



uOttawa

L'Université canadienne  
Canada's university

FACULTÉ DES ÉTUDES SUPÉRIEURES  
ET POSTDOCTORALES



FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND  
POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

Natalie Taylor

AUTEUR DE LA THÈSE / AUTHOR OF THESIS

Ph.D. (English Literature)

GRADE / DEGREE

Department of English

FACULTÉ, ÉCOLE, DÉPARTEMENT / FACULTY, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT

Mapping Mystic Spaces: Cognition, Communication and Communion in Contemporary Western  
Fiction

TITRE DE LA THÈSE / TITLE OF THESIS

David Jarraway

DIRECTEUR (DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS SUPERVISOR

CO-DIRECTEUR (CO-DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS CO-SUPERVISOR

EXAMINATEURS (EXAMINATRICES) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS EXAMINERS

Donald Childs

Keith Wilson

Ronald Granofsky (absent)

Dominic Manganiello

Gary W. Slater

Le Doyen de la Faculté des études supérieures et postdoctorales / Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

Mapping Mystic Spaces in the Self and its Stories: Reading (Through) the Gaps in  
Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*, Alice Munro's *Lives of  
Girls and Women*, Peter Ackroyd's *The House of Doctor Dee*, Adele  
Wiseman's *Crackpot*, and A. S. Byatt's *Possession*

Natalie Taylor

Ph.D. Dissertation  
Department of English  
University of Ottawa  
Ottawa, Canada

May, 2006



Library and  
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et  
Archives Canada

Published Heritage  
Branch

Direction du  
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file* *Votre référence*  
*ISBN: 978-0-494-18609-1*  
*Our file* *Notre référence*  
*ISBN: 978-0-494-18609-1*

**NOTICE:**

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

**AVIS:**

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

---

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

  
**Canada**



## Abstract

In their novels, Ernest Buckler, Alice Munro, Peter Ackroyd, Adele Wiseman and A. S. Byatt have each explored moments when their characters experience expanded states of consciousness. Narratives such as these, as well as those of various mystical literatures, posit the idea that the barriers of the known self can be broken through, often repeatedly. Each of the novels to be studied here portrays a gap- or flaw-ridden self in the act of perpetuating and / or penetrating various forms of narrative and identity constructs. Each also features an encounter with what is other when these narrative and identity boundaries are breached. Reading about “mystical” occurrences of this nature challenges readers with the possibility that perceptions may be registered beyond the paradigms of the subject / object split. In this project, narrative fiction will be read in terms of its capacity to trigger a questioning of, and an expansion from within, systems of knowledge and identity, explicitly in terms of character and plot structure, and implicitly as a model for the reading self. The ability to observe and to respond to productive “gaps” or “flaws” in the stories of the self is a skill not only practiced by contemplatives and mystics, and by the characters in these novels, but by readers of imaginative fiction as well.

## Acknowledgements

Many sincere thanks go to David Jarraway for ushering me through this process with the help of his keen eye, his amazingly fast turn-around times, and his enthusiasm for the project, all during a time when he was so very busy himself. Thanks as well to my family; to Erma Petrova, Darren Millar and Ryan Maydan, my “theory buddies,” for keeping me company over the long haul; and to Marlene Best and Ron Chapman for their moral support and stellar examples of how to get through graduate school in the midst of “life happening.” Above all, my gratitude and appreciation go to David Saikaley for his love and support, and for being my own private and never-failing cheering section. I would also like to acknowledge my appreciation for the financial support of OGS and SSHRC.

## Table of Contents

### Chapter One

Bridging the Gaps: Introduction ..... 1.

### Chapter Two

Shifting Frames of Reference: Rereading *The Mountain and the Valley* .... 24.

### Chapter Three

Lilies and Mud: Seeing Other-Wise in Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* ..... 61.

### Chapter Four

Shifting Grounds: Mapping the Dialectic of Self, Other and Text in Peter Ackroyd's *The House of Doctor Dee* ..... 99.

### Chapter Five

All or Nothing? Testing the Magic Circles of Self and Story in Adele Wiseman's *Crackpot* ..... 140.

### Chapter Six

"Outside our small safe place flies Mystery": Paradoxical Spaces of Self / Possession in A. S. Byatt's *Possession* ..... 183.

### Chapter Seven

Minding Our Ps and Qs: Conclusion ..... 223.

Works Cited and Consulted ..... 237.

Chapter One  
Bridging the Gaps: Introduction

“Come and see: / There is opening within opening, / level beyond level.”  
(*Zohar*)

Five novels will be used as test cases for the mystic mappings I propose to explore: *The Mountain and the Valley*, by Ernest Buckler; *Lives of Girls and Women*, by Alice Munro; *The House of Doctor Dee*, by Peter Ackroyd; *Crackpot*, by Adele Wiseman; and *Possession*, by A.S. Byatt. Each of these features occurrences in which characters experience dynamic states of awareness that exceed or suspend the limitations of “ordinary” consciousness. By remaining open to possibilities of this nature, the fiction of writers such as these, as well as the so-called mystical literatures of various traditions, offer an ongoing challenge to the ways in which subjectivity and the functions of literature are currently understood. Narratives like these posit the idea that the barriers of the known self can be broken down or broken through, sometimes repeatedly, in a manner that results in a broader capacity for vision, experience, self-knowledge and empathy for others. I will be arguing here that the modes of “breaking through” that these literatures describe are akin to what can occur in the reading process. The ability to observe and to respond to productive “gaps” or “flaws” in the stories of the self is a skill practiced by contemplatives and mystics, by the characters in these novels, and by readers of imaginative fiction.<sup>1</sup>

Gershom Scholem has said that, in and of itself, “mystical experience is fundamentally amorphous. The more intensely or profoundly the contact with God [or what is Other] is experienced, the less susceptible it is of objective definition, for by its very nature it transcends the categories of subject and object which every definition

presupposes” (*On the Kabbalah* 8). Mystical literatures, both ancient and contemporary, may provide readers with fresh perspectives from which to question such constructs of subjectivity, especially those delimited by preoccupations with technological and self-reflexive models of the subject. Each of the following novels explores the nature of the self, the text and, by implication, constructs of reality, in such a way that moments of communion between subject and object are imagined to be not only possible, but essential to the recognition of viable horizons of meaning. For, as Heidegger has said, “world and things do not subsist alongside one another. They penetrate each other. Hence the two traverse a mean [*Mitte*]. In it, they are at one . . . . In our language, the mean of the two is called the between . . . .” (qtd. in Taylor 43-44). Negotiating this “between” belongs to the interspace of meaning.<sup>2</sup> Meaning, the noun, relates to the construction of frames of reference that freeze or reify occurrences into objective form according to particular, subjective points of view. In movements between subject and object, meaning is not a noun, nor is it transfixed into one schema; it is a verb and always dynamically productive and fluid.

Many theorists of language and subjectivity in the last century have tended to negate the possibility of movement beyond pre-existing systems, or beyond a perpetual state of dividedness. They tend, in other words, to describe and reinforce the perception or experience of being permanently in exile from a lost origin. For such a being, the “realization of its infinite *difference* from everything other than itself exposes outer and inner wounds that never heal” (Taylor 9). In recognizing infinite difference, multiple truths have become liberated from monolithic Truth. But one result is that the imperious Self—the “sovereign ‘I’ of the constructive subject, which relates only to itself” (23)—

has become so trapped, to all intents and purposes, in its own subjectivity that a verifiable experience of or connection with what is other has come to seem virtually impossible.

Multiplicity has become another word for isolation: “man has risen up into the I-ness of the *ego cogito*. Through this uprising, all that is, is transformed into object. That which is, as the objective, is swallowed up into the immanence of subjectivity. The horizon no longer emits light of itself” (Heidegger, qtd. in Taylor 40).<sup>3</sup>

The last century’s continuation of the nineteenth-century revolt against the transcendent has tended to fall into a familiar metaphysical trap by aspiring, however covertly, to gather all known phenomena under one dominant pattern, system or schema. As Michael Mortin notes,

one of the more striking features of the contemporary scene is the way in which many other critics seek in effect to combine a basic penchant for skepticism with one form or another of metaphysical dogmatism, drawing on now the one, now the other, standpoint as the occasion demands, but with little apparent sense for the fundamental self-contradiction to which in so doing they commit themselves. (15)

In the process of rejecting Hegel’s vision of a transcendent and transparently reasoning Subject in whom all differences are eradicated, many twentieth-century theorists land squarely back in what Hegel describes as the “unhappy consciousness” of “insurmountable cleavage” (qtd. in Taylor 8;7). In service of opening up, tearing down, or deconstructing conceptual frameworks, philosophically, culturally, and ideologically, such criticism, to my mind at least, reverts to a form of closure that is not only premature but hypocritical in that it replicates the flaws of the metaphysical systems it attacks.<sup>4</sup>

Lack, loss, and cleavage become the replacement ground and origin of a self-conscious mode of being that can never lay claim to any real contact with other-than-itself; language becomes a game or a prison, both equally inescapable. And subjectivity is both nothing in itself, and all that can be aspired to.<sup>5</sup>

Specialization becomes one of the only ways to pursue through such an impasse, yet discussion between different points of view often becomes little more than warring terminologies that each aspires to universality on its own terms. Gerald Bruns, in *Tragic Thoughts at the End of Philosophy*, describes the development of a “variety of intellectual positions often lumped casually together as ‘deconstruction’ where... language is not a logical system for constructing an intelligible and defensible description of reality but a historicized totality of texts.... [W]hat gets counted as reality is in a state of constant, interminable, aporetic redescription” (6). Such processes have been, in large part, laudable and “constructive,” if I may be excused the pun. But what results is that this dominant idea of “constructionism ends up implying a plurality of criteria of rationality without telling you how to choose between [*sic*] them, that is, how to make your choice rational rather than arbitrary, interest-based, ethnocentric, emotive, or in any of a variety of ways historically contingent” (8). To explore and affirm how opposing modes of experience may communicate with one another has to be accompanied by an apologetic air or smothered in jargon to be acceptable. To identify with something other-than-onself must mean repressing or oppressing *something*. So critics wade amongst the excrement, the marginalized—for good reason. Meanwhile, the possibilities for union (or even similarity) amongst, within, or overarching difference and multiplicity, seem mostly excreted from the critical imagination:

We come to this: namely, that we have in our current intellectual environment a terrific surplus of conceptual-scheme theories—idealist theories of symbolic forms, structuralist systems of formal constraint, analytic conceptual holism, prison-house theories of language, ideology, and metaphysics, new historicist theories of cultural fabrics, Nietzschean perspectivism, internalist realism, theories of archives, paradigms, language games, webs of belief, narrative backgrounds, intersubjective assumptions, communicative communities, interpretive communities, reflective equilibriums, what-you-will: in short, a plenitude of structuralisms, and no bottom-line reason for holding any one of them.

(Bruns, *Tragic* 10)

Because this kind of criticism offers no map of where to go from the point labelled “You are here,” it can evoke not only a sense of futility, but of claustrophobia as well.

Imaginative literature often confronts, as acutely as literary theory and philosophy, the traps which hedge about the contemporary human subject, but just as often it follows an inner, often unchartable logic of development that leads beyond the understood and the expected. Bruns says that such literature “engages the world at ground level where human beings find themselves in situations refractory to concepts, rules, and justified true beliefs. Mimetically, or at the level of narrative, literature is a richly detailed and endlessly expanding inventory of such situations under varieties of scrutiny” (*Tragic* 14). In this project, narrative fiction will be read in terms of its capacity to trigger a questioning of and an expansion from within systems of knowledge and identity, explicitly in terms of character and plot structure, and implicitly as a model for the

reading self. Each of these novels portrays a gap- and flaw-ridden self in the act of perpetuating and/or penetrating various forms of narrative and identity. Each also features an encounter with what is other when these narrative and identity boundaries are breached. And all of them explore the impact that such an encounter has on the storied self when it reaches past its limits. Paul Ricoeur has said, in his discussion of Frank Kermode's "premature" solution to the problem of how fiction and reality interact, that he finds it both permissible and productive "to hold in reserve other possible relationships ... than that of consolation reduced to a vital lie. Transfiguration, as well as defiguration; transformation, as well as revelation, also have their right to be preserved" (*Time and Narrative* 2:27-28). Narrative as such—and the role of narrative in the formation of identity—will be seen to operate both as a limiting construct and as a dynamic process that stimulates change, allowing, not to say transcendence, but transformation or translation of boundaries and limits.

Reading about "mystical" occurrences challenges readers with the possibility that perceptions may be registered beyond the paradigms of the subject / object split. During mystical experiences, real or imagined objects of perception may "catch fire and become present" (Buber 90). The challenge of the mystic, then—who has encountered a radically present "present" (meaning here and now), in a way that exceeds expectations or existing configurations of meaning—is to make sense of the lived event in terms of whatever ideologies hold sway in a given era.<sup>6</sup> The individual attempts to communicate that excess and to promote the construction of different frameworks of meaning, thereby skewing the experience but also enabling it to leave its trace in and through narrative. Literature which records or imagines mystical experience, therefore, presents readers with ways to

negotiate differently the perceived limits of language and identity constructs which are well worth investigating in spite of (or perhaps because of) their profoundly counter-rational nature. The communication of *possibilities* becomes, then, one key aspect of mystical narrative.

At the core of this project, therefore, is the belief that there exists within each individual an observing and communicating capacity that enables the “subject” to critique its own systems—both those that construct the subject, and those constructed by it, consciously or unconsciously. The ability to monitor and question systems from within, at play in all of the novels to be dealt with here, involves participation in constructs of understanding, knowledge and experience while at the same time engaging in a practice of 1) observing from a distance and 2) communicating the subtle differences or differentials that emerge. Not only do these novels allow their characters apparent access to what is other-than-self; they do so by exploring the gaps or the flaws which appear within the apparently closed circles of narrative structure and self-identity. As each text approaches the breakdown of these closed circles formally and thematically, sites of crisis are transformed into areas of emergent possibility which militate against any tendency towards a fixed sense of closure or cleavage.

In this way, these five novels map out mystic spaces in which the trapped subjectivity inhabiting much of literary theory might possibly find a way out of its own endgame. This is by no means to be construed as an escape into “another world,” for which mystical thought has sometimes been criticized. On the contrary, the way out is the way back in, to ground level explorations of selfhood in this world via the interpretation of fictional worlds in which possibilities are not closed down before being entertained as

possibilities.<sup>7</sup> Mystical mappings such as these do not seek to establish a definitive polemic upon or theory of language, narrative or the self. What they do offer is an engagement with the practice of reading narrative such that methods or moments may appear of moving constructively and creatively past the limits that dominate each of these things under normal conditions. More radically still, they entertain the notion that, when constructions of text and self are activated and interacted with watchfully, transformations of the subject watching and the system being watched may occur. Always acknowledging the human subject in its constructedness, the mapping of mystic spaces involves the playing-off of multiple points of view that insists on their only partial validity, their “framedness.” These mappings maintain, therefore, not only due respect for the reality of limits, but a sense of *movement*, out of and towards mystery.

A word about what is not meant by the word “mystical” as it is used here: it is not aligned with “mysticism” as such, in the sense that word has had since the seventeenth century when “la mystique,” as de Certeau tells us, was spoken of for the first time and “assigned, within social or scientific life, a region of its own, with its own objects, itineraries, and language” (“Mysticism” 13). Nor am I speaking of the mystical from the perspective of a historian of mysticism or a theologian, for whom the mystical, whether of language or experience, only operates within the context of a particular religious system. Bernard McGinn elucidates this perspective, in which

mysticism is only one part or element of a concrete religion and any particular religious personality. No mystics (at least before the present century) believed in or practiced “mysticism.” They believed in and practiced Christianity (or Judaism, or Islam, or Hinduism), that is,

religions that contained mystical elements as parts of a wider historical whole. (xvi)<sup>8</sup>

As McGinn notes in parentheses, however, the present time is another matter, and the mystical must now be dealt with on different terms.

Michel de Certeau would see this change as having originated long ago. As far back as

the sixteenth or seventeenth century ... one no longer designated as mystical that form of “wisdom” elevated by a full recognition of the mystery already lived and announced in common beliefs .... In other words, what becomes mystical is that which diverges from normal or ordinary paths; that which is no longer inscribed within the social community of faith or religious references, but rather on the margins of an increasingly secularized society and a knowledge that defines its own scientific object; that which thus appears simultaneously in the form of extraordinary, even strange, events and as a relationship with a hidden God (“mystical” in Greek means “hidden”) whose public signs pale, flicker, or completely cease to be believable. (“Mysticism” 13)

In a secular context such as ours, the use of the word “mystical” reverts to one of its original meanings, which McGinn says unites the exegetical approaches of early Greek, Jewish and Christian hermeneutics. Simply put, this involves the

belief that the text contained deeper meanings and dimensions than those readily available to all readers .... Philo was not the first, but was certainly the most influential, of those Jews who sought to meld Jewish and Greek

approaches to the holy books, following the “inspired men who take most of the contents of the Law to be visible symbols of things invisible, expressing the inexpressible” (*De specialibus legibus* 3.178). By the second century C.E., Christian exegetes would be referring to such deeper meanings of the Old Testament as “mystical,” the earliest usage of the term in Christian literature. (12)

Thus, a twenty-first century mystical hermeneutics is one which features a search for those deeper meanings and dimensions, but maintains a sceptical awareness of the pervasive limits (not to say self-deceptions) impeding such a search.

This project will, therefore, bring together a close reading of the interaction of self and text in the five novels mentioned above with the help of an assortment of literary theorists, philosophers, and literatures of mystical experience. Reading ( I should probably say “rereading”) these novels carefully results in a growing sense of the intriguing structural and stylistic asymmetries within each text, gaps or “flaws” that are laden with potential subversions of the ostensible work of the text itself. Awareness of these spaces then stimulates a conscious relationship in the reader with what Ricoeur calls “distanciation.” Distanciation not only pertains to the space that opens up between the worlds projected by the text and by the reader; it also inevitably instigates a certain alienating distance of the reading self from him or herself. As Ricoeur explains,

[w]hat is to be interpreted in the text is a proposed world which I could inhabit and in which I could project my ownmost possibilities .... To appropriate is to make what was alien become one’s own. What is appropriated is indeed the matter of the text. But the matter of the text

becomes my own only if I disappropriate myself, in order to let the matter of the text be. So I exchange the *me, master* of itself, for the *self, disciple* of the text. (*From Text to Action* 36-37; emphasizes his)<sup>9</sup>

In this sense, “alienation” is not a negative term: rather, it is akin to the “observer mode” within the self to be found throughout mystical literatures and contemplative praxes (such as in Hindu and Buddhist meditative exercises). This is not the position of the “transcendental observer occupying the seat of wisdom and judgment” as Bruns puts it (*Tragic* 2); rather it is that of a self grounded in experience, but watching it unfold and actively attempting to interpret the meaning to be found in life events, and thus remain open to change and growth.<sup>10</sup>

Such creative processes of alienation are a necessary aspect of interactions between reader and text, Ricoeur asserts, partly because both are, to some degree at least, fictitious:

it must be said that the subjectivity of the reader comes to itself only insofar as it is placed in suspense, unrealized, potentialized .... [I]f fiction is a fundamental dimension of the reference of the text, it is no less a fundamental dimension of the subjectivity of the reader. As a reader, I find myself only by losing myself. Reading introduces me into the imaginative variations of the ego. The metamorphosis of the world in play is also the playful metamorphosis of the ego. (*From Text to Action* 88)

The novels to be dealt with here all play with potential metamorphoses of the worlds of the text and of the ego, by focusing simultaneously on the unavoidable limits of expression and insight, and on moments that translate these paradigmatic constructs of

self and text into something more fluid and open. The playfulness of each of these novels can appear manipulative, in the sense that artistic (and ordinary) processes of communication are always manipulative, in that they are subject to controlling and limited points of view. But at the same time, these novels explore the possibility that there are energies able to break through and transform the (often not confidence-inspiring) frameworks in which such communication occurs. To encourage a certain suspiciousness regarding narrative, while continuing to work through narrative forms, allows for, in Ricoeur's terminology, the growth of the worlds of text and reader. These particular texts display an intense awareness of the potential, or indeed necessary, untrustworthiness of the function of storytelling. But the ironic distance that results—in both reader and writer / narrator—instigates the creation of a vantage point *outside* the paradigms of personality and text.

