in and out to various characters throughout the novel exhibiting the same difficulty. If the self is subjective and a product of the imagination, authenticity is, by and large, illusive and the point counterpoint of the appearance of both the angel and the devil seem to underline that. Through his encounter with the angel and the opportunity provided for role playing, Bernard realizes that how he applies himself has consequences and that there is more at stake than his own happiness in regard to his actions. This has huge implications in relation to the love, passion-love, and religious zeal schema in that it takes these emotions out of the realm of the personal subjective experience of blind faith and misinterpretation and into a place of conscious choice to know ones' self and to face reality in the sense of having the ability to both see and interpret things realistically.

Bernard's night with Sarah is what instigates his meeting with the angel for, in his confusion, he does not know whether or not he has left Sarah alone in her bed as a result of his own insensibility. He describes his feelings about the evening as at once "exaltation... and the annihilation of self" (284). He comes to reject Sarah for Rachel's sake, out of "great pity" for the bigger sister's situation. This is a difficult reaction to analyze, but what is apparent is that

there is no freedom for him in hurting Rachel. Avoiding anything related to either absolutes or to stagnation, Bernard will continue to grow and change in what is his solitary search for authenticity – a journey less about the ends than the means. Unfortunately for Sarah, Bernard's sexual encounter with her is caught between the set-up by Armand, who jealously praises the occurrence, and the affront the event makes on Rachel's sense of morality. It is interesting that Bernard seems to have no compassion for Sarah the next day, but the manipulations of the Vedel siblings around Bernard's encounter with her are more than a little disturbing. In explanation, readers are left to ponder Bernard's thought that she has a "likeness to Laura" but with a "less angelic grace" which stirred "he knew not what troubled depths in his heart" (274). Clearly, Sarah's "instinct for revolt" which manifests as easy virtue makes her motives for being with Bernard dubious and Armand's artificial influence born from his incapacity to act in his own life make the whole experience ring intensely false for Bernard.

Suicide as a means of rejecting life becomes just one of the many forms in the novel of escape from the challenge of knowing oneself. When little Boris knowingly walks into a death trap it is an ironic form of seeking acceptance from the group of boys at school who call themselves the *confreries des hommes forts* – the strong men. As the youngest figure in the novel, his abdication of his own free will is synonymous with that of his grandfather La Perouse, the oldest figure in the novel. Both live a meaningless existence in that neither of them can cope with reality. The elder has avoided sinful acts in the name of virtue and the younger has embraced them, namely his masturbation, as a kind of magic, but lives with his ensuing guilt. These two enigmatic characters identify with absolutes, namely magic and virtue, and yet they are aware that they have been duped, one by God and the other by his peers. Despite this, Boris acts in sacrificing himself in order to give some purpose to his life in death and to avoid

eternal judgment, while La Perouse cannot kill himself since all sense of purpose is already exhausted for him as one who can only see himself as a slave to God's judgment. He is, therefore, not free to commit suicide.

Conclusion: Self-Delusion and the Chain of Life

Whether it be rebellion against family and society, the weary resignation to an existence that is unfulfilling, or the complete annihilation of the self, self-delusion is at the core of all that the novel exhibits to be *pathétique* in life.⁵⁹ Looking for moments of sincerity between the characters or in their personal expression will reveal that it is hard to come by and that the belief in absolutes is dangerous on a personal level as well as to the society at large. Many of the characters are in some way responsible for the death of little Boris: Edouard's suggestion that Boris go to the Azais-Vedel school, Bernard neglecting his role as chaperone to Boris after the death of Bronja, Sophriniska shirking on her responsibility to have total care of the boy, La Perouse having his loaded gun at the school, the members of the Strong Men proposing that Boris take the initiation risk, Gherandisol for his leadership of the group, and Strouvillhou for his scheme to spread counterfeit coins. The individual cannot refute his influence on the chain of life, the consequences of which are often difficult to fathom.

The values that underlie personal identity and social interaction throughout represent an economy that cannot be ignored. Bernard has come to understand that society relies on convention, thus it is necessary, and yet, it is up to the individual to take some moral responsibility. Bernard is an idealist, but when combined with realism he shows that one can help to modify and grow the system without prescribing to the extremes of anarchy, nihilism, or

⁵⁹ *Pathétique* is used to show the French sense of the word as touching, moving, dramatic, rather than the English sense of the word as just pitiful.

conservatism. The problem inherent in each of these latter approaches relates to clinging to the counterfeit and the absolute. Similarly, just as the individual must take responsibility, these larger entities must consider the individual. The crux of this is not about a return to a historical and nationalist France or to overthrow with a new order. It is about integration of the past, present, and future as well as about the integration of desire and commitment, and of theory and action. La Perouse speaks of the perfect and continuous chord, but the text shows that there is neither perfection nor singularity in any aspect of life. God will not answer because God cannot be personified. The resolution that La Perouse awaits never happens because the novel remains open without a progression from dissonance to consonance, without a succinct final note.

Ironically, Edouard will not use Boris's suicide in his novel because it seems unlikely to him, in other words, not real. The main conflict that the plot is building up to happens at the very end and is then abandoned by the authorial subject, which leaves readers without a salient answer to the question of *why* all of this happened, beyond it being simply the sum total of all acts therein. It is a process-oriented hermeneutic built on reversals and correctives and Gide allows the adumbration within the *mise en abyme* form to shape readers' understanding of things. There are at least forty characters in the novel with complex motivations and outcomes that make for a deep causal coherence that is related to the perspective of each and how they shape reality en masse. The dramatic action then becomes a look in to how much or how little they can come to see, act on, or know that reality, and how much or how little they can each come to live by their own lights.

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