Stories (and storytellers) are Janus-faced, with a paradoxical capacity both to reify and to expand constructs of self and world. Stories may reinforce and thus close off the parameters of identity, but may also instigate a dismantling or a leap out of conceptual paradigms. By stories, I mean all of those modes of discourse which tell us who we are, who we can be, what the nature of the world is that we live in and interact with, and which help to determine our openness or resistance to the different possibilities inherent in all of these things. Science, critical theory, news and fiction tend to be the dominant domains of such “stories” currently, whereas in previous centuries religion and myth played a more overt role. While many stories (national histories being one example) serve to solidify the otherness of the other as opposed to the sameness of the self, stories may also convey flashes of cross-boundary recognition that exceed the logic of the status quo. Stories (especially those that take shape as critical theory, philosophy or the evening

news) frequently tend to promote the idea that the primary reality of the world is one of limitation and scarcity. But stories may also posit irrational, impossible possibilities, working out their logic imaginatively in such a way that those possibilities become familiar—and thus no longer quite so impossible. Stories lull us to sleep or jolt us into a more alert state of consciousness of ourselves, of others, and of the world around us. The story promulgated by much recent critical theory is that of the insurmountable limits of human consciousness (while paradoxically valorizing human consciousness as an agreed-upon limit in the universe as a whole). Fiction, as evidenced by the five novels to be investigated here, however, does not always accept these limits as being the end of the story. Such fiction often explores, instead, the possibility that human consciousness does not have to remain locked within pre-existing and closed circles, because it is capable of shifting between and among different levels and states of awareness.

Some comments about methodology: this is not a genre or a period study.

Navigating and reading (from) the gaps or flaws within text and self can be equally well applied to short stories or to *Paradise Lost*, for example. Obviously, since this topic does focus exclusively on novels, and ones which were written and published in the latter half of the twentieth century, questions of genre and of the relative activities of the modernist versus the postmodernist novel are pertinent and valid. However, this thesis is already straining the limits of what can reasonably be engaged under the aegis of one topic, by engaging critical theory and mystical literatures to analyze “storytelling” and the self. The novel as such is not especially significant, to me at least, except insofar as novels do have the advantage of extending the link between reading and living narrative so that the self and its stories can undergo permutations on a broader canvas.<sup>11</sup> Also, the novel is a

genre that defies conclusive genre definition. The “baggy monster” remains monstrous, refusing to adapt itself well to theories and categories. Perhaps that reason alone explains why I favour it at the moment for the kinds of questions I hope to engage. The imposition of categories usually demonstrates what it sets out to demonstrate, and might tend to elide the presence of what does not fit in.

The novels I have chosen to work with do not fit themselves into particular categories with any great ease, although certainly cases could be advanced to categorize each in a number of ways. They offer narrative satisfaction reminiscent of nineteenth-century novels, display elements of a modernist sensitivity to the potential autonomy and structural integrity of the artistic form, but also dabble in postmodernist disruptions of that same form. Thus, working with these texts under the rubric of modernist versus postmodernist would certainly be valid. However, I personally find the dividing line between these terms to be quite evasive, especially since postmodernist practices can be found in the prose writings of the Renaissance, not to mention *Tristram Shandy*.<sup>12</sup> I have chosen to group these novels together because they unite sharply divergent sensibilities of the kind I am interested in. Initially, what drew these novels together in my mind was that each of them featured a mystical strain which sat quite uneasily with, or strained against, an otherwise pervasively ironic and sceptical tone.<sup>13</sup> In the process of working with that strain, what emerged was the notion that an observer mode forms the link between the mystical and the ironic in these novels and in the reader’s experience of them. It is this observer mode that I wish to focus on, mostly in a reaction against complex theories that support the idea that “reality” is something we are forever debarred from because of the “always alreadiness” of language, and of social and identity constructs. If an observer

mode exists and can be nurtured, communication is indeed possible, reality can indeed be experienced on multiple levels, and narrative can function as a pathway towards an expanded awareness or, at least, an expanded willingness to question, wonder and think.

This is always to concede, of course, that communication and subjectivity will ever fall short of the mark (in terms of ultimates) and must be understood as building temporary constructs in service of *moving on*. Temporary messages of value in ongoing processes of growth can be communicated by individuals and by social and cultural collectives. This is also what it means to be constructive, not only in the sense of “constructivist,” but in the sense of aligning with and affirming those aspects of self, of narrative and of any other constructed form that are able to *observe, critique, and change* themselves from within. The (de)constructionists do not seem to give enough credence to that faculty which they themselves make use of: the ability to be aware of how a construct (story, language, identity, society) functions means that its observer is able to have one foot (figuratively speaking) outside of it. To be constructed, therefore, does not necessarily mean to be unconscious of the fact; being conscious of the fact means that choices emerge. One’s choices may be somewhat limited, but it certainly does no harm to entertain the possibility that processes of movement and observation may be infinitely productive of further choices offering both meaning and purpose. Though systems perpetuate themselves and are recreated *ad infinitum*, this does not mean that they are not transformed in the process. So perhaps the seeming impossibility of escape from pre-existing systems does not have to be a matter for despair, apathy, justification for a lack of responsibility, or for meaninglessness, because it may be possible that these systems themselves can be changed from within. Each of the writers listed above appears to be

advocating this very idea, even while being uncomfortably, almost overwhelmingly, aware of a sense of imprisonment within story, language, and the limits of identity.

Each chapter will commence with a close reading of the chosen novel with a sharp eye for the various structural and tonal gaps that appear, to be followed by help from theoretical models and then an expansion into the text's mystical resonances. Although it will be clear from the treatment of each novel that there is interesting work to be done in tracking down any direct influences upon its author of the mystical and theoretical literatures I bring to bear, that is not my intention here. I simply work with the texts, theoretical and mystical, that provide pertinent models of explanation for the way in which each author circumvents or transforms his or her characters' crises of consciousness into the stuff—at least potentially—of mystical experience. The main preoccupation will very much be to observe the different modes of selfhood that take shape, because that is, finally, what is at issue. More often than not, I will be referring to the “self,” rather than the “subject,” and this will be a term that demonstrates quite a bit of slippage. I do so mostly because the term “subject” is so particularized in meaning there is very little moving space left within it, so that it does not tend to include that capacity for observation and transformation that I am claiming for the self. Similarly, the term “other” will be used often, but not usually in its capitalized form, simply because the “Other,” like the “subject,” has become too paradoxically circumscribed in its potential meanings. In the transformative moments isolated in these texts, otherness remains, but it is a confrontation of or communion between mysterious “selves” that occurs, selves that both contain and are contained by that otherness. Finally, I do consider that the activity of writing engages with similar processes as will be looked at here; but since my own

vantage point on these novels is that of a reader, I focus to a large extent on that experience and will not speculate upon the experiences of the writer. However, the *narrator* of each novel does loom large in the modes of watching and communicating in and through the distances that open up in these texts.

Paul Ricoeur, for one, has an interesting notion of the interplay between the modes of *ipse* and *idem* in the aporia of what actually constitutes the self (which will be explored in detail in Chapter Four). Self, as explained at length in Ricoeur's *Oneself As Another*, is itself a mystery, but one which actively engages narrative as a mode of self / other awareness, in an oscillating movement between appropriation and distanciation.

Daniel Frank Chamberlain explains that in Ricoeur's thinking,

[a]ppropriation is a renewed event that involves dispossessing the narcissistic ego and repossessing the self as well as making one's own a foreign mode of being in the world through a transformation brought on by play (Ricoeur 1981a, 182-93). While all these dimensions meet their point of departure in the notion of an event, the process is not a closed circle. It is similar to a helix that returns to its starting point but at a different level. (55)

Stories are circles, encapsulating a beginning, a middle and an end; plots are the linear unfolding of a sequence of events within the circle of the story. As Chamberlain further comments, narrative thus "combines two temporal dimensions: the configurational dimension ... and the episodic dimension. The configurational dimension draws or grasps the events into one temporal and meaningful whole. ... The episodic dimension 'draws narrative time in the direction of the linear representation of time'" ( 69). Circle and line:

the line goes into infinity, but only on one track; the circle sweeps around eternally, but in a closed circuit.<sup>14</sup> Cross the two, add awareness of the cycles and the lines and watch for the spaces that emerge. Stories trace a circle and follow a line, but these can expand and lift, go up, down and intersect, if we observe these lines and borders with attention, noticing the translations that occur. Transpose the circle and the line and this is the result: the helix, the spiral, ascending and descending levels of meaning in perpetual movement.

---

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although prolonged and intensive periods of being caught up in a narrative can cause one to experience some rather strangely dislocated states of consciousness, I am certainly not claiming that reading can induce mystical experiences. Writers in the mystical traditions that I have encountered would scoff at the suggestion. Sufis have a traditional saying, that “a donkey with a load of books is still a donkey” (*Essential Sufism* 79). Krishnamurti distrusted habits of reading that kept the mind busy while staving off actual awareness of what he called “*what is*” (62, 78,137). Teresa of Avila, for her part, had some rather sharp words for the obstacles placed in her way by “half-learned men” who were rich in book-lore and poor in actual spiritual experience (122). Neither, however, do these writers claim that the actual practice of meditation guarantees transformative experiences, any more than reading might. Rather, it is the engagement with processes that encourage a softening of the protective hard shell of the identity that allows space for such transformation, if any be possible, to occur. In a neat analogy between meditating, reading and writing processes, Sri Aurobindo is quoted as saying that, while it appears that all our efforts seem required to create or to catch glimpses of truth, it is in fact in the *intervals* between surges of effort that the real event occurs: “When any real effect is produced, it is not because of the beating and hammering, but because an inspiration slips down between the raising of the hammer and the falling and gets in under cover of the beastly noise” (qtd. in Satprem 281). Indeed, “Sri Aurobindo used to say that the sole purpose of books and philosophies was not really to enlighten the mind, but to silence it so that, quieted, it can start experiencing and receive inspiration directly” (281).

---

<sup>2</sup> The word “interspace” was borrowed, on my part, from meditative practices in which the individual orients him- or herself to gaps or spaces in the self that are not already patterned or formed as part of an identity construct. The idea here is that the identity can be impacted *from* those interspaces, even if they remain unconscious (Chapman).

However, in the process of researching Buckler’s novel, I encountered the word again in Marta Dvorak’s *Ernest Buckler. Rediscovery and Reassessment*. Chapter 7 is entitled “The Rhetorical Phenomenon: Occupying the Interspace Where Subject and Object are Joined by Language.” The concept of the interspace, Dvorak says, comes from Bernard Dupriez (192).

<sup>3</sup> Astradur Eysteinnsson, in *The Concept of Modernism*, quotes Lillian Robinson and Lise Vogel as saying that theories about so-called “modernist” literature also serve

to intensify isolation ... [forcing] the work of art, the artist, the critic, and the audience outside of history. Modernism denies us the possibility of understanding ourselves as *agents* in the material world, for all has been removed to an abstract world of ideas, where interactions can be minimized or emptied of meaning and real consequences. Less than ever are we able to interpret the world—much less change it. (13-14)

<sup>4</sup> Northrop Frye quotes Bertrand Russell as having said that

Every philosopher, in addition to the formal system which he offers to the world, has another, much simpler, of which he may be quite unaware. If he is aware of it, he probably realizes that it won’t quite do; he therefore conceals it, and sets forth something more sophisticated, which he ... asks

---

others to accept because he thinks he has made it such as cannot be disproved. (qtd. in *Words with Power* 150)

Frye goes on to say that he thinks it “part of the literary critic’s task to look into some of these indecently naked formal systems that won’t quite do: the cosmologies, for example, constructed out of the metaphors that lift us up or bring us down, that oppose one hand to the other ...” (150).

<sup>5</sup> Hannah Arendt, in her introduction to *The Life of the Mind*, claims that the destruction of metaphysical systems should enable us “to look on the past with new eyes, unburdened and unguided by any traditions, and thus to dispose of a tremendous wealth of raw experiences without being bound by any prescriptions as to how to deal with these treasures” (12). But, indicating that she sees as well the kind of reverse dogmatism that Morton demonstrates as pervading contemporary thought, she says as well that we are greatly hampered in that freedom of thought by a “growing inability to move, on no matter what level, in the realm of the invisible ... [and] the disrepute into which everything that is not visible, tangible, palpable has fallen” (12).

<sup>6</sup> See Gershom Scholem’s discussion of this in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp 8-13, in which he says, among other things, that the dilemma of the mystic is that “the substance of the canonical texts, like that of all other religious values, is melted down and given another form as it passes through the fiery stream of the mystical consciousness. It is hardly surprising that, hard as the mystic may try to remain within the confines of his religion, he often ... approaches, or even transgresses, its limits” (9).

<sup>7</sup> I borrow this concept of the validity of the “ground level” vantage point from Gerald L. Bruns who, in *Tragic Thoughts at the End of Philosophy*, says that “wisdom means

---

connecting up with how things are in a practical rather than theoretical way. Wisdom means at least seeing the finitude of theory, or of reason, that is, seeing the human world as rational from within or from the ground up, not from top down” (10).

<sup>8</sup> Gershom Scholem expresses this point of view as well, asserting that “there is no such thing as mysticism in the abstract, that is to say, a phenomenon or experience which has no particular relation to other religious phenomena. There is no mysticism as such, there is only the mysticism of a particular religious system” (*Major Trends* 6).

<sup>9</sup> Obviously this implies some degree of both attention and willingness on the part of the reader to actively “take in” the matter of the text such that the claims of the self are questioned or temporarily suspended. While one can escape into, or lose oneself in, reading, it is doubtful whether that process can claim any lasting impact on the self unless one actively “works with” the text.

<sup>10</sup> A creative distancing from a fixed sense of selfhood or identity constructs is the burden of David Jarraway’s recent book, *Going the Distance. Dissident Subjectivity in Modernist American Literature*. Jarraway explores the “quite substantial tradition of pragmatist thought,” of the kind that Gerald Bruns calls “ground level” thinking, that has gained in prominence in American literature since Emerson. He finds that the “Cartesian project of a totally humanist and totally self-regarding subjectivity” is replaced in this tradition by a “consciousness [that] accedes to self-consciousness only through the recognition of a certain distance within (and from) itself” (5).

<sup>11</sup> Quoting Martha Nussbaum, Gerald L. Bruns explains a possible connection between the novel, in particular, and the kinds of existential questions faced by the questing self: “The moral agent, like the novelist, is ‘someone who is keenly alive in thought and

---

feeling to every nuance of the situation' (LK 143). Indeed, 'the novel can be a paradigm of moral activity' precisely because it is 'the intense scrutiny of particulars' (LK 148)" (*Tragic* 108).

<sup>12</sup> Astradur Eysteinnsson, for one, asserts that the term "modernism," for example, is a highly disputed conceptual paradigm and cannot be assumed to be either closed or fully accepted or representative as some critics do (1-5). It is a "name" (6) of a phenomenon, or group of phenomena, not a "*struggle over the meaning of significant changes*" (5; his italics).

<sup>13</sup> Originally, the list of novels was a much longer one as well, which sadly had to be shortened due to considerations of space (and time!). This list included novels by William Golding, Pat Barker, Walter M. Miller, Henry Roth, Yann Martel, David MacFarlane, Malcolm Lowry, and Nicholas Mosley. The two that I was most disappointed to let go were *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, by Miller, and *Hopeful Monsters*, by Mosley, because they point to a fascinating link between the transformative potential within language and subjectivity and the processes of mutation and replication in the genetic language of DNA.

<sup>14</sup> Northrop Frye, discussing the closed circle as an image for eternity, says that "it presents a somewhat lugubrious picture of whatever that impressive word is supposed to convey" (*Words* 164).

Chapter Two  
Shifting Frames of Reference: Rereading  
*The Mountain and the Valley*

The ending of Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* is notoriously difficult to interpret.<sup>1</sup> Is David Canaan's climb up the mountain and his subsequent death the ironic climax of a life of habitual self-aggrandizement? Or is it the tragic end of the life of a gifted individual cruelly hampered by limitations of personality, language and community? How the ending of the novel is read affects how Buckler's narrative strategies are interpreted throughout the whole of the text. Rereading David's story through the lens of the epilogue opens up a space in which reader begins to be allied with narrator in observing that story operate on various levels simultaneously. The process of rereading is crucial, for what occurs in the epilogue—the language in which it is conveyed, the way it parallels Ellen's symbolic rug-making, and its asymmetry with the prologue—allows, or rather demands, a reinterpretation of the novel in terms of shifting states of consciousness and a corresponding interplay of radically different levels of meaning. The notion of transpersonality, which will be brought into prominence by Jungian and mystical readings of the epilogue, provides a new way through which to examine the narrator's use of language, and the silence beyond language that it evokes. Likewise, the centrality of the notion of "translation" in this final chapter also ties in with this central preoccupation of Buckler's text, in which he tests the limits of language and explores its symbiotic relationship with the ineffable. Finally, rereading the novel in these ways brings into focus insights into the process of storytelling itself.

The epilogue begins with a disorienting blend of past and present tenses encapsulated in one line of text: "David stood at the window now, watching the

highway”(MV 274). Brought back to this “now,” the reader realizes that the entire progress of the novel has occurred, it would appear, within the brief instants of David’s reverie, which began in the prologue. In that reverie— in other words, in the main body of the narrative—the flow of narrative time has been held in check repeatedly while the narrator lingers over the evocation of a moment, a landscape, or a sensation. Time has been made to expand and contract, move backward and forward, according to this narrator’s will and vision. The beginning of the final chapter underscores the reader’s experience of the malleability of time that has been at play throughout the text: “Now” the narrator marshals the reader back to this narrative’s “present”. But the “now” beginning the epilogue is already a moment in the past by the end of “Prologue—The Rug.”

In that first chapter, David has escaped already from the kitchen, with its “sounds of seconds dropping” (7), leaving his grandmother alone with the rug she is hooking and the memories that fountain up as she handles the different pieces of her family’s clothing. With this emphasis on the passing of clock time (“seconds dropping”) and on the disappearance of the adult David from the scene of his grandmother’s stream of memories, the reader follows the narrative into what Paul Ricoeur characterizes as a zone of “active distancing of the future from the past [which] is what allows for the measurement of time not as a past or future thing but as an expectation or memory” (qtd. in Chamberlain 65-66). But whose consciousness is it that guides, contains, or is subject to / of the flow of memories that constitute the whole of the text? David’s voice or persona seems closest to the narrator’s, but who, then, is the narrator, since the ending of

the epilogue is almost, but not quite, coincident with David's death? From what vantage point is the text guided back to the "now" of the epilogue?

The status of this third-person omniscient narrator is relatively unproblematic until the misalignment of prologue and epilogue makes it a more pressing question. The insistent blurring of voice which occurs frequently throughout this final chapter, with its unexplained shifts of perspective from "I" to "you" to "he," also becomes a factor in opening up interspaces for the reader between locatable points of view. The always impossible to fix relationship between subject and object (no object without a subject, no subject without an object, and, somewhat obviously, the layering of these positions: the subject position of narrator or character is subjected to being the object of the reader's interpretation, and so on) becomes much more obviously a matter of movement here, between points of view and between levels of narrative function. This movement becomes the meaning (in the sense of *moving through the mean* or the in-between, as indicated in the previous chapter) of the interrelationship of narrator, character and reader.

As it becomes increasingly difficult in the epilogue to impose a separation between "David" and the "narrator" with any assurance, and since the flow of chronological time has been interfered with in the ways mentioned above, quite obviously David's death and, indeed, his whole life process, become subject to—or the object of—a variety of possible interpretations as well. Thus the narrative begins to assume the appearance of, as Daniel Frank Chamberlain characterizes Ricoeur's understanding of narrative, "a helix of dynamic productivity" (54). How the narrative of

David's death and life is read thus may involve the reader in the transformative potential involved in a dialectic of appropriation and distanciation:

Distanciation is the basis of cultural solitude and historical alienation ....

Appropriation is a renewed event that involves *dispossessing the narcissistic ego and repossessing the self* as well as making one's own a foreign mode of being in the world through a transformation brought on by play (Ricoeur 1981 a, 182-93). While all these dimensions meet their point of departure in the notion of an event, the process is not a closed circle. It is similar to a helix that returns to its starting point but at a different level. (55; emphases added)

How David's life can be read as a process of "dispossessing the narcissistic ego and repossessing the self" and how this engages the reader in a similar process will be discussed a little further on.

What I want to attend to first is what happens when the reader begins to come to terms with the imposition of the narrative frame of prologue and epilogue, and the disjunctive spaces that open up in what had appeared to be a fairly straightforward narrative. He or she becomes conscious, above all, of *design*, emphasizing, but also running counter to, the "exact" interrelationship of cause and effect that so fascinates David in the epilogue (290). On the one hand, the reader may sense the iron hand of the author compelling events and characters to assume and work out a preconceived "meaning." Toby and Anna arrive home precisely at a moment that prevents the Canaan family from going to cut the tree that will eventually fall on Joseph and kill him; a wind then blows "exactly" in such a way that Joseph never hears Martha's "absolving voice"

before his death (294). David never knows that he was not responsible for Effie's death because her mother Bess cannot securely grasp the word "leukemia"(146); his grandmother Ellen cannot or will not tell stories that concern her too closely, thus depriving David of an important source of insight, from within his own family, into aspects of his nature (25). All of these things make inescapable and obtrusive the sense of a willful design at work in the progress of the narrative. Control, mastery, or the lack thereof occurs most acutely in this novel in the handling of language, whether by the author / narrator or the characters themselves: language throughout the whole of the novel figures as the "one way to possess anything ... captured and conquered" (189). At the same time, the spoken word is the most potent destroyer of families and individuals, especially when it becomes a matter of the refusal to speak, of maintaining a willful silence.

A willful (and perverse) design is at work in the life of the main character as well. David, for reasons that are never entirely obvious,<sup>2</sup> has forced his own potential to turn in upon itself, containing it within the obsessively meticulous manner of living that he has chosen for himself. He manufactures the necessity of staying on the family farm once his parents have died, just as he manufactures the need to complete his chores in a manner "exactly" calculated to keep him perpetually busy:

Each day's routine immobilized him by its very immediacy. It had to be cleared away, extinguished, before the real nowness began. Each tomorrow (never doubted, in prospect, as a break in the repetition of today), itself becoming today, was repetitive nonetheless. (221)

David's ascent up the mountain in the epilogue, then, can be viewed as the final stage in a drama of progressive self-strangulation in the pursuit of total control, of complete and isolated agency. He now has no "inside" other than "a great white naked eye of self-consciousness" (275); he has abandoned his one remaining family member; he has "fabricated" his last interaction with a friend (278); and he has one last flaring of ecstatic self-aggrandizement before a heart attack puts an end to the patterns readers have watched take hold of him throughout his story.

But one can also read the end of this novel as the final instance of autocratic control on the part of an author who has bent David's fate to a preconceived idea. Buckler himself has said that he conceived of the ending of the novel first: "I tried to get my characters straight right at the start—to know exactly where they were going to wind up" ("My First Novel" 23). The use here of the word "exactly"—the same pressurized word and concept that stretches David's consciousness to the breaking point in the "Epilogue"—does little to reassure readers that the author's need to control his characters and his text is any less problematic than David's own enveloping desire for control. Consequently, as readers are left with images of Ellen completing her rug while David's body is buried in the falling snow and a partridge hurtles downward out of the sky, *The Mountain and the Valley* appears to offer a deliberately self-reflexive, ironic commentary on language, art, the artist, and the human personality. The narrative frame, the use of language in the text, and David's character development all support such a reading.

On the other hand, however, each of these elements in the novel bears layers of significance that complicate this interpretation. For at the same time that Buckler dictates both David's choice of path and final end, he infuses the narrative frame, David's

character and his own prose with powerfully alternative impulses. In a sense, David's story is complete with the last sentence before the epilogue begins, in the final vision that readers have there of him:

The pail of skim milk was almost more than his left arm could support on the way to the barn, but he didn't shift it to the right or set it down, halfway, and rest. Something unplastic, unbent, unshuffling in him, still drove straight ahead. His father, Joseph, would keep chopping as long as he could see, though his axe was dull and his feet were cold and the rest of the crew had given in to the blizzard hours ago. (273)

Still struggling to model himself upon the one person who was most different from himself and most admired, David's "story" ends with the willful quenching of his own gifts. But the fact that this story does not, in fact, end at this point but rather is enclosed within the asymmetrical frame of prologue and epilogue, as explained above, forces a shift in focus to the narrating consciousness that has told David's story. This casts the reader in the role of observer along with the narrator, even as the reader must speculate about this narrator's position in the text. Reader and narrator begin to function like the two selves written about in the "Mundaka Upanishad," doubles simultaneously of David and of each other: "two birds, two sweet friends, ... dwell on the self-same tree. The one eats the fruits thereof, and the other looks on in silence" (80)<sup>3</sup>. Once this happens, David's life and death begin to assume even more overtly the status of metaphor.

As Marta Dvorak points out in her study of Buckler's work, metaphor is a trope that, like irony, generates double vision, or even stereoscopic vision with its aptitude for cumulation, for the 'accumulated

intension' of words, according to Urban, is the source of fertile ambiguity and of the symbolic power of language, allowing the writer to name realities for which language has, and can have, no proper term. (221)

In an overview of Ricoeur's work on metaphor, Chamberlain demonstrates further how metaphor, like irony, stimulates this doubling of perspectives. Metaphor

has its base in three areas of tension: (1) "tension within the statement: between tenor and vehicle, between focus and frame"; (2) "tension between a literal interpretation that perishes at the hands of semantic impertinence and a metaphorical interpretation whose sense emerges through non-sense"; and (3) "tension in the relational function of the copula: between identity and difference in the interplay of resemblance ... between an 'is' and an 'is not'" ([Ricoeur]1977, 247-8). ... The principal characteristics of metaphor are, then, tension, an openness to the world, a questioning, non-sense and sense, context, focus and frame. (60)

In the double vision instigated by the presence of both irony *and* metaphor, David's story can be read from more generative points of view. For the discussion that will follow, it would be helpful to keep in mind what Northrop Frye has to say about one "puzzling fact of modern literature": "Irony descends from the low mimetic: it begins in realism and dispassionate observation. But as it does so, it moves steadily towards myth, and dim outlines of sacrificial rituals and dying gods begin to reappear in it" (*Anatomy* 42). First of all, though, here is a closer look at how irony operates in this text.

While some critics, such as Alan Young and Claude Bissell, do attest to the mystical or transcendent moments both in David's ascent up the mountain and in his

earlier performance during a school play, they also end by pointing out the collapse of those moments into the overarching irony of the final scene. Robert Gibbs comes closest to affirming a stronger counter-design at work in the novel when he says that, “[t]here is ... for all the irony in its design, a kind of transcendence at the end” (302). Speculating that the falling partridge may be supposed to represent “David’s soul flying out of its valley” (302), he further points out that the paradoxes and musicality built into the variations of narrative voice and the harmony “within the broken lines of Ellen’s thought”(298) resist the enclosing frame so that “this well-closed book [is], in a way, unclosed” (302). Yet Gibbs, too, emphasizes that David does not succeed in transcending his errors or limits: “Momentary lapses and chance interruptions—the word spoken out of season or not spoken when called for—have lasting consequences” (301-302). Reading David’s ending in *The Mountain and the Valley* as a failure to actualize his potential—making his final vision before his death a parody of that of the ascetic hermit on the mountaintop—is a valid and indeed a necessary interpretation. So far, however, critics have failed to take Buckler up on his parenthetical comment in one interview that David’s death “was to be the crowning point of the whole dramatic irony (and, of course, the most overt piece of symbolism in the book)” (qtd. in Young 36).

Irony, as it is usually explicated in terms of this novel, occurs in several ways: in the excruciating gap between David’s potential and its miserly expression, in the way that his desire for control results in the eradication of what is best in himself, and in the fact that his death occurs at the moment of his apparent epiphany or enlightenment—thus making it impossible for him to write the book he dreams of writing. Some readers choose to find ironic as well the way in which Buckler himself seems to be implicated in

the failings of his main character (Fee 71). Most critics also observe at some point that the “crowning irony” (Orange 52) of the novel’s ending is that *Buckler* has written the novel that David failed to write (Seaman, Young, Fee): “while critics disagree about the positives and negatives of the ending, they seem unanimous in their faith that Ernest Buckler has written the novel that David was unable to complete” (Van Rys 65). But irony also may be seen to operate more generatively simply as an instigator of, as Cleanth Brooks terms it, “the recognition of incongruities” (209).

Incongruity has already been noted in the epilogue’s temporal disjunction with the prologue. Observing this incongruity initiates a mode of watching in which the reader seems to meet the narrator on a temporal plane at some distance from the temporality at work in the narrative. These gaps between levels of meaning and between levels of temporality function in a manner akin to Chamberlain’s description of “*distentio*,” a concept derived from St. Augustine: “*Distentio*, like an ‘event’, is the interruption of the field of presence by dividing it and distancing the expectation of the future and the memory of the past so as to allow for an interaction between them in the present” (65). On the opening page of the prologue, the narrator refers to a clock-like movement of time with the staccato noises of the heat tick of the stove, the “tick, tick, tick, of emptiness” that David feels and the mat hook moving in his grandmother’s hand like “the sounds of seconds dropping” (7). This is right before a break occurs in the flow of narrative time with a movement from the prologue to the main body of the narrative. In the temporal disjunction introduced by the shift from prologue to Part One, and in the asymmetry of prologue and epilogue, “who is speaking?” becomes also a question of “from where is one speaking?” (Ricoeur, qtd. in Chamberlain 74). *Someone’s* consciousness makes a

return, through the various stories, moments and memories, to the epilogue. As the question becomes one of *whose* perceiving consciousness guides the telling of David's story, the reader enters that space of metaphor "at the core of perception," wherein "lies a fundamental 'non' sense .... It is not speech but the silence from which speech emerges. It is an awareness, an experience prior to any subject / object opposition. It precedes even such basic dichotomies as birth / death" (Chamberlain 18). Within the spaces of this observing consciousness, different ways of interpreting the layering of and movement between symbologies or metaphors in the prologue and epilogue—that of the making of Ellen's rug and the stages of David's climb up the mountain—emerge.

"Prologue—The Rug" describes the rug that Ellen is hooking, using scraps of clothing that have belonged to each member of the Canaan family: "The pattern of the rug was not intricate. It had a wide dark border, then a target pattern of circles radiating from the centre of the canvas. David had marked them for her" (9). Ellen continues to work on this rug in the epilogue, its progress coinciding with David's journey up the mountain; it is completed at the moment of his death. That this rug is mandala-shaped<sup>4</sup>, and that Ellen works her way closer to its centre as David climbs the mountain to its peak, suggests that Buckler has framed his narrative with archetypal images of self-discovery and self-transformation, even as Ellen works within a frame, recasting the threads of her family's lives like some goddess of fate. Factor in the manipulations of time in the text, the narrator who is both akin to and distant from the character of David, and the resulting discord between David's "failure," or death, and the existence of the novel itself, and readers may begin to suspect that they have encountered the timeless, transpersonal world of the psyche.<sup>5</sup> When the archetypal and mystical resonances in the

final chapter have been uncovered, Buckler's low-key, parenthetical remark quoted above that, while David's death is "ironic," it is also "the most overt piece of symbolism in the book," appears to be an intriguing bit of understatement.

Ellen's rug, then, inaugurates a novel that may be read, at its core, as being about psychic processes of self-transformation. Mandalas are circular forms (as is the novel), which have as their

basic motif ... the premonition of a centre of a personality, a kind of central point within the psyche, to which everything is related, by which everything is arranged .... The energy of the central point is manifested in the almost irresistible compulsion and urge to *become what one is*. (Jung, "Mandala Symbolism" 357; emphasizes his)

The image of the mandala pertains to the larger "self" according to Jung, a "psychic totality" imaged as both circle and "centre, neither of which coincides with the ego but includes it, just as a larger circle encloses a smaller one" ("Rebirth" 141). With the deliberate juxtaposition of this well-known archetype of self-transformation with another—the journey up the mountain—the final chapter invites rereading from a Jungian perspective.<sup>6</sup> It is of the essence of Jung's psychoanalysis that the person is divided, in the sense of *watching* the expressions of his or her psyche for clues about the self's interior processes of growth, death, and rebirth. The capacity to be a self divided is a core part of the process of in-divid-uation.<sup>7</sup> This observer capacity is not the detached, transcendent philosophical eye, untouched by and distant from the world of the physical, the personality, desire and will. Rather, the observing self is both immersed in his or her own life and identity *and* watching them unfold at the same time. Jung speaks of the

“growing out of” insoluble problems that occurs which instigates a “raising of the level of consciousness,” without requiring that aspects of the self be left behind or cut off, but involves instead the integration of those capacities and forces at higher levels (“Commentary” 88). When this process takes place in the individual, what

on a lower level, had led to the wildest conflicts ... viewed from the higher level of the personality, now seemed like a storm in the valley seen from a high mountain top. This does not mean that the thunderstorm is robbed of its reality; it means that, instead of being in it, one is now above it. But since, with respect to the psyche, *we are both valley and mountain*, it seems a vain illusion if one feels oneself to be above what is human. The individual certainly does feel the affect and is convulsed and tormented by it, yet at the same time he is aware of a higher consciousness which prevents him from being identical with the affect, a consciousness which takes the affect objectively, and can say, ‘I know that I suffer’. (88; emphases added)

When symbolized in art and ritual, the changes in the self that can result from such shifts in levels of consciousness, Jung says, are “usually represented by the fateful transformations—death and rebirth—of a god or a god-like hero,” which occur and recur in moments “of eternity in time” (“Rebirth” 117, 118). Time “flattens” in the epilogue (*MV* 281), allowing the re-experiencing of past events; David’s nature, that has tended to seem both empty and grandiose, emerges as transpersonal and potentially “god-like”; and the moments of “translation” emphasized again and again in this final chapter may be read as portending a rebirth, of which the translation of David from flesh to text is one

version.<sup>8</sup> The ending of this novel therefore can be read as the delineation of one individual's inner process of psychic evolution, wherein David Canaan is seen to undergo the kind of

natural transformation processes which simply happen to us, whether we like it or not .... These processes develop considerable psychic effects ... sufficient in themselves to make any thoughtful person ask himself what really happened to him .... [H]e too, will draw mandalas and seek to shelter in their protective circle; in the perplexity and anguish of his self-chosen prison, which he had deemed a refuge, he is transformed into a being akin to the gods. (Jung, "Rebirth" 130)

If he is being faced with psychic processes beyond his control, David's withdrawal into his "self-chosen prison," then, can be seen as a natural reaction to overwhelming internal pressure and to the resulting dissonance he experiences between himself and the outside world.

Jung observes that these "[n]atural transformation processes announce themselves mainly in dreams" (130). David's journey towards an encounter with his inner nature, marked in the text by what Claude Bissell calls a "series of illuminations" ("Introduction" x), begins in childhood with his dream of climbing the mountain. In that dream, as he walks with his father and brother, he becomes conscious of the existence of a parallel path upon which he walks alone (*MV* 15), just as his final journey up the mountain in the epilogue will exist on a dual plane, both physical and psychical. This dream is juxtaposed in the text with a dream that Chris has had of almost, but not quite, consummating a sexual act with Bess. Thus David's dream of failing to reach camp and Chris's dream of

failing to attain his body's fulfillment emphasize as well the simultaneity and interpenetration of physical and psychical journeys, of internal and external realities.

Both David's dream and his ascent up the mountain in the epilogue contain strange echoes of Jung's own dream of climbing "slowly and toilsomely" up a mountain, that he describes in this way: "Night was coming on, and I saw ... a brook flowing down ... and two paths leading upwards, one to the left, the other to the right" ("Kore" 193). Jung recounts his delight when he happened upon an "obscure alchemical treatise" that helped him to make sense of this dream. Written by Gerard Dorn in the sixteenth century, the treatise states that men may "bend their steps towards the *second region of the world*, making their crossing *on the bridge of infirmity*" where "you will come to the camp of wisdom" and see "a stream of living water flowing with such wonderful artifice from the mountain peak" (193-194, his emphases). David, in *his* dream, sees "the camp on this other road ... but when we came back to the other road the camp was gone" (*MV* 15). And, in fact, on their first attempt to climb the mountain together, David, Joseph and Chris are turned away at the bridge. The time for crossing the bridge and finding the camp has not arrived yet for David, and will not until the end of the novel. In his several attempts to reach the top of the mountain with family members or with his friend Toby, something always intervenes to prevent him from consummating his desire. By the final chapter, however, David's turn away from what Dorn characterized as "The Tour of the World" (qtd. in "Kore" 193) is complete, and, carrying his infirmity with him, he crosses the bridge over water into which "a living movement" begins to come (*MV* 279). Beyond "defeat," "apathy," and "despair," and with a will that "remained unbroken," David begins his final climb up the mountain (275).

As he climbs, moments and faces from his past rise up out of the stillness of his mind. He drinks at the brook, oblivious to the way the image of his face “wobbled and disintegrated”; he then continues past “the highest point of the brook that had held all their images at some time or other” (282). When he crosses the brook, David presses past both his limiting self-identification and his limited acknowledgement of others as merely reflections of himself. As he climbs upward he draws closer to the transpersonality that in a mandala is symbolized by what Jung calls “an innermost point ... surrounded by a periphery containing everything that belongs to the self—the paired opposites that make up the total personality” (“Mandala Symbolism” 357). As David begins consciously to absorb the significance of the paired opposites in his own life—Martha and Joseph, Anna and Chris, Effie and Toby—he comes under the compulsion to *be* what he sees: “it seems as if he must go out *into* these things. He must *be* a tree and a stone and a shadow.... He must be exactly as each of them was, everywhere and at all times” (*MV* 286). This stage of David’s experience is reminiscent of Martin Buber’s account of a state of relationship and awareness so profound that self and other encompass one another with no sensation of division remaining. As Buber expresses it, “if will and grace are joined ... as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an It .... But thinking that you have brought this off in your own case, must you again divide the indivisible?” (58-59). David must, or so he thinks, and the pressure of maintaining each distinction, that “fanned at the touch of thought into another infinite divisibility,” threatens to destroy his sanity (*MV* 286).

At the pinnacle of this pressure from all of the voices, all of the faces and all of the multitudinous perceptions which explode in his mind, David reaches the top of the

mountain, at first unaware that he has done so. From here, he can see his place of origin—the “place of the middle” as Jung calls it (“Rebirth” 139).<sup>9</sup> And then,

without warning ... the translation came. All the voices were soaked up at once. Not in a vanishing, but as the piercing clamour of nerves in fever is soaked up in sleep. Sleep is the answer. At the moment of waking again their voices are still there, but the finding of the answer goes out over them, smoothening and softening and absorbent as firelight. There is no accusing in them now. They are like the challenging strangeness of a figure walking back-to along the road. As you come closer it turns and discloses the face of a friend. (*MV* 292)

At the top of the mountain, David comes into close proximity with what Jung calls “the inner friend of the soul into whom Nature herself would like to change us” (“Rebirth” 131). This friendship had been mirrored by his earlier, symbiotic relationship with Toby—“that other person who we also are and yet can never attain to completely” (“Rebirth” 131). David’s encounter with this “friend,” that Jung believed may be met with in the interspaces between identity and observer within an ever-expanding self, is amplified by the formal complexity of these passages. The present moment of David’s experience, conveyed in the past tense, is explicated and enlarged by the seemingly past experience of the narrator, conveyed in the present tense: voices and times blur, or are held in a sort of suspension, that they may overlay and mutually inform and communicate with each other. Viewed, then, from a Jungian perspective, with its idea of the “enlargement of the personality” (“Rebirth” 120) and the possibilities for communication

between various aspects of the self, neither David's habit of self-aggrandizement nor his (narrative) death need be seen as the evidences of failure that they often are.

According to Jung, the attempt to identify the "ego-consciousness with the [transpersonal] self" is both a normal response and a dangerous one, for the ego is "likely to collapse under the impact of the collective forces of the psyche" (145, 147). Beyond this, however, is the notion that death is a requisite event before a rebirth, involving the translation of the self from one state to another. Jung explains that an alchemist would view this event (symbolized as the transformation of base metal into gold) as "the transformation of what is mortal in me into what is immortal .... It shakes off the mortal husk that I am and awakens to a life of its own" (134). In any case, self-transformation would seem to be an infinite process with an unattainable end. David's consciousness, as he himself realizes, would not be complete even if he lived for another hundred years (*MV* 293), instead of dying at the moment of an epiphany. As Jung says:

It would be desirable to know what happens afterwards. But, just as neither the philosophical gold nor the philosopher's stone was ever made in reality, so nobody has ever been able to tell the story the whole way, at least not to mortal ears, for it is not the story-teller but death who speaks the final "*consummatum est*". ("Study" 348)

That Jung leaves his commentary at this point, and that this process in its entirety exceeds the grasp of the storyteller, reflects the dilemma of the mystic who desires to communicate a visionary experience.

From this point of view, "the saying of the *Upanishads* is true: 'Words are weariness'" (Mascaró 11). Jung, whom Freud called "something of a mystic himself"

(qtd. in De Certeau, "Mysticism" 12), was fascinated by correspondences between his own psychoanalytical theories and the mysticism of the East.<sup>10</sup> The *Upanishads* articulate what Jung would characterize as the transpersonal nature of the psyche in these terms: "Brahman is all and Atman is Brahman" ("Mandukya Upanishad" 83). Atman, the soul or Self which is the spark of the eternal in each individual, "pervades everything, is one with everything" (Powell 98). It "has four conditions" ("Mandukya" 83), or "four states of consciousness culminating in knowledge of the Absolute" (Powell 98). These four conditions or states can be seen as corresponding with the stages that David Canaan traverses on his journey to the top of the mountain.<sup>11</sup>

The "Mandukya Upanishad" defines the first or lowest condition of Atman as being "the waking life of outward-moving consciousness, enjoying the seven outer gross elements" (83). This first level is termed *vaisvanara* "which literally means 'common to all men'," and refers "not only to the individual's perception, but also to that which is perceived, the universe" (Powell 98). It is the level of the "ordinary" world of perception, is dominated by the subject / object dichotomy and possesses only the beginnings of self-awareness. At the base of the mountain David encounters Steve who, like Chris, represents a life that is dominated by body-awareness without much in the way of introspection for balance. Whereas for David, "[e]ven the sensations of his own flesh had become outside," another thing to be observed, for Steve there was

an inside and an outside ... too, but he would never look at the eye of his own watching. He saw the trees and the fields. Yet in a way he didn't see them at all. A tree was a tree, a thing for the axe. A field was a field. You

hauled across it when it was frozen, ploughed it when it was soft. That's  
all there was to it. (*MV* 277)

After this encounter, during which his “mind deliberately suspended its own nature” so that he could communicate with Steve, David proceeds to climb the mountain (277). At its base, the dense growth of scrub spruce was “impenetrable to the eye,” as if imaging that first state of consciousness in which detached observation in the midst of experience is a virtual impossibility (280). David, who has seen himself as central to the experiences of everyone around him, and who has only related to others as reflections of his own self-importance, pauses to drink at the brook, paying no attention to his disintegrating image (282). He climbs past the brook, which unreflectingly reflects everything within itself, and through a flood of sensual perceptions triggered by the landscape surrounding him, onto another stage of the mountain.

The second condition of Atman is “*taijasa*, ‘the brilliant’. The dream state is its field, it is inwardly cognitive .... *Taijasa* is a purely mental condition; the senses are withdrawn from gross objects, but now alight upon ‘subtle objects’—that is, impressions of waking life stored in memory” (Powell 98). The “Mandukya Upanishad” describes this stage as “the dreaming life of inner-moving consciousness, enjoying the seven subtle inner elements in its own light and solitude” (83). At the point when David is halfway up the mountain, the scrub spruce yields to hardwood, which “unlike the spruces, stood singly and separate .... The cold yellow sun and the thin cold air hung and breathed in the spaces between them, like a great centrifugal eddy of lightness. Their limbless trunks broke into a twist of searching branches as they reached higher against the sky” (*MV* 282). David becomes conscious of being entirely alone, at which point a “translation”

suddenly occurs: “It was the thing that comes only once or twice ever, without hint or warning. It was the complete translation to another time .... It is not a *memory* of that time .... It is not a returning: you are there for the first time, immediately” (283). He is “waking that clean April morning” when he, his father, and Chris are about to try to climb the mountain for the first time: the same morning that he dreams of climbing the mountain by an alternate, solitary path (283).

Then a flood of similar translations begins to inundate him. His consciousness is not able to process such an overwhelming input of information:

If he took the voices one at a time, his listening could trace sharp and clear every vein of their story.

And yet some unquenchable leaven in the mind’s thirst kept sending it back for the taste of complete realization it just missed. Even if you listened thoroughly, they seemed to wait, with that awful, chiding stillness, for something more. The mere *presence* of the objects about him was like a kind of accusation. It was as if you’d been given eyes for the first time; your first sight was met by the teeming insatiable hunger to be seen, of everything that was there. (285)

Attempting to encapsulate an infinite number of observable phenomena by rendering them “exactly” in his own consciousness, overwhelmed by the “swarming multitude of all the voices” (285), the faces, the infinite permutations of cause and effect and alternate possibilities “not traceable in space or boundable by time” (291), David reaches a crisis point:

... he put his arms about the great pine and thrust his forehead against its hard body. He screamed, “Stop ... Stop ... Stop ... STOP ...”

And then he raised his head and he saw that he was at the very top of the mountain.

He had been within sight of this great solitary pine before, but he had never stood beneath it. It was beyond the last ridge of the great hardwood. Beyond it the lane of the road levelled off between low-clinging scrub, and then fell. (291)

And here, “without warning, suddenly again, the translation came”: all the voices are absorbed into silence just “as the piercing clamour of nerves in fever is soaked up in sleep. Sleep is the answer” (292). The third condition of Atman “is the sleeping life of silent consciousness ... [that] is all-powerful, all-knowing, the inner ruler, the source of all, the beginning and end of all beings” (“Mandukya” 83). This is the state of “*prajna*, or ‘of one who knows properly’” (Powell 98). Barbara Powell quotes Swami Sarvananda as saying that in this state, “cognition [is] reduced to a mere indefinite mass, full of bliss, enjoying bliss, and forming the gateway to all definite cognitions” (98).

As David himself recognizes, this newly relaxed state of mind, this “sleep,” is not a final plateau but a preliminary stage before another expansion into further possibilities of knowledge and expression: “As he thought of telling these things exactly, all the voices came close about him. They weren’t swarming now. He went out into them until there was no inside left. He saw at last how you could *become* the thing you told” (*MV* 292). As Powell explains, “*Prajna* ... is compared to *Isvara*, the Lord, because from this deep consciousness springs the whole phenomena of waking and dream states and back

into it they dissolve .... This is much like creation emanating from, and returning to, *Isvara*, God” (98). Perhaps not only David’s characteristic grandiosity is implied, then, in his thought that “I know how it is with everything” (*MV* 292). And neither, possibly, is there only irony to be found in his death: the final condition of Atman is Atman itself, beyond words, beyond dualities. As Powell explains, again quoting Sarvananda,

the fourth level, *turiya* ... [is] qualitatively and categorically different from the other states, yet at the same time present in all the states. It is, in reality, not a fourth part of anything, but the whole of reality. It is the Self ... “unseen, unrelated, inconceivable, uninferable, unimaginable, indescribable .... All phenomena cease in it. It is peace, it is bliss, it is non-duality. This is the Self, and it is to be realized.” (98)

When read from this perspective, the fact that David’s body dies at this point is quite appropriate: the novel has taken David as far as language can.

John Van Rys agrees that *The Mountain and the Valley* “narrate[s] the disappearance of David’s voice from the multi-voiced world he inhabits” (68). But he also believes that, on “the mountain-top, David’s discourse is torn from reality; instead, he seeks to master a nonexistent meta-language that will soak up all voice in a monologic vision. David seeks to become the *Logos*, the creator and Messiah who unlike Christ grasps at godhood” (77). The notion of “translation” may be a key antidote to this negative framing of David’s experience. In “The Task of the Translator,” Walter Benjamin points the way to “that which seeks to represent, to produce itself in the evolving of languages .... Though concealed and fragmentary, it is an active force in life as the symbolized thing itself, whereas it inhabits linguistic creations only in symbolized

form” (79). Buckler’s frequent and precise use of simile, which creates surprisingly vivid flashes of interconnected sense experiences through the translation of one thing to another, seems to echo Benjamin’s fascination with correspondences. Hannah Arendt has said of this facet of Benjamin’s thought that

[w]hat fascinated him about the matter was that the spirit and its material manifestation were so intimately connected that it seemed permissible to discover everywhere Baudelaire’s *correspondences*, which clarified and illumined one another if they were properly correlated, so that finally they would no longer require any interpretative or explanatory commentary.

(“Introduction,” *Illuminations* 11)

David experiences such correspondences on his ascent up the mountain: “He could think of anything now. Everything seemed to be an aspect of something else. There seemed to be a thread of similarity running through the whole world” (*MV* 281). And Buckler defends his great care in creating these webs of inter-relationship in the “Author’s Questionnaire” for *Ox Bells and Fireflies*, where he says that he “intended to underline ... the inter-locking and cross-pollination of all things tangible or intangible” (qtd. in Dvorak 200).

Marta Dvorak further explains that

[a] close examination of Buckler’s recurrent rhetorical devices reveals that the dynamics of his writing involve creating simultaneously, in a paradoxical fashion, a web of ramifications that generate a cross-network of analogies and a corresponding movement from the Many to the One. ...

The metaphor, in particular, plays a central role in Buckler’s textual

production, as an agent of marvellous transformation, allowing the reader to see one thing under the aspect of another, or to see together, in the same category, what the ordinary gaze does not or cannot associate. Buckler's metaphors do not describe the world—they create a new vision of the world. (10-11)

And yet, Dvorak too, in her excellent study of Buckler's linguistic and philosophical concerns, still sees David, as do so many other critics, as a "failed artist" (108). This constitutes a failure on their part to see the spirallings of meaning at work in the language that conveys David's experience. Throughout the novel, alongside its acute sensitivity to the correspondences of thing with thing, and microcosm with macrocosm, the importance of communication and community also has been a primary concern. With an eye to watching how design, comparisons, juxtapositions, and parentheses all work together to enable the narrator (to whom, for convenience sake, I will refer as "he") to sow his messages in the text, one section of the novel will suffice as an example: "Part One—The Play."

After Anna and Ellen view a captured fawn (and Anna realizes with a sick feeling that she can never truly contact the fawn's reality), the narrative shifts to a description of the new church site (23). The raising of this church involved the contribution of everyone in the community:

Joseph had given the site for it, as well as his share of lumber and time.

Everyone in the place (Baptists and Catholics too) had driven a nail or laid a board or helped raise a rafter. Spurge Gorman had hewn the cross from the great mountain ash he'd looked out for axe handles; and Peter

Delahunt had fixed the cross to the steeple. The bishop from Halifax had consecrated the new burial ground only last week. (24)

Here the narrator inserts a two-paragraph parenthetical commentary describing Martha's fear that the bishop might stay to dinner. This is another notation of the narrator's ability to inhabit and communicate the points of view of all these characters; it demonstrates as well his willingness to play with the narrative line, to allow bubbles of depth insight, sparked by location, event or what have you, to form and be expressed. And in that parenthesis—detailing Martha's fear of the unfamiliar other—the bishop turns out to be “only a man” as Joseph asserted he would (24). He smokes, dresses casually, eats well, and takes notice of details like Martha's carrot fern; he is responsive to everydayness, is not alien from it. He is a “ground level” person in spite of his exalted position. The narrator notes as well, in a characteristic shifting of pronouns, that “[h]e was a smiling man who made you feel like smiling too” (24). This “you” is from Martha's perspective, as filtered through the narrator, but it is used as the second-person pronoun gets used throughout this novel, especially in the epilogue. It signals commonality, universality: “you” is a plurality meaning “we,” all of us, individually and collectively. It means that “I” experienced this, but that I also know that we all would. “You” is “us” in this novel, as well as other. Its usage rests on the supposition of the communicability of experience, of at least a partial commonality.

The narrative shifts again, then, to a description of Ellen's sensitivity to “mystery.” For her, “mystery still dwelt in the old church four miles down the road .... It too was a building made by human hands like any other building ... but she felt that the mystery breathed there all by itself whether there was the sound of voices on the road or

not” (24). The notion of mystery gets picked up again a little further on, with the deaths of two men of the community. It touches the houses of Spurge and Peter, an “illegible secret” the people could not read but could sense. Alongside the presence of mystery is the frequent repetition of the word “enigmatic.” The “enigmatic windows” reflect the beams from the sinking sun (36), and mourners try to understand the “enigmatic face” of the dead man (37). At the funeral services, everyone

held up their faces meekly to the rain of solemn words. They heard only the sound, not the heart of them. It wasn't until the organ began, the one sound which chords with the watcher's feeling at the enigmatic language of death, that everyone wept. (38)

Following a series of chapters, then, in which the importance of community and of attempts to communicate are highlighted (along with their abuses and distortions, in the speech and behaviour of Rachel Gorman and of the men coming back from the log drive), what is delineated here is the point at which such attempts must fail. Also emphasized, however, is the translation from one state of awareness to another: “Swiftly as a breeze, Peter and Spurge passed from fact to memory .... Now the grass was ordinary grass only. The fields became familiar weekday fields again” (38). The translation back into the ordinary, the everyday, illuminates the fact that the reverse has taken place as well. “Ordinary” things, faces and words have been transformed by the numinous, touched by mystery and perceived differently, although it had not been possible to express or understand their meanings directly or completely. After the conclusion of this section, the novel proceeds to chart the myriad paths of communication frustrated, aborted, or

wilfully denied. Yet an emphasis has also been established, subtly, on the things that cannot be spoken or interpreted, but whose reality is felt nonetheless.

Much of what the narrator describes with such loving and agonizing precision focuses on silence: still moments of evanescent beauty that can be only approached in language through simile, the yoking together of two ineffables which grasps at meaning through the translation of one thing into another. Most of the power struggles between characters in this novel, often occurring in symbiotic pairs, centre upon their choices to speak or to remain silent. Language in this narrative distorts reality and falls short of expressing it, but functions as a necessary bridge between human beings nonetheless. Silence, too, can wound but can also heal. Paradoxically, when David experiences perfect peacefulness on the mountain, he has to speak it aloud: “With the use of his tongue, the sound of it suddenly in the stillness broke the grip on his thinking as the first halting words of forgiveness do” (286). The healing silence that stills the assaulting voices makes David think that he should “*tell* it .... That is the answer” (298). For the mystic, language expresses the silence from which all things come and leads back to it again.<sup>12</sup> It is a bridge emerging from and extending toward what Emerson terms “the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related” (“Oversoul” 134). David Canaan is translated into silence and into whiteness at the end of the novel, the silence that contains every voice and the colour that is “made of all the other colours but of no colour itself at all” (*MV* 294). At the same moment, Ellen sees that, in her rug, only “one tiny circle remained. White. White ... She picked up the scrap of fine white lace and made of it the last circle” (295). As he contemplates translating

silence into words, David is translated, from being to book (implicitly), from life to death, from identity to mystery.

This is a text that unquestionably highlights issues of dominance and control via the use of language: the framing of the story, the prose style, and the various characters' wounding use of speech as well as, conversely, their refusal to speak, can all easily be construed as "phallogentric" as Janice Kulyk Keefer insists (165). Buckler, the narrator, and David, as well as many of the other characters in this novel, betray a desire to be the controlling, perceiving subject, particularly through the agency of language. Margery Fee sees a coincidence between David and Buckler as word-wranglers: David, "like Buckler, longs to transcend his awkward relation to language, not by abandoning words, but by making his artificial use of them seem natural, rather than worked over. That *Buckler's* style seems often to fall short of both his own and David's standards has troubled many critics" (71). Fee quotes Warren Tallman's commentary from 1960 as reinforcement of this idea: "Buckler has no compositional key except maximum intensity. Sentence after sentence is forced to a descriptive pitch which makes the novel exceptionally wearing to read" (71). This may be true, but the novel also emphasizes communication amongst multiple perspectives in a way that substantially dilutes these charges against its apparently controlling discourse. Likewise, the way in which the narrative appears to push towards a prefigured end while in fact hosting an interplay of opposing energies marks it as being open to incursions and communications from other levels of meaning.

David's development exhibits a similar paradox: solipsistic to the point of self-annihilation, he proceeds according to a fierce desire to hold himself separate from, and untouched by, contingency and the uncontrollable other. The stories he tells himself

about his superior abilities elevate him to a lonely pinnacle, in which others figure only as adoring audiences. He is not alone in this tendency, for stories in this novel often figure as modes of control rather than as modes of communication. When the men come back from the log drive in which two men have died, each of them “was telling over and over whatever part of it he himself had seen” (34). I-centred, this kind of storytelling processes traumatic events and asserts the self’s mastery over the upsurge of chance and disaster, while relying on the other as witness: “They repeated over and over again the things they’d said to each other along the road, asking each other over and over again for sanction” (34). Listening to them talk, David walks with the men and tries to understand his first encounter with death and the way that grown-ups deal with it:

The men were mostly silent. But now and then they spoke about their work, the season, even a smirking joke that had to do with women. This had no relation to the shock that was basic in all their minds, but David didn’t understand that. He didn’t know that adult speech was merely an instrument of disguise. Their remarks seemed heartless to him. He didn’t see how they could talk at all. He hadn’t said a word, even to Chris. (35)

Based on a misunderstanding of that defensive use of language, a schism opens up in David between speaking and not speaking that plagues him for the rest of his life.

David’s own stories are quite often responses to experience he is unable to process. The first of these self-amplifying stories occurs while he is walking with the men. In it he reinvents himself as a powerful military leader, clearly in order to neutralize a new and painful sense of helplessness. He cannot bear the knowledge of how much his friend Effie will suffer when she learns of her father’s death, especially when he contrasts

her reality with his, secure in his much-loved father's presence. Just at that moment, someone mentions the long years of war Pete had survived only to die now in a freak accident: "That's the way she goes" is Joseph's laconic comment. And suddenly, "David wasn't with them at all" (35). There, for the first time in this narrative, David escapes into one of his grandiose stories, one of his fantasies of heroism: "suddenly, like waking from a muddled dream, he knew exactly what he was going to be. He was going to be the greatest general in the whole world" (35). In response to a painfully "muddled" reality, David fantasizes about rescuing soldiers trapped under fire. His acute sensitivity to others provokes an equally acute distancing from them into the world of his own imagination. Yet the stories David tells himself, although always featuring extremes of self-dramatization, are also always about sharing his gifts with others, enabling others through his art to know that their innermost reality has been understood and communicated.

On the mountain, David's self-focus, pushed to another extreme, becomes inverted spontaneously into an overwhelming awareness of and responsiveness to an abundance of energies and possibilities that he cannot even begin to encompass, although he attempts to be in control of these as well. His urge to describe them, to fix them in a frame of perception and understanding is not wrong, although doomed to inadequacy. It is a part of the ongoing spiralling of communion and communication that the narrator has been concerned to draw readers' attention to, a momentary encounter with what is other than the self—the inner double who both is and is not "you". But in the end, the epilogue to *The Mountain and the Valley* will be read as the reader chooses. At the moment of his novel's most overt display of authorial management, Buckler yields control to the reader in the final chapter with its movement between levels of perspective and its layering of

metaphor and irony. He infuses this chapter with the language of mysticism and the archetypal imagery of psychic transformation, even as he follows David's frailties of personality to their logical conclusion. Perhaps the mixture of all of these elements accounts for the "greyness" into which the ending descends (295-296). David's death can be read either as ironic anti-climax of a life of posturing and thwarted potential, or it can be read as a translation of his experience beyond the limitations of personality, language, and text. The weight given to either of these interpretations must be meted out by each reader accordingly, but, though the novel ends with the grey partridge falling from the "grey-laden air ... as if burdened with the weight of its own flight," it falls "swoopingly, directly, intensely, exactly" on the *far* side of the mountain (296).

Whatever the level at which all of these perspectives and voices come together—beyond the limitations of each single one—a pooling together of experience into an ongoing process occurs. Thus David's consciousness ends and does not end. In *The Four Degrees of Passionate Charity*, Richard of St Victor writes the following which seems to parallel somewhat the four stages of consciousness written of in the *Upanishads*:

In the first degree God enters into the soul and she turns inward into herself. In the second she ascends above herself and is lifted up to God. In the third the soul, lifted up to God, passes over altogether into Him. *In the fourth the soul goes forth on God's behalf and descends below herself.*

(qtd. in *Mysticism. A Study* 100-101; italics in the original)

Throughout the novel, there has been a guiding consciousness that instigates a rereading of David's double journey, the blurring of subjectivities, and the outcroppings of

metaphor which interrupt his linear path, making it into a circle that does not arrive “exactly” where it left, but spirals up and down through different levels of meaning.

A Hindu mystic would say that consciousness does not die, that David’s physical death is immaterial in the sense that an observing, experiencing consciousness will continue on, incorporating the lessons learned and bringing them to fruition in another life, another incarnation. A Western reader does not have to engage with such beliefs to benefit from the double vision offered in this novel. The re-reader has accompanied David and his family, watched their mistakes and taken note of the narrator’s guiding and blending of characters, his emphasis on communication, and his ironic treatment of the desire to possess and conquer through language. The eye/I of the reader has accompanied David on his ascent up the mountain, and then made the return back into the valley of the book to make sense of his “ending.” This has been done in search of the inner eye/I of the narrator,<sup>13</sup> the hidden consciousness that guides the shaping and transmitting of the story.

As Dvorak points out,

[a]nticipating Merleau-Ponty’s theoretical elaboration, Buckler argues that our gaze must be coupled with another gaze, a complementary one: ourselves seen from the outside, as another would see us, in the process of contemplating him or her. Buckler’s writing is thus ... an epistemological attempt to arrive at an understanding of the nature ... of the human mind, of the cosmos, and of knowledge itself. (99)

In telling the story of David and in reading that story, the “you” that means all of us in Buckler’s usage is momentarily illumined. In this novel, “he” translates to “you,” which translates to “we.” The Hindu would say “we are all one”; Jung would say we all

participate in and are formed in common on the level of the collective unconscious. I, “you,” we incorporate the story of David’s ending on the mountain and take it back down with us into the valley.

---

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Since its publication in 1952, *The Mountain and the Valley* has inspired uneasiness (verging on irritation) even in those critics who regard it as, on the whole, a great novel. As John Van Rys suggests, “the critical debates on Buckler’s masterpiece remain somewhat unstable. Various read as a regional pastoral idyll, a *bildungsroman*, an ironic portrait, and a tragedy, critics continue to wrangle over the novel’s meaning” (65).

<sup>2</sup> Yet clearly this is a portrait of real psychological force, whatever the motivations or causations to which readers choose to attribute David’s downward spiral. Jung’s characterization of a man possessed by his own shadow fits David well: “In the long run luck is always against him, because he is living below his own level and at best only attains what does not suit him. And if there is no doorstep for him to stumble over, he manufactures one for himself and then fondly believes he has done something useful” (“Rebirth” 123). Willfully isolating himself from others, unable or unwilling to bring to fruition any of his grandiose ideas or hopes, David may be a portrait of a weak ego, or of the tragic perversity of human nature, or (in what used to be a popular reading) of the plight of the artistic sensibility in the midst of a community that does not understand, nor give it the means with which to express itself.

<sup>3</sup> All references made to the Upanishads come from Juan Mascaró’s translation.

<sup>4</sup> My friend Mary Forster was the first to suggest to me that the rug is shaped like a mandala. She also finds that there are many correspondences between Buckler’s novel and Taoist philosophy.

<sup>5</sup> Buckler was clearly interested in the world of the psyche, and in the interpenetration of macro and micro spheres. In one interview he made the claim that, even though he lived

---

in a very small town in the Annapolis Valley, “[t]he whole thing, the whole macrocosm, is here in microcosm. You don’t have to know any more people than these to know what is going on in the human psyche” (qtd. in Van Rys 68).

<sup>6</sup> If the reader misses the clue of the mandala-shaped rug in the prologue, as I did initially, Buckler sows another clue in Chapter Three: Ellen’s mysterious sailor, somehow akin to David either in spirit or in the flesh, plucks a peacock’s feather in a moment of transgression. Peacocks, according to Jung, are also “an old emblem of rebirth and transformation” (“Mandala Symbolism” 375).

<sup>7</sup> I have borrowed this bit of word play from Ron Chapman.

<sup>8</sup> This is an idea that obviously intrigues Buckler, since in his second novel one character “even tells us how he will write the book we have just read” (Cook 1).

<sup>9</sup> Jung describes this “place of the middle,” as it figures in the Koran, as being “between two Mountains” and that people live there “who could barely understand a word” (144), an interesting correspondence with the generally inarticulate nature of the inhabitants of Buckler’s Entremont.

<sup>10</sup> Although far from advocating an uncritical adoption of Eastern practices and beliefs (*Kundalini* xix), Jung devoted a great deal of effort to analyzing how this tradition and his own could cross-fertilize one another, writing as early as 1912 on the *Upanishads* and the *Rig Veda* (*Kundalini* xix).

<sup>11</sup> Buckler was clearly familiar with Eastern philosophies. In his *Ox Bells and Fireflies*, Marta Dvorak writes, “The older narrator compares ... an epiphany to the ecstasy that transcendentalists and theosophists borrowed from Eastern religions” (52). She quotes Buckler as describing such an epiphany in this way:

---

It was a kind of instant Zen, come by with no effort at all. Perhaps in the most humdrum hour it would strike you right out of the blue, and ... lift you higher than a June of kites into that sky of skies where *the glass between inside and outside melts completely away.*" (52, emphases mine)

<sup>12</sup> Gershom Scholem points out that writers of mystical texts "continuously and bitterly complain of the utter inadequacy of words to express their true feelings, but, for all that, they glory in them ... and never weary of trying to express the inexpressible" (*Major Trends* 15).

<sup>13</sup> The "eye": the moment (read by so many critics as a collapse into utter solipsism) when David realizes the lack of any "inside" other than "a great white naked eye of self-consciousness" (281) should remind readers of a similar experience that is related by Emerson in *Nature*:

Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. (386)

Chapter Three  
Lilies and Mud: Seeing Other-Wise in Alice Munro's  
*Lives of Girls and Women*

Like Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*, Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* focuses on a main character, a writer-to-be, whose progress from childhood through adolescence is conveyed in clusters of illuminating (and disillusioning) experiences. Munro's prose, like Buckler's, captures the layered textures of lived moments in vivid, precise and startling detail. But the key point of similarity between these two novels for my purposes is that *Lives of Girls and Women* also ends with an epilogue that disrupts the chronological flow of the story, by returning to a point already in the past by the close of the penultimate chapter. Del Jordan's story, like David's, is "completed" quite satisfactorily before the advent of this epilogue. The first-person narrator in this novel is somewhat less problematic than the presence of the third person narrator in *The Mountain and the Valley*, since the older Del who narrates this story presumably still "exists." But while the narrator has already, somewhat paradoxically, established a cool, observing distance from her younger self and story, the disjunctive epilogue, both formally and thematically, opens up troubling gaps in the construct of the older Del's narrative as well.

These gaps or interspaces open up overtly in the structure of the text, as they did in Buckler's, via the epilogue and the shifting of temporal levels between the narrator and her main character (herself). In *Lives of Girls and Women*, however, their impact is intensified by the fact that the novel itself is, in large part, about "storytelling" as such. As they were seen to do in *The Mountain and the Valley*, but in a much more obvious way throughout Munro's novel, characters tell stories to defend themselves against a

chaotic reality, and to shore up the constructed identities of the storytellers. Repeated collisions occur between multiple versions of these shaped, idealized and controlling fictions. While, as Marjorie Garson has noted, “[v]irtually everybody” in the novel “is compelled to construct a unified whole out of personal experience,” Munro’s text “displays ... both a scepticism about holistic constructions and a fascination with the fantasies of dismemberment that they engender” (415). All of this gets rehearsed throughout the body of the novel before being picked up more aggressively and pointedly in the epilogue.

“Epilogue—The Photographer” presses home the issue of the violence inherent in all acts of representation, in the dismemberment of the “real” preceding or accompanying the remembering or rendering of accounts. At the end of the epilogue, Del’s encounter with Bobby Sherriff, whose story she had attempted to tell in an early writing effort, further problematizes the process of rendering self-present any picture of the “real.” In his transformative experience at the end of *The Mountain and the Valley*, David meets what is other-than-himself in his own expanded consciousness. In the epilogue to *Lives of Girls and Women*, Del confronts this “other” outside of herself in such a way that her text (and her self) is opened “to a deeper vigilance, to which is revealed, beyond all *unveiling*, that which cannot be contained in any representation” (Lévinas, *Alterity* 4; his emphasis). But the fact that Del has obviously persisted in representing her experiences in narrative form begs the question of the relationship between the significance of such encounters that cannot be represented, and the continued impulse towards rendering them textually.

The mysterious significance of Bobby's gestures, of his simple presence, makes the older Del intensely conscious of her hunger to capture and record what is "radiant, everlasting" (*LGW* 210) in the coincidence of the mundane, the absurd, and the incendiary. Early on in the novel, however, the narrator also records an event in which her younger self experiences the shame and humiliation of being "flesh," to such an extent that she is "caught in a vision which was, in a way, the very opposite of the mystic's incommunicable vision of order and light; a vision, also incommunicable, of confusion and obscenity" (48). This vision, like "the other kind," "could never be reconstructed" (48). Although this appears to be an extreme reversal of David's mystical epiphany at the top of the mountain, Del's encounter with the depths of bodily experience constitutes a meeting with what is other than her familiar self that is similar to her encounter with Bobby in the epilogue. In rereading these apparently contradictory accounts it becomes clear that, paradoxically, it is in *working with* the self's fictional constructs, and with their disruptions, that what is other may be re-encountered in such a way that the question of the observing, remembering, representing self is perpetually reopened. While investigating the constructions and disruptions of stories and of self that are central to *Lives of Girls and Women*, it will be helpful to have recourse to Emmanuel Lévinas's notion of "bad conscience" and again to mandala symbolism, this time from a Tantric Buddhist perspective.

The strangeness of acts of representation and their dependence on particularized detail begin to be noted from the first pages of this novel, from the futile attempts of the narrator and her brother to remember and list as many items as possible from Benny's junk-filled kitchen, to the tabloid stories that the narrator read until she was "bloated and

giddy with revelations of evil, of its versatility and grand invention and horrific playfulness” (4). Finding space for these alternate visions and versions of reality within her own more prosaic experience, however, was a problem:

the nearer I got to our home the more this vision faded. Why was it that the plain back wall of home, the pale chipped brick, the cement platform outside the kitchen door, washtubs hanging on nails, the pump, the lilac bush with brown-spotted leaves, should make it seem doubtful that a woman would really send her husband’s torso, wrapped in Christmas paper, by mail to his girlfriend in South California? (4-5)

In a clash between different modes of perceiving and representing reality, credibility hinges on detail, on the rendering of exact accounts. So intent was Del’s Uncle Craig upon capturing every last detail of daily life in his historical memoirs of their county, for example, that, by the time of his death, “he had only got as far as the year 1909” (27). Just as Craig’s memoirs stamp the history of the area with his authoritative point of view, others’ attempts to remember and to recount particular details also constitute a form of ownership over lived experience. His sisters repeat familiar tales as they go about their daily round of tasks, maintaining the rhythms and currency of their private family history, and their sense of themselves, with the same vigour and precision that they apply to maintaining their house and land. Del’s mother claims her world as an ordered space of expanding but controlled possibilities with her allegiance to rational facts, definitions, and scientific theories. Benny tells fantastic stories of black holes in the swamp so deep they could “take down a two-ton truck like a bit of breakfast” (1). In this way he attests to

his special knowledge of the area which, to “his way of thinking [makes] the river and the bush and the whole of Grenoch Swamp more or less belong ... to him” (1).

Attention to and repetition of remembered detail not only provide access of sorts to a lived reality, but also function as a way to hold reality at arm’s length. Characters focus on specific detail to render knowable, or reduce to controllable contours, anything that is troubling or threatening. Del badgers her mother for an exact account of Craig’s death because, she says, “I wanted death pinned down and isolated behind a wall of particular facts and circumstances, not floating around loose, ignored but powerful” (39). The chaos of the actual and the unknown is dissected and tamed to fit the design of a chosen story. The mystery of Marion Sherriff’s apparent suicide, for example, has an easy answer: “‘Pregnant, naturally’” (203). Benny’s strangely violent wife is likewise “remembered ... like a story, and having nothing else to give we gave her our strange, belated, heartless applause. ‘Madeleine! That madwoman!’” (23).

Del takes note of how the people around her control their experiences in this way, noticing also how she herself will assume various clichéd roles when caught up in other people’s story-lines, as it were. She is a half-willing “bad girl” for Art Chamberlain, just as, some years later, she adapts her personality to fit her lover’s mute expectations. Fascinated, Del watches herself respond to being seen in particular ways, such as when she watches Jerry Storey look at her naked body for the first time, in each case feeling a different aspect of her potential selfhood emerge or shift. She plays at being these different people to satisfy her *own* curiosities, knowing that they are fictions, hypothetical realities created to meet certain desires. Yet these fictions prove to have a compelling momentum, and come dangerously close to having actual, physical consequences for her.

She could have been assaulted by Mr. Chamberlain, for instance, or actually drowned in her struggle with Garnet French over her “pretend” baptism in the river. Likewise, she also senses how she herself could be caught within the convincing quality of these fictional roles, and actually become, for example, the model Baptist country girlfriend that was so easy for her to play.

Not only does Del’s own personality shape-shift; how she perceives her environment changes according to which story she is caught up in at the time. The landscape mirrors back to her the state of her sexual relationships with Art Chamberlain and Garnet, somehow reflecting both their personalities and her own feelings (140, 142, 190). This sort of thing occurred at an earlier, more basic level as well, when the world came into being for her through her mother’s eyes and speech. Coming home to Jubilee after a day spent driving around the country selling encyclopedias, Del remembers her mother saying,

“Well, yonder lies the metropolis,” or she might even quote, fuzzily, a poem about going in the same door as out she went. And by these words, whether weary, ironic, or truly grateful, Jubilee seemed to me to take its being. As if without her connivance, her acceptance, these streetlights and sidewalks ... would not be there. (58)

And since these are the stakes, since Del’s world and sense of self are so tightly implicated in how others see it and her, and can be caught in fictional constructs pre-existing her own choosing, modes of representation become highly charged battles for dominance. At the same time that Del is trying on or appropriating different versions of

self and world, she is also engaged in fighting off or discarding the various authoritative renderings of self and other she has inherited or had imposed on her.

Her mother's version of self and world, in particular, is one that Del struggles to shake off over the course of the novel, charting a movement from alignment to rebellion and finally to dismissal, a brutal process made the more brutal because of the close similarities between them. Early on, confronting similar pressures from her father's side of the family, Del succeeds in escaping from beneath the symbolic weight of her Uncle Craig's official word. Her aunts bequeath his memoirs to Del and expect her to complete them, thereby both acknowledging her gift with words and affirming their belief that her words should rightfully be subsumed within Craig's. Del puts his massive pile of papers in a cardboard box in her basement, appropriating Craig's much nicer box for her own writings. When a spring flood reduces his memoirs to a sodden mass, she thinks of her aunts "watching the manuscript leave their home in its padlocked box and ... felt remorse, that kind of tender remorse which has on its other side a brutal, unblemished satisfaction" (53)—the satisfaction of an identity claiming, in what seemingly *must* be a violent way, its own right to exist.

By the end of the penultimate chapter, this process—that of carving out an identity in opposition to those that might be thrust upon her—appears to be well under way. Del has failed to win a scholarship to a university, thus confounding her mother's hopes and plans for her. She has enjoyed her first sexual relationship, fully recognizing that its significance for her depends at least partly upon its occurring against the background of her mother's innocent oblivion. She has also chosen to end this relationship in favour of preserving her potential self, instead of entering into the prescriptive role that

awaits her should she marry into Garnet's family. In making this choice, she watches herself "repossess" her world:

Trees, houses, fences, streets, came back to me, in their own sober and familiar shapes .... And already I felt my old self—my old devious, ironic, isolated self—beginning to breathe again and stretch and settle, though all around it my body clung cracked and bewildered, in the stupid pain of loss. (199)

She watches herself mourn as if she is a character in a dramatic poem: "Without diminishment of pain I observed myself; I was amazed to think that the person suffering was me, for it was not me at all; ... I was watching, I was suffering. I said into the mirror a line from Tennyson .... I said it with absolute sincerity, absolute irony" (200). Able to see through the powerful fictions that she has participated in, Del preserves a free space to become something other, something perhaps more authentic. The novel ends with the words "*Real life*" opposing the hypnotic litany of what she has chosen to reject: "*Garnet French, Garnet French, Garnet French*" (201; italics in text).

Del's "story" ends symmetrically, then, with the re-assertion of her will to be, giving her narrative an "'end point,' which, in turn furnishes the point of view from which the story can be perceived as forming a whole" (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1:66-67). But there is another level of symmetry at work that undermines the first. The narrator, ironic still, betrays how the young Del creates a vision of her future: "Now at last without fantasies or self-deception, cut off from the mistakes and confusion of the past, grave and simple, carrying a small suitcase, getting on a bus, like girls in movies leaving home, convents, lovers, I supposed I would get started on my real life" (200-201).

Still representing herself to herself, Del's images of "real life" take shape with story-lines borrowed or absorbed from popular or communal images.

Re-opening what apparently has just been closed down, "Epilogue: the Photographer" describes the collision between Del's attempt sometime earlier to write a novel about her town and the people she uses as material for her story. The epilogue begins with the kind of story about Jubilee that Del has discarded: "'This town is rife with suicides,' was one of the things my mother would say" (202). The first paragraph briefly recapitulates the movement charted over the course of the entire novel, from Del's past belief in her mother's "mysterious, dogmatic" point of view, to the time when "my attitude towards everything my mother said became one of skepticism and disdain" (202).<sup>1</sup> That Del's dismissal of her mother's influence, her attempts to write a novel, and the idea of self-annihilation are juxtaposed in this way is significant.<sup>2</sup> For Margaret Harris, this means that Del has successfully fought off the threat of annihilation in her conflict with her mother, and in her relationship with Garnet (112). But since Del has either inherited or appropriated many of her mother's own mechanisms of self-expression and then used them against her, defeating and then erasing her mother from her text and her life, she has also erased, symbolically, important aspects of herself.<sup>3</sup> Garson writes that this novel tends to "call in question all discourses that facilitate dismemberment" (414). Del's creation of her own identity—and the creation of this narrative—in opposition to that of her mother is another such "discourse" of dismemberment: her mother, sickening and diminished, disappears early from the pages of the epilogue. But that the control exerted over the appearance and disappearance of her mother from this novel is connected with the idea of suicide suggests the violence that is involved in the

narrator's representation of her younger self as well. The narrator cannot escape being implicated in the judgments passed on both mother and daughter, however much she may have gained in sophistication and subtlety.

In like fashion, the younger Del "doomed ... to fiction" the suicidal daughter of another imposing, eccentric mother (203). By transforming Marion Sherriff into "Caroline Halloway," Del opposes her own storytelling art against the assumptions through which the town makes sense of the mystery of Marion's suicide. She will not, she thinks, use traditional narrative tactics and cast Caroline as "witch" or "nymphomaniac" (although she actually *does*): "Nothing so simple!" (204). Clearly Del, along with the other townspeople, desires to share the limelight shining on the "Tragedy" (with a capital "T") over which they "linger with a touch of pride" (202). Storytelling thus foregrounds the one who sees, rather than what may be seen, while the subject of such fictions remains mysterious. The subjectivity that, powerful and anonymous in its deflected focus, creates these stories filters, rearranges and discards aspects of its subject, both willfully and inadvertently, according to its own agenda. Once Del has reduced the Sherriffs and their tragic lives to a story, she can safely forget about them: "I did not pay much attention to the real Sherriffs, once I had transformed them for fictional purposes," she says (206). The malicious photographer in Del's early novel mirrors the anonymous author function of such a narrative. He "had no name in the book" but the subjects of his photographs see terrible truths in their distorted images: "Middle-aged people saw in their own features the terrible, growing, inescapable likeness of their dead parents; young fresh girls and men showed what gaunt or dulled or stupid faces they would have when they were fifty" (205). Del's fictional version of Jubilee, likewise, is a "darker, more decaying

town, full of unpainted board fences covered with tattered posters .... People in it were very thin, like Caroline, or fat as bubbles. Their speech was subtle and evasive and bizarrely stupid: their platitudes crackled with madness” (205-206).

Like the tabloid stories Del used to read as a child, these distorted images contain a kind of truth, since they intuit what terrible energies may subsist beneath the normalcy of daily life. Del and her photographer expose these “truths” in the harsh light of their manufactured images. While this pays tribute to the complexity, strangeness, and enormity of life, it also obscures what may be simple, obvious, equally “true” and equally mysterious. The narrator pairs the memory of her first fictional rendering of Jubilee with one of a much simpler, more clearly patterned town:

Jerry Storey and I coming back from our walks could see Jubilee so plainly, now the leaves were off the trees; it lay before us in a not very complicated pattern of streets named after battles and ladies and monarchs and pioneers. Once ... I did have a vision, as if from outside, of how strange this was—Jerry contemplating and welcoming a future that would annihilate Jubilee and life in it, and I myself planning secretly to turn it into a black fable and tie it up in my novel, and the town, the people who really were the town, just hooting car horns ... and never knowing what danger they were in from us. (206)

The writer’s art appears here to be oddly akin to Jerry’s cold-bloodedly scientific mode of thinking (for why else would Munro name this boy “Storey”?). This quite pointedly implies that what stories do is to impose a construct of logical coherence upon both the welter and the simplicity of lived life, thereby reducing both. The forces at work in the

depths of things are absurdly distorted, forced to “make sense” in a way that is alien to their nature; also expunged is the fact that the “real” is perhaps sometimes composed of the not-so-complicated patterns such as the ones formed by the streets of Jubilee and the cars full of people out for a drive. To willfully complicate a vision of the real serves to elevate the observer / teller, and, at the same time, to evade the actual impact of events by erasing, selecting, and arranging them so as to be suitably dramatic.

The need for “appropriate” drama lands Del in some difficulties with her own novel, for how is Caroline to drown herself in the river when the town (necessarily, for dramatic effect) is gripped by drought? She “would have to lie down on her face as if she was drowning herself in the bathtub” (206). Early on Del realizes that, in order to avoid having to reconcile such absurdities and to preserve the integrity of her vision, actually writing her story down “would flaw the beauty and wholeness of the novel” (203). On the one hand, this simply acknowledges the inevitable distortion involved in perception and expression. On the other hand, however, those who refuse to commit their stories to writing do not have to defend as rigorously how they have arrived at the conclusions that they promote, or the dogmatic statements that they make. Neither do they have to be accountable for the “self” that such narratives may reveal. Writers must confront the steps of their own reasoning, and how their choices and arrangements reflect back on the chooser and arranger. The photographer’s own malice, for example, shapes the subjects of his pictures. Likewise, Del’s vision of Jubilee is imbued with her own chaotic emotional experience of it. This is revealed in the fact that Del’s Caroline manipulates and controls the men who desire her, yet is herself caught by the desire to see herself being seen through the photographer’s eyes. Del does not realize, initially, how she is

exposing herself: “The reasons for things happening I seemed vaguely to know, but could not explain; I expected all that would come clear later. The main thing was that it seemed true to me ... as if that town was lying close behind the one I walked through every day” (206).

But when Del meets Bobby Sherriff on the veranda of his house one day—the ordinary bungalow with its ordered gardens and old porch furniture, and Bobby Sherriff himself, home from the asylum, clean, well-dressed and pressed, smelling of after-shave and preoccupied with the baking of cakes and the B-vitamins in a proper diet—all “bring ... [her] up short” (208). By contrast, her never-written narrative seems absurdly overstated. The Sherriffs’ actual experiences remain, unanswered, implacable: “*What had happened to Marion?*” she finally asks herself. “Such questions persist, in spite of novels. It is a shock, when you have dealt so cunningly, powerfully, with reality, to come back and find it still there” (209; italics in text).

Here Del begins to confront what Emmanuel Lévinas would term “bad conscience.” To realize one’s “bad conscience” means to *wake up to* a responsibility for the other; this responsibility is found to pre-exist one’s own self-awareness which has, prior to this awakening, constituted the foundation of consciousness. Bad conscience replaces an integrated and complacent, self-contained sense of “being-in-the-world” (or “good conscience”) with a radical state of “being-in-question” (*Alterity* 21). Surprised by Bobby, Del—whom we see in the penultimate chapter posing in front of a mirror, creating images of a future that is free of entanglements—begins to be stripped of the “protective mask” of an individual “contemplating ... [her]self in the mirror of the world, reassured and striking a pose” (*Alterity* 21). That the narrator juxtaposes these moments

emphasizes the ambiguity that permeates her representation of her younger self, “in memory of’ whom, as Lévinas puts it,

the *I* that ... posits itself and affirms itself—or firms itself up—in being, remains sufficiently ambiguous—or sufficiently enigmatic—to recognize itself as being, according to Pascal’s formulation, hateful in the very manifestation of its emphatic identity as ... the “saying I.” (*Alterity* 21)

The narrator appears to be acutely conscious of how self-involved the younger Del is, particularly in the ways that she disregards others in order to maintain her fascination with and allegiance to herself.

Remembering the end of her relationship with Garnet, for example, the narrator realizes that she had met his “good offerings with my deceitful offerings, whether I knew it or not, matching my complexity and play-acting to his true intent .... I had thought I wanted to know about him but I hadn’t really, I had never really wanted his secrets or his violence or himself” (*LGW* 198). This is the bad conscience of the “I” whose “place in the sun” implies that someone else, equally deserving, must have been summarily displaced (*Alterity* 23). The younger Del, meditating on her own “place in the sun,” is oblivious to anybody and anything else, aware only of herself: during her walks home at sunset, she remembers, “I never looked at the Flats Road houses, I never looked at the cars that met me, raising dust, I saw nothing but my own shadow floating over the gravel” (*LGW* 191-192). But face to face with Bobby, Del confronts “an other that *reveals itself*, but that does so precisely in surprising the intentions of subjective thought and eluding the form of the look” (Lévinas, *Alterity* 4; his italics). Del’s “look” takes in every detail, scrutinizing Bobby and concluding that he “did resemble, distantly,

Caroline's brother that I had made him into" (LGW 209). But she finds it odd "to think that he shaved, that he had hair on his face like other men, and a penis in his pants .... There must be some secret to madness, some *gift* about it, something I didn't know" (209-210). The "gift" that Bobby might have to offer Del, however, is largely missed: she is at this time still too preoccupied with what Lévinas terms "the identity of the 'I am,' of the *cogito* content with itself and persevering in its being," to be receptive to anything else (*Alterity* 15). Bobby's attempts to account for his own insanity are not spectacular enough to hold Del's interest for long, although she does for the first time pose the question of her narrative's accountability to its "subject."

For the narrator, however, this joining of the tragic and the absurd, the anticlimactic and the momentous, is precisely the fascination. She recognizes that the face of her neighbour, as Lévinas terms it, "puts me on the spot, calls me into question .... It is precisely in that recalling of me to my responsibility ... that the other is my neighbour" (*Alterity* 24-25).<sup>4</sup> She is alive especially to the mystery of Bobby's final action, when he "rose on his toes like a dancer, like a plump ballerina. This action ... appeared to be a joke not shared with me so much as displayed for me, and it seemed also to have a concise meaning, a stylized meaning—to be a letter, or a whole word, in an alphabet I did not know" (LGW 211). Remembering Bobby on tip-toe, the narrator senses a mode of existing that escapes her ability to understand and to represent it. It is a moment in which she has confronted "a *durée* removed from all will of the *I*, absolutely outside the activity of the *I* ... [*d*]urée as pure *durée*, as non-intervention, as being-without-insistence, as being-on-tiptoe, as being without daring to be" (Lévinas, *Alterity* 20-21).<sup>5</sup> The excessive meaning of Bobby's gesture, in an "alphabet" Del does not know,

inaugurates her recognition of a “fraternity” which “can take on an importance in excess”—an excess emerging from beyond being as self-presence (*Alterity* 96).

In this manner the novel, interrogating the construction of self-presence which occurs simultaneously with the construction of multiple representations, culminates in a final moment of confrontation with that which perpetually escapes both. Lévinas would explain that what escapes is a “signifying that is immediately from beyond the plastic forms that keep covering it up like a mask with their presence in perception. Incessantly it penetrates these forms ... [with its] nakedness and baring of expression as such, i.e., extreme exposure, no defense, vulnerability itself” (*Alterity* 23-24). The enigmatic vulnerability that Bobby offers for Del’s inspection is an “extreme exposure” that far exceeds both the picture she forms in her mind of his nakedness at the beginning of their encounter, and those over-exposed images in her still-born novel. Within the ending of this novel, then, is the beginning of the process of a self calling itself into question, and the incipient beginning of the construction of a new narrative. As narrator, Del scrutinizes the representations and constructions of self-identity that have constituted her experience, and tries to render an account of what has been seen, to render account-able the “hateful I.”

But can the narrator herself be trusted? Or has she perhaps done nothing more than set her own official seal on the re-membered past? She knows herself to be as greedy for remembered detail, as

[v]oracious and misguided as Uncle Craig .... I would try to make lists. A list of all the stores and businesses ... a list of family names .... A list of the titles of movies that played at the Lyceum Theatre from 1938 to 1950

.... And no list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together—radiant, everlasting. (*LGW* 210)

The narrator sees the miraculous in the ordinary that her younger self missed, and she commits her memories to writing, as she earlier would not. But what is “radiant, everlasting”? Is it, again, the *story*? Her urge to represent things, “held still and held together,” is still anchored in the urge to possess, still caught in the same paradigm, if one that is increasingly sophisticated. When the narrator says, for example, that Bobby’s enigmatic action of rising on tiptoe is “the only special thing he ever did for me” (211), readers should feel ill at ease with such a pronouncement. Does she not think special his attempt to communicate with her through his cake, his theories, his story? From what vantage point are *his* “other offerings” thus diminished? As Lévinas says, in any act of representation, “a thought thinking the thing prevails. The latter is not a real part of thought, but, in presence, it is given to that thought” (*Alterity* 123). In her encounter with Bobby, the narrator has surely glimpsed the “transcendence” that Lévinas claims “is alive ... in the proximity of one’s fellow man, whose *uniqueness* and consequently whose irreducible *alterity* would be—still or already—unrecognized in the perception that stares at ... the other” (*Alterity* 126). But by attempting to render an account of this encounter, by “thinking the thing,” has she already caused it to be drained of its vital alterity?

The *OED* gives the word “render” this sense of violent extraction (already suggested by its affinity with the word “to rend”): not only is “to render” to “represent, interpret, or perform artistically,” to “translate”; it is also to “melt down (fat) so as to

clarify it,” to “process (the carcass of an animal) in order to extract proteins, fats, and other usable parts” (964). It is “to cause to be or become” (964)—a forcing into presence which Lévinas makes clear is about reducing or effacing the alterity of the other into more of the “same”: “Beneath the plasticity of the face [*figure*] that *appears*, the face [*visage*] is already missed. It is frozen in art itself, despite the artist’s possible attempt to disfigure the ‘something’ that starts again, figurative, in presence” (*Alterity* 126). Has Bobby been made into just such a form, just such a figurative meaning? Or has the writer’s attempt to “disfigure” the text, by causing it to resist becoming a closed circle, succeeded, at least partially, in realizing the sense of the word “rendering” that the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* gives as “the act or instance of giving, yielding, surrendering” what is “due” (871)? To render what is “radiant, everlasting” (*LGW* 210): can that radiance live again in re-membered form? “The most spontaneous *lived experience* splits in two in order to become intimate in rejoining itself .... We hold to the image we have experienced, and make ourselves memories” (Lévinas, *Alterity* 92). Always there are cracks in the forms that are reconstructed, cracks out of which reality, the radiant, leaks—but perhaps through these cracks the radiant also breaks in?

Alice Munro thinks that narrative and memory offer such a potential:

Memory is the way we keep telling ourselves our stories—and telling other people a somewhat different version of our stories. We can hardly manage our lives without a powerful ongoing narrative. And underneath all these edited, inspired, self-serving or entertaining stories there is, we suppose, some big bulging awful mysterious entity called THE TRUTH,

which our fictional stories are supposed to be poking at and grabbing pieces of. (“Conversation”)

The violence in this process is clearly in the forefront with these words, “poking,” “grabbing.” But, as Munro says next about the writing process itself,

What could be more interesting as a life’s occupation? One of the ways we do this, I think, is by trying to look at what memory does (different tricks at different stages of our lives) and at the way people’s different memories deal with the same (shared) experience. The more disconcerting the differences are, the more the writer in me feels an odd exhilaration.

(“Conversation”)

This is not, or not only, an “author” speaking, but a person engaged in watching and writing about these differences, trying to understand and give expression to what they may signify, even when that seeing implicates the self and its own processes. To recognize the obvious insufficiency of both storytelling and memory does not *render* either of them futile. Both have the potential to sharpen the ability to pay attention to what is other—with all that escapes this subject / object dance of control and ignorance—and to acknowledge how much was missed at the time of the experience. Munro thus views storytelling as a process of perpetual re-visiting and re-visioning, always shifting amongst points of view and times, always partial and hampered by preconceptions. Perhaps in the repeated re-visions and re-memberings of these fictional constructs of self and other, of what has been dismembered in coming to conceptual presence, the “other offerings” of representation may be glimpsed: we may be able to “see again” what was missed the first time(s).

Returning to the beginning of the novel, readers find what may have been missed the first time<sup>6</sup>—that the narrator who is in question by the end of the epilogue is in question (in another sense) in the first chapter as well, so that this novel's beginning and ending, like Buckler's, form a kind of frame. The first paragraph features an intensely detailed picture of the narrator and her brother playing in the Wawanash River, and fishing for the "juicy" frogs that are destined to be cut up and put on Uncle Benny's hook. From the beginning, then, vivid experience is juxtaposed with images of violent death and dismemberment. Midway spaces and halfway zones predominate in this chapter, from Benny standing in the river at the point where the mud stops and the pebbles and stones begin (1), to the frogs which are specifically "adolescent" (1), on to Benny's house "at the edge of the bush" (2). "Between the house and the bush" which is constantly encroaching on it, are pits and cages full of half-tamed wild animals, mostly destined for some "unpleasant end" (2-3). The narrator's family occupies an in-between space as well: the road on which they live is "not part of town but it was not part of the country either" (5). The Flats Road is a place for people who don't fit in anywhere, people who raise "bizarre" animals "that would not be found on an ordinary farm," in addition to the resident bootleggers and "idiots" (5-6).

The narrator's mother, Ada, is one such misfit who belongs neither on the Flats Road, where she is not popular, nor in town (6-7). Benny is another anomalous person of undefined function and manufactured relation, an uncle who "was not our uncle, or anybody's" (1). In this chapter, Ada's mode of forcing sense upon things is overtly juxtaposed and contrasted with Benny's stories, which focus on the unpredictable nature of reality with its wildness, violence and incomprehensibility. Ada's version of reality is

regulated by order and the supremacy of concepts over lived experience: she “was on the side of poor people everywhere,” for example, but since she could not abide “dirty language, haphazard lives, [and] contented ignorance ... she had to exclude the Flats Road people from the ... real poor whom she still loved” (7). Both Benny and Ada miss the “in-between” of experience and concept, superstition and rationality, and their world views clash head-on. Responding to Benny’s stories of ghosts,

“you don’t believe that, do you?” ... my mother [would say] with cheerful energy. She began explaining how it was all coincidence, imagination, self-suggestion.

Uncle Benny gave her a fierce pitying look. (8)

As will become clearer as the novel unfolds and Ada’s character is more fully described, she and Benny represent two extremes of a compulsion to capture reality in particularized detail—the chaotic but minutely registered perceptions of a superstitious mind alive to wonder (2), versus the controlling order of facts, names, and memorized relationships. They are, in fact, opposing models of immanence and transcendence.

Never named or defined as to gender or age throughout the whole of this chapter, of which the first word is “we,” the narrator is an undetermined, non-specified “I/eye” whose awareness oscillates sympathetically between these extremes. Observing the other enigmas who surround her, the narrator sees how people’s actions are, at least partly, constructed fictions. Madeleine’s mysterious rages, for example, need to be “re-assembled; remembered”: they are “calculated, theatrical,” though really dangerous (14). Watching the various dramas unfold around her, the narrator has not yet taken over centre stage. In this introductory chapter, which ends as it had begun with the word “we,” the

narrator is not a “who,” ultimately, but a site or nexus of observation and response, neither definable nor fixed. Roland Barthes has written that “[a]s soon as a Name exists (even a pronoun) to flow towards and fasten onto, the semes become predicates, inductors of truth, and the Name becomes a subject: we can say that what is proper to narrative is not action but the character as Proper Name ” (*S/Z* 191). In the first chapter, as later in the epilogue, the narrator is still open to question, both as far as she herself is concerned, and from the standpoint of the reader. The progression *into* Del’s narrative is a movement away from that openness and flux into the construction of her identity, or the “egotism that founds being” (Lévinas, *Alterity* 99). This, as we have seen, is coincident with the construction and dissolution of different forms of “story.” However, this emergence *into* a defined sense of self is only the first step in what Lévinas calls “the opening and true exiting from self. The human will pass through another decisive step, in which the subject, despite its satisfaction, fails to be sufficient unto itself” (99).

In the next chapter, “Heirs of the Living Body,” Del, amid a telling confluence of events, is named for the first time in the text. This occurs at the same time that she locates herself within a family system with its obsession for record keeping and rules of behaviour; awakens to the shame and fear engendered by her female body; recognizes the strangely compelling depths within her cousin Mary Agnes, who is dismissed as “slow” by everyone else; and weathers exposure to the casual brutality subsisting beneath ritual family observances of death. While facing the relentless force of official versions of reality, of names and systems of relationships, Del is also confronted by questions and experiences that cannot be contained within any of these ordering systems, just as she will later be faced with “questions [that] persist, in spite of novels” (*LGW* 209).

When she and Mary Agnes happen upon a dead cow lying half in the river and half out, she realizes that it still

had power, lying with a gleaming strange map on its back, its straining neck, the smooth eye. I had never once looked at a cow alive and thought what I thought now: why should there be a cow? ... I paid attention to its shape as I would sometimes pay attention to ... real maps, as if the shape itself were a revelation beyond words, and I would be able to make sense of it, if I tried hard enough, and had time. (38)

Later, fighting viciously to avoid being paraded past her uncle's corpse, she bites Mary Agnes' arm, thinking that by doing so "I was biting myself off from everything. I thought I was putting myself outside ... where nobody would dare ask me to look at a dead man .... I thought they would all hate me, and hate seemed to me so much to be coveted, then, like a gift of wings" (46). She soon discovers, however, just how impossible it is to break free of the trap of being a named, embodied member of a family system, with its official stories: "freedom is not so easily come by. ... [T]hey would not put me outside. No. I would be the highly strung, erratic, badly brought up *member of the family*, which is a different thing altogether" (46, 48; italics in text). Being "forgiven" in this way, both identified *and* put in her place, creates "a peculiar shame":

This shame was physical, but went far beyond sexual shame .... [N]ow it was as if not the naked body but all the organs inside it—stomach, heart, lungs, liver—were laid bare and helpless .... To be made of flesh was humiliation. I was caught in a vision which was, in a way, the very opposite of the mystic's incommunicable vision of order and light; a

vision, also incommunicable, of confusion and obscenity—of helplessness, which was revealed as the most obscene thing there could be. But like the other kind of vision this could not be supported more than a moment or two, it collapsed of its own intensity and could never be reconstructed or even really believed in, once it was over. (48)<sup>7</sup>

Rendered transparent in this moment of “extreme exposure,” Del “sees through” the fiction of the secure self.

At the same moment that her named body emerges in her consciousness and in her narrative as both a trap and something to be defended,<sup>8</sup> she also encounters the body, her own and others’, in its uncontrollable, mortal otherness, as well as the ever-present possibility of an irruption of energies from beneath the skin of “normalcy.” Del bites through the skin of Mary Agnes’ arm and tastes blood; wants to poke the dead cow’s eye but is afraid that “the skin over the surface would break and let loose all sorts of putrid mess” (37); looks at her dead uncle and sees that his face is

like a delicate mask of skin, varnished, and laid over the real face—or over nothing at all, ready to crack when you poked a finger into it ... the terrible, silent, indifferent conductor of forces that could flare up, in an instant, and burn through this room, all reality, leave us dark. (49)

Expelled from or reduced by self-contained identities and their self-constructed fictions, when confronted these energies expose bodies, identities, and family narratives to be as fragile and tenuous as they are insistent and persistent. And yet, paradoxically, being forced to perceive that such forms are not (or not only) all that they appear to be is an

opportunity to confront the wisdom of what is other, to see other-wise. “Embodiment,” in Tantric Buddhism, is understood to be that of a

nonessentialist self ... seen not as a bounded or static entity but as the site of a host of energies, inner winds and flames, dissolutions, meltings, and flowings that can bring about dramatic transformations in embodied experience and provide a bridge between humanity and divinity. It is in light of this model of a dynamic, permeable self without fixed boundaries that the Tantric Buddhist paradigm must be interpreted. (Shaw 11)

To be willing to observe and experience the disruption and transformation caused by these energies, to acknowledge a state of radical openness—as opposed to perpetuating the illusion of closed, impenetrable circles of body and text—allows what is other to challenge the self in its temporarily totalized form, to re-open its protective circle, and to allow both body and text to be “seen through.”

This process of re-circling the parameters of self and of text is not a “vicious circle” by any means. Lévinas, speculating that the “hermeneutic circle” as it is used to interpret texts may be equally well applied to an intelligent interpretation of life as well, supports this notion of following the circle in its path, over and over again:

the circular movement of the totalization is precisely irreducible to a linear movement, operating in a homogeneous environment .... A notion of totality and of intellect that would lead to the understanding of all experience, and perhaps all reasoning on things, according to the model of the interpretation of texts. A notion of totalization that is ever to be resumed anew, an open notion of totality! (*Alterity* 49-50)

Revisiting these circles and framing them with awareness is the mandala principle in action, according to Tantric Buddhism. Our identities, or our life “stories,” are “self-existing circles” created by us in order to express ourselves, “our passion, aggression” (Trungpa 3). With them, “we create perception, consciousness, name and form, sense-consciousness, touch, feeling, desire, copulation, the world of existence” (3-4). This mandala of the self is constituted by the everyday experience that goes into the creation of our stories, and forms “the ground on which we can play our game of hypocrisy and bewilderment” (4). To begin to explore this ground while attempting to avoid pre-existing concepts (4), requires a clear-eyed willingness to see the energies at play *and* the patterns that they form, the chaos and the ordering principle both, without privileging either.

Beginning to engage actively with the mandala principle, we see that our experiences, our sense of self and our perception of others constitute our “land”: “We get onto our land, we relate with it, and we begin to possess it .... We freeze the whole area” (5). Once that space is solidified, organized and owned, “the only thing left to relate with is the boundary, the fence” that surrounds it (5). Once perception has been aimed at the boundaries encircling that totalized space, “we make the boundary [itself] into space” which turns everything upside down (5). Discovering space within the boundary, such that “it might be hollow, not a solid wall ... is how we set up a mandala situation to begin with, with our confused mind” (5). To be able to recognize this mandala “set-up” requires that no part of the perceived situation be rejected. It is a “simpleminded approach” that tries from the outset to relate to everything as “beautiful and glorious” (5, 4): “if nirvana exists, samsara<sup>9</sup> exists equally. ... [A]re we going to consider nirvana alone as workable

and samsara as something we have to reject and destroy?" (5). Instead of potentially finding that the boundaries are made of space, then, the situation would be concretized once more as a solid object. The aim, rather, is to work on acknowledging all of what is there, all of the chaotic energies of the total being, along with all of its ordering impulses.

In the Tantric tradition, this is spoken of in terms of "preparing the mandala with the five ingredients of a cow," which are its "snot," its "shit," its "milk" and so on (9). When, "going beyond discrimination," you are able to "[c]lean the ground completely with the five ingredients of a cow, then you can build a mandala on it" (9-10). Del, wanting to pierce the dead cow's form with her stick, but fearing the "putrid mess" that might pour from underneath the surface of its unseeing eye, looks at the "map" on the cow's side and wonders for the first time why "cow" should have manifested in just that way and no other (*LGW* 37). Looking *into* form, working with the mandala principle, one begins to realize that,

[a]s to what manifests, the way in which it manifests is very conditional.

We receive some kind of map, or pattern, some kind of data concerning how things work and how things happen. And at the same time, we try to interpret this. Between receiving the information and interpreting it, we tend to lose something. We tend constantly to exaggerate or miss something, so there is a big gap. Nevertheless, this is another form of truth. It is truth in its falsity, which is *some* kind of reality—we must admit that.

(Trungpa 122; his italics)

That characters in this novel attempt to capture and represent "truth" through an obsessive attention to the details of lived life, therefore, is not as completely "misguided"

as the narrator seems to think (*LGW* 210). Active in the mandala principle, which “includes the animate and the inanimate, form and the formless, emotion and nonemotion,” there is “the notion of an accumulation of lots of single details, which, put together, make a whole” (Trungpa 125):

The end result of this whole process is that everything is extraordinarily complicated and detailed. And every bit of this is very meaningful to us. That seems to be the general pattern ... [and] we cannot study the behaviour patterns and put all the details down on an information sheet. But there are rough patterns. The only approach seems to be to try to the extent possible to perceive a generalized pattern without trying to interpret every detail. (122)

This approach instigates the “watcher” which “is ... the beginning of the path” but is also the beginning of seeing “the futility of the watcher” in appreciation of the existence of the gap (129).

Watching the watcher and distrusting the narrative process that encapsulates these details in what is recognized to be an imposed pattern remains a problem, however, because

[w]e also have the distrustful quality of the judgment that goes on at the level of interpretation. The monitor, so to speak, or the commentator, has its tone of voice and its particular manner of expressing things, and its approach is extraordinarily distrustful. (122)

But being aware and wary of this monitor does not necessarily entail disengaging entirely from it and its function. Watching, living, and encountering disruption are all a part of the

mandala process which includes, according to Chögyam Trungpa's teachings, meditation and meditation-in-action. To actively engage both "provides a sense of solidity and sanity as well as willingness to enter into the encounter with life. And that in turn brings up the question of the gap and the neighbourhood of energy where the mandala perspective is happening. So we need both ... The two have to complement each other" (130).<sup>10</sup>

Watchfully engaging in ordering patterns, then, actually promotes awareness of the "gap" wherein what is other may be encountered.

But finding open space where there had appeared to be solid ground can open into an experience of helplessness and exposure such as Del has had, in what the narrator calls "the very opposite" of a mystical vision of wholeness and order (*LGW* 48). This is perhaps not as "anti-mystical" as it first appears, however. At such a point, "the basic totality of the mandala [can be] extremely terrifying. There is no ground, there is no journey, there is not even any effort. We cannot even deny it, because we discover it" (Trungpa 65). As Del realizes, this vision is "incommunicable" (*LGW* 48): "we cannot put it into terms or ideas" (Trungpa 65). But here, paradoxically, the "self-destructive situation of ego simultaneously finds its self-creative situation" (65). An affirmative sense of this creativity is subtly at work in those very same moments in which Del confronts mortality and an abyss of humiliation. An image that appears twice in this chapter juxtaposes the pristine beauty of a lily with mud and decay. When Del walks by the river and sees the dead cow, she also sees "here and there a yellow water lily, looking so pale, tranquil, and desirable" (*LGW* 37). She wades in, she says, amongst "the sucking roots, in black mud that oozed up between my toes and clouded the water, silting the leaves and lily petals" (37). Brought back to shore, the flowers "seemed coarse and

rank and began to die immediately” (37). In the parlour where her Uncle Craig’s body is laid out, it “smelled of lilies, waxy, pure-white lilies, and also like a root cellar” (49). These lilies, like the lotus in Hindu and Buddhist symbology, are images of purity and serenity, but are “rooted” in mud and decaying matter. Therefore, rather than being images of a futile transcendence that dies at the touch of the real, the lilies and the mud represent the polarities that make up the mandala situation. Any picture of the real, as with any lived encounter with it, must “take into account everyday experience and its actual polarities .... [For] a concept of enlightenment to exist, confusion must exist; the possibility of nirvana presupposes the existence of samsara” (Trungpa 4).

Becoming habituated to the recognition of such polarities may stimulate an openness to luminous perceptions of what J. Krishnamurti terms *what is*, perceptions which include, without judgment, all aspects of the human situation. Krishnamurti claims that “it is that quality of sharpness, of attention, of seriousness, which will give total perception. One hasn’t the eyes to see the whole thing at a glance; this clarity of the eye is possible only if one can see the details, then jump” (122). But this leads again to the question of the value and utility of creating fictions, for if “you want to understand the actual you must give your whole attention, all your energy, to it. That attention and energy are distracted when you create a fictitious, ideal world” (122). But if these fictions are recognized as such—in actual life as well as in written narrative—and not elevated as ideals to be protected against changes in form or meaning, might not the process of writing and reading fiction, of storytelling, sharpen that ability to pay attention to *what is*? Martha Nussbaum argues that the novel, with its “intense scrutiny of particulars” and its abundance of “nuance and fine detail of tone” may in fact offer a “paradigm of moral

activity” that features “perception” as opposed to an “intellectual grasp of particular facts” (qtd. in Bruns, *Tragic* 108-109). If such be the case, stories that model this kind of perception can perhaps develop alternatives to the idealized fictions that people tell themselves without paying much attention at all. They may, in fact, be able to function potentially as samsaric mandalas that provide access to “energy beyond the samsaric level. When we say ‘beyond’, the idea is not of getting out of samsara, or even, for that matter, of transcending it in the ordinary sense .... We are talking about a way in more than about a way out” (Trungpa 61).

Further correspondence between the ways stories and samsaric mandalas function is to be found in the notion of a “thin thin line” drawn in a circle around experience that Marjorie Garson sees as linking Munro’s novel to James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. She says that “in his aesthetic theory ... Stephen asserts that ‘[t]he first phase of apprehension is a bounding line drawn about the object to be apprehended’” (416). While Munro’s novel claims a kinship with Joyce’s in many ways, Garson suggests that the “way this allusion is handled—indeed the very presence of Joyce in Munro’s novel—makes clear that there is a problem with the notion of a text ‘selfbounded and selfcontained’ .... Munro puts into question the aesthetic criteria of organic unity that in Joyce’s narrative are associated with it” (416-417). In other words, as we have seen, Munro resists closure of the circles that she creates. Garson also takes note of the fact, though, that Munro has herself acknowledged a tendency “to see ‘totally commonplace things ... with this kind of rim around them’” but that “‘it has nothing to do with judgements about things being beautiful or ugly’” (Note 8, 426). As is the case

in this novel, Munro's habit of seeing other-wise means that her vision includes both the lilies and the mud.

Of such perception that oscillates between polarities, David Jarraway has this to say:

comprehension of the phenomenal world truly becomes a sometime prospect ... [while] human subjectivity becomes what de Certeau says about mysticism itself—"the rendezvous of an enigma" .... [A]ccording to Lacan, subjectivity is perhaps more accurately viewed as "the introduction of a loss in reality"; like the universe of discourse itself, subjectivity is a "nothing contain[ing] everything," so long as "you find again the gap that constitutes the subject." ("Sublime" 83-84).

Munro's writing demonstrates that these gaps can be both constructive and instructive, being not only flaws in the constructed subject of both self and text, but also what allows opening to occur *between* points of view. In terms, furthermore, of the gap that always occurs between experience and interpretation, it "is not a question of trying to avoid that. Things do happen that way. That kind of gap is there" (Trungpa 128). Interpretation and its gaps will occur—we seem to have no choice in the matter—but "the idea is that some kind of trust begins to develop ... that even though there is a gap, it doesn't matter" (128). This kind of awareness is akin to what Lévinas terms "proximity" to the irreducibly other, the neighbour. We find ourselves "next to" what is other, without possessing it or interpreting it securely or completely.

Along with a growing awareness of the gap between experience and interpretation, what may develop is an awareness of one's own "style" (Trungpa 129).

Becoming aware of the conditioning that shapes how a person manifests and patterns experience occurs at “the neighbourhood of the boundary itself . . . . [A]fter that there is the manifestation of the mandala” (129). In *Writing Degree Zero*, Roland Barthes calls “style” (which is the “biological” point of interface with a social system and a language) a “closed personal process,” but one which contains within itself “fragments of a reality entirely alien to language. The miracle of this transmutation makes style a kind of supra-literary operation which carries man to the threshold of power and magic” (9, 11, 12). Writing is both communication and “coercion,” in which definitions and judgments are simultaneous (20-26). But Barthes argues for the possibility that writerly texts may achieve a “perpetual present,”<sup>11</sup> and resist becoming “products” as “readerly texts” do (*S/Z* 5). The boundaries in a writerly text are “spacious,” to use Trungpa’s terminology, whereas a readerly text solidifies itself as frozen ground. As writers and readers, the “task is to move, to shift systems whose perspective ends neither at the text nor at the ‘I’” (Barthes *S/Z* 11).

In a movement from responsiveness to responsibility, seeing other-wise is to encounter the infinitely unknown that disrupts form in what Lévinas might call the wisdom of the here as opposed to the hereafter. This is wisdom as opposed to knowledge as self-presence or self-possession. Squaring the circle: the mandala puts the circle of self and text into a frame that enables one to interact with the ground it encloses both from within and from a distance. Drawing a frame around experience and narrative in this way recalls Lévinas’s discussion of the “parallelogram” in Saint-Exupéry’s “Little Prince,” which indicates both the inevitable failures of representation and its hope. The little prince asks the pilot, who “only knows how to draw a boa constrictor digesting the

elephant,” to draw a sheep. Since the pilot cannot draw one to satisfy the prince, he “draws a parallelogram, the box in which the sheep is sleeping, to the little prince’s great satisfaction” (*Alterity* 88-89). Lévinas does not claim that this “box,” framing the irreducibly separate circles of self and other, can provide “the solution to insoluble problems” (88). But, he goes on to say, it is “a box over which persons who have drawn close to each other keep watch .... The abstract drawing of a parallelogram—cradle of our hopes. I have the idea of a possibility in which the impossible may be sleeping” (88-89). Or, as Alice Munro puts it, by paying attention to “all these edited, inspired, self-serving or entertaining stories” in which we frame our experiences, we might just find lurking behind, or beneath, or inside them “some big bulging awful mysterious entity called THE TRUTH .... What could be more interesting as a life’s occupation?” (“Conversation”).

---

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Likewise the narrator reiterates that “[a] time came when all the books in the library in the Town Hall were not enough for me” (203)—books and Town Hall both being symbols of superseded authority.

<sup>2</sup> David Jeffrey, referring to the way in which Harold Bloom and Jacques Derrida “take on” the Bible as metanarrative, says that “erasure is to be effected by the tactics of subversion, by reading and writing which overthrows the ‘precursor’, the previously respected text” (xvii). According to Bloom, every new writer must take on his or her inherited tradition aggressively and attempt to obliterate it, yet builds the new vision and expression upon the basis of the old. Paula Gilbert says that for Del this is a process of the “recreation of the female self and maternal other” (142). Del rejects her mother just as Ada in her turn had rejected hers in a drama of confrontation, appropriation, and modification of tactics that played out over at least three generations. Ada’s mother, for example, buys Bibles and forces her daughter to peddle them, as later Ada will buy encyclopedias and enlist her daughter’s support in selling *those*.

<sup>3</sup> For both Del and her mother, for instance, it was “[p]ure comfort ... to know the location of the Celebes Sea and the Pitti Palace, to get the wives of Henry VIII in order” (55). Against Fern’s complacent, lazy observation about town affairs, and against the repetition of certain kinds of town stories, Ada, like Del, has a much “sharper, economical commentary” (59). Del has a mind and a memory for detail like her mother’s, a passion for books and information, and a pride in her own difference from the society around her. She finds herself occupying the fringes of town society in a way that mimics or was predetermined for her by her mother’s personality. She both struggles against that

---

position and takes pride in it, for it enables her to watch the town, her mother and herself from a vantage point slightly apart and above.

<sup>4</sup> This recognition of the neighbour, Lévinas states elsewhere, can be equated with the advent of the word of God wherein “the word God ceases orienting life by expressing the unconditional foundation of the world and cosmology, and reveals, in the face of the other man, the secret of his semantics” (*Alterity* 96). A moment of recognition such as this finds an echo in Del’s momentary questioning of her own concepts of God earlier in the text: “*Could there be God not contained in the churches’ net at all, not made manageable by any spells and crosses, God real, and really in the world, and alien and unacceptable as death? Could there be God amazing, indifferent, beyond faith?*” (LGW 96; italics in text). This seems to be what Lévinas means by the possible “in-difference” of the absolutely other, the absolutely prior, as perceived in the “[d]irectness of the face-to-face” (93). Here “the difference between the *I* and the other remains” but is able to instigate the beginning of a “non-in-difference toward one another” (*Alterity* 93-94).

<sup>5</sup> This is “the Bergsonian *durée*, which is the opening that puts back in question, on the basis of the Future, all complete totality before being the affirmation of I know not what mobile essence of being” (Lévinas, *Alterity* 50-51).

<sup>6</sup> In any case, this is how the novel unfolded for me. First I was caught up in the coming-of-age aspect of Del’s story. Then, with the questions that emerged so pointedly in the epilogue, I returned to the first chapters to find that those same issues had already been highlighted there.

<sup>7</sup> Bernadette Roberts, in *The Experience of No-Self*, describes a similar experience in the early stages of her “contemplative journey” beyond the limits of the known self:

---

Suddenly I was aware that all life around me had come to a complete standstill. Everywhere I looked, instead of life, I saw a hideous nothingness invading and strangling the life out of every object and vista in sight. It was a world being choked to death by an insidious void, whereby every remaining movement was but the final throes of death. The sudden withdrawal of life, left in its wake a scene of death, dying, and decay so monstrous and terrible to look upon, I thought to myself: no man can see this and live! ... [I]n the same instant I understood this thing called self: it is man's defense against seeing absolute nothingness, against seeing a world devoid of life, a life devoid of God. Without a self, man is defenseless against such a vision, a vision he cannot possibly live with.

(42-43).

<sup>8</sup> Roberts also expresses this sense of the self as both a trap and something that needs to be preserved nonetheless:

I was now back where I started—not knowing any more about life or God than the day I was born ... egged on blindly, no doubt, by a self persistently demanding its own survival. What a trick of the mind! What total deception! And what man born has not been led by the nose and fallen into this trap—a trap which *is* the self? And yet, what lies beyond the self? If emptiness and nothingness is the whole truth and nothing but the truth, then man is entitled to his self and his deceptions... (62-63)

<sup>9</sup> Samsara is the “round of birth and death and rebirth, characterized by suffering, impermanence, and ignorance” (Trungpa 163).

---

<sup>10</sup> Krishnamurti puts this in a slightly different way: “Seeing is the doing and not ideation first and action according to the conclusion. This breeds conflict. The analyzer is himself the analyzed . . . . The observer is the observed and therein lies sanity, the whole, and with the holy is love” (157).

<sup>11</sup> The sense of this “present,” here, is not the “presence” against which Lévinas would object. It is akin to his own orientation toward the future, which is really to be in the present and always moving and shifting.

Chapter Four  
Shifting Grounds: Mapping the Dialectics of Self, Other  
and Text in Peter Ackroyd's *The House of Doctor Dee*

In *The House of Doctor Dee*, readers are exposed to a particularly acute example of the manipulation of text and characters by a questionable narrator / writer. Dual first-person narratives multiply the problems of perspective and temporality that were discussed in the previous chapters. Also, by the end of the novel, "Peter Ackroyd" has barged into his own text, disrupting any narrative closure readers might have struggled to attain. At the same time, while one narrative (Doctor Dee's) approaches a resolution of sorts, the other, (Matthew's) has looped around almost full circle, as if beginning all over again. As was the case in Alice Munro's novel, *The House of Doctor Dee* exerts pressure on its own images of containment. However, the grounds for unease being mapped in Ackroyd's novel expand to include not only text and body, but a highly symbolic house, the city of London, and the universe of the imagination as well. Breaking down conventional boundaries apparently serves to provoke a corresponding increase in the potential agency of the perceiving, responding, expressing self. But this is accompanied by the threat of a different kind of breakdown, aptly symbolized by Ackroyd as intrusive author: the collapse of multiplicity into solipsism. Potential solutions to the problems of reading *The House of Doctor Dee* will emerge with reference to Stanley Fish's notions of dialectic and the self-consuming artifact, to the alchemical symbology that pervades this novel, and to Ackroyd's Blakean vision of London. The spectre of solipsism, however, will need to be explored via Paul Ricoeur's most recent ideas about the dialectical nature of the self and Ackroyd's imaginative rendering of an equally dialectical Catholic sensibility, which finds echoes in Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*.

Peter Ackroyd's work is full of contradictory impulses. Throughout much of his writing, Ackroyd plays—one might say almost obsessively—with penetrating the barriers of time and personality. In his novels, characters from different time periods influence or even confront one another via the living energies of their actions, their thoughts and their artistic creations. His novels and biographies display a virtuoso ability to imagine the tone, mood, and diction of other times. He breathes life into historical figures and earlier literary periods, at the same time dazzling readers with an encyclopedic knowledge of the arts and sciences of bygone eras: music, medicine, architecture, painting, alchemy, theatre, and, most particularly, English literature. While emphasizing in this way the transhistorical vitality of England's creative traditions, Ackroyd's fiction also exposes the ignorance and violence found to be embedded in them, rendering ironic the notion of a proud cultural inheritance. His exploration of the interpenetration of times and traditions repeatedly moves towards a mystical vision that is undercut even as it is offered as a possibility. In his work, he expresses a "yearning for mythical closure," imaged, for example, in his treatment of London as a "mystic center of power"; yet he is intent on demonstrating the "constructedness" of world, text, writer and reader (Omega, "Interview" 208). Contradictory elements such as these mean that readers must continually negotiate the weight of response they give to these perhaps incompatible tendencies in his fiction.

Also problematic are Ackroyd's novels as literary works, which quite often pair twentieth-century plots with others that take place in previous eras. Generally speaking, character, dialogue, and plot in the narratives set in the present lack the rich energy of those set in former times, tending to remain two-dimensional and unsatisfying by com-

parison. Ackroyd's style can seem overly didactic and condescending, but his plots often simply end rather than come to a conclusion, since they set up difficulties or hinge on inexplicable occurrences that are rarely, if ever, resolved or accounted for. His historical recreations appear to be loving evocations of other times, social contexts, and personalities. His habit, however, of intruding overtly into his novels may seem to his readers to run the risk of devolving into "conditions of narrative control as an antagonism with the final aim of conquest" (Siemerling 113).<sup>1</sup> Because Ackroyd infiltrates his accounts of actual historical characters with openly fictional elements, this also can be construed as something less benign than a postmodernist game of playing with the indistinct boundaries between history and fiction (if such a thing is ever truly "benign"). In effect, he bends and twists these characters to suit his own purposes. This is precisely what John Dee reproaches "Ackroyd" with at the end of the novel, protesting "I am not your little man. I am not your homunculus" (*The House of Doctor Dee* 275).

In similar fashion, recurring evocations of fathers and houses as representative links in a patrilineal chain of inheritance—and, as such, the loci of intense ambivalence, as in *English Music*, *Chatterton* and *Hawksmoor*—give a distinctly Bloomian cast to Ackroyd's rendering of the past and of his predecessors.<sup>2</sup> As Harold Bloom has said, "if we know both a place and a father, it is because we have made them both, and then turned from and against them" (*Agon* 245). This Oedipal relationship between generations of writers is complicated enough. But with the blurring of the borders of identity in Ackroyd's novels, and with their resulting tendency to conflate self, other, place and text, these novels—and their writer—become openly self-incriminating as well. Any close reading of their style, structure and content, in fact, tends to provoke progressive

degrees of uncertainty in the reader about Ackroyd's project, both stated and unstated. *The House of Doctor Dee* is a particularly useful novel to study in relation to the problematics of Ackroyd's work since it features what tends to be most discomfiting about his fiction as a whole, while also highlighting the difficulties of reading well.

"I inherited the house from my father. That was how it all began" (1). At the beginning of *The House of Doctor Dee*, Matthew refers to "this year," thus situating his narrative in an active present during which he initiates a strangely transformative journey to one of London's ancient centres. Matthew has travelled to Clerkenwell to find the house bequeathed him by his deceased father. Once there, he finds various historical strata in the structure of the house itself, which include a long-buried Catholic past, ominous evidence of his father's secret pursuits, and an array of other-worldly presences that persist through time in their relation to this particular place. Himself a pallid, hopeless ghost of a fellow, Matthew only feels alive when he is immersed in the study of past times. He also, however, possesses buried memories that surface as the novel progresses. These include an early vision he had as a child when he perceived that London was a great centre of living energy in which his own being naturally participated.<sup>3</sup>

I had glimpsed some interior life and reality which glowed within all things .... [T]hat fire was also within me, and I found myself running through the streets as if I possessed them. Somehow I had been present at their beginning; or, rather, there was some presence within me which had always existed in this soil, this stone, and this air. That original fire has

left me now, which is perhaps why I seem such a stranger to myself;  
 slowly over the years, the city has darkened within me. (42)

London has become for Matthew an “eternal city for those who are trapped in time,” a city draining its inhabitants of their energies through some “dark alchemy” (44, 47).

Walking through its streets, which he can vividly imagine as peopled by characters from a still-living past, he seeks paradoxically both to lose and to find himself in these shades. He traces paths through the city, “stopped where they had stopped ... and whispered my own name .... Surely among all the dark shapes of [London’s] past, there was one in which I could be concealed” (42). In his father’s house, other dark shapes from the past whisper back: “You are undone, my little man” (9-10). Perilously close to the dissolution of his own identity—and whether this be a process of liberation or of annihilation remains to be seen—Matthew recognizes that this is a journey “the keys to which my father had bequeathed me” (3). Whether this was a gift given out of love or out of malice is likewise unclear.

John Dee, or rather, Ackroyd’s version of this well-known sixteenth-century historical figure, narrates the alternate sections of this novel. One of the shades whom Matthew encounters, he also, in his own time, catches glimpses of Matthew. Doctor Dee parallels his fellow narrator’s experience in other ways, as well. He shares with Matthew his love for the past and also sees London as a mystical centre, while living a similarly dreary emotional life. Unlike Matthew, however, Dee glories in the self that he creates through his mastery of a vast learning. To conquer time and learn the secrets of all creation are his modest goals, and he actually does succeed in belonging, as Matthew sees it, “in one way or another ... to every time” (132). While researching Doctor Dee’s life,

in an attempt to account for his lingering influence in the old house, Matthew finds that this famous man

was in part a medievalist, expounding ancient formulae, but he was also an active agent in contemporary natural philosophy; he was an antiquarian, who speculated about the origins of Britain and the presence of ancient cities beneath the earth, but he was also one of those who anticipated a future scientific revolution with his experiments in mechanics; he was an alchemist and astrologer who scrutinized the spiritual world, but he was also a geographer who plotted navigation charts for Elizabethan explorers.

He was everywhere at once .... (132-133)

By his very nature, then, an ideal character for Ackroyd's favorite themes, this important figure of Renaissance England embodies in extreme fashion its world of learning and exploration.

He is also one whose "portrait is on the verge of collapse under the weight of its apparent contradictions" (Harkness 712). The discomfort scholars have felt in coming to terms with some of John Dee's more curious proclivities, such as his mystical visions and his conversations with angels, makes him a peculiarly apt subject for Ackroyd's imaginative investigation into the problems of interpretation and knowledge. Doctor Dee possessed the largest library in England of his time, and his staggering amounts of reading and writing were based not only on his love of learning but also on a desire to "inscribe" himself into history in an ambitious process of identity construction, as William Sherman explains (23, 11).<sup>4</sup> The fictional John Dee's drive to amass knowledge is charged with wonder at the miraculous nature of the created universe, but is likewise

overshadowed by his desire for pre-eminence. This he believes can be achieved with the recovery of the ancient lost city of London which existed when “truly was Britain the incomparable island of the whole world” (*HD* 154). To be the one to find this hidden city once again is an undertaking that he feels is

so great that, as to this time, it never was to my knowledge achieved—to find the very portion or circuit of ground where our ancient city lay, and by the apt study of that place to discover its contents, why, it is a marvel indeed. It is hard in these our dreary days to win due credit for the exercise of any art, but in this venture I believe that great glory will be found. (157)

It is perhaps clear that Ackroyd, who shares with Matthew and Doctor Dee their fascination for uncovering the past, playfully implicates himself as well in these lines.

Other aspects of these dual first-person narratives, however, implicate the writer in a more troubling manner. Both Matthew and Doctor Dee tend didactically to “explain” themselves and their progressive insights over the course of their narratives, which can make Ackroyd’s technique seem unduly heavy-handed. That both narratives collapse at the end of the novel with the intrusion of the writer into the text also perhaps derails any sense of the moral development of these characters, as they begin, apparently, to escape from the prisons of their own self-centredness. John Dee’s narrative has also featured sporadic references to a reader, a “you,” as for example with these words: “I have not the reports close to hand, otherwise I would give them to you in this place” (51). This never-explained allusion to an unknown recipient of Dee’s narrative further frustrates the “real” reader’s hopes of understanding the logic of the text. How to read and interpret, then,

becomes a pressing concern in *The House of Doctor Dee*, inevitably involving attempts to assess not only Ackroyd's intent, but his abilities as a writer as well.

Applying Stanley Fish's analysis of Plato's dialectic and of the ideal text as a self-consuming artifact proves a useful strategy in reading this novel. Discussing Socrates' method of "soul education," Fish describes how a series of arguments and their apparent resolutions are artfully arranged so as to provoke discomfort with the manipulations of rhetoric and with received "wisdom" (7). Of this process Fish claims that "the value of a word or a proposition in a dialogue is determined less by its truth-content than by its effectiveness in stimulating further inquiry" (8). As the listener or reader confronts an argument's palpable untrustworthiness, as it becomes apparent that its "resolutions" are actually nothing of the sort, "this space of prose and argument will have been the vehicle of its own abandonment" (10). This, then, models the text as a self-consuming artifact whose validity is used up in the act of reading. By engaging in this process, the reader progresses to subsequent levels of understanding where the text becomes irrelevant, except in having provided the means to get there. Central to this idea is that the dialectical process stimulates a reader's capacity for "vision": the text's "moments of blurring become invitations to examine closely premises too easily acquiesced in" (11). Thus the crucial activity takes place in the mind of the reader as the text and its (in)conclusions become clearly subordinate to, though in service of, that mind's broadening capacity for discernment (12). Reaching and then moving past temporary plateaus of understanding in this way is akin to the mandala principle discussed in the previous chapter, in which the apparently solid boundaries, approached with self-conscious awareness, can be perceived to be transformed into space.

The fact that Ackroyd revisits one central theme over the course of many novels, then, may be seen as the enactment of a dialectical process, as can the problems with reading that occur in *The House of Doctor Dee*. That both Matthew and Doctor Dee begin to turn away from their books in order to participate more directly in their own lives and relationships would also seem to align this novel with Fish's idea of the self-consuming text. The "final rung" on the dialectical ladder, after all preceding rungs have been successfully kicked away, Fish argues, "is, of course, the rejection of written artifacts" (13). This impression is reinforced by Dee's own moment of insight as he struggles to decipher canting language for the first time:

There are the words "house" and "father," all closely inscribed, but in the gathering darkness I can read nothing more. So I light my candle and watch its fire. As the darkness is lifted the wax is consumed: the substance does not die, but is transformed into flame. This is the final lesson. By means of that fire the material form of the candle before me rises into its spiritual being. It has become a light and a shining within this poor shambling room, my library. (79)

Should the reader be tempted to rest content with this "final lesson," however, offered barely a third of the way into the novel, the temptation would be short-lived.

Following upon the heels of this vision is Doctor Dee's brutal disregard for his own father who lies suffering and close to death: "what was I to do with him, this thing upon the bed, or he with me? What does death signify, if it is not my own death?" (99). Similarly, Matthew's musings upon abstract ideals of love and pity are interspersed with acts of violence which he commits almost automatically and seemingly at random. This

disjunction between their words and actions effectively ironizes any moments of realization that Doctor Dee and Matthew seem to achieve. If this pattern is part of a deliberately dialectical movement, readers might better understand both the occasional didacticism of Ackroyd's storytelling, and the role of irony in the novel, since the two would underscore both the construction of paradigms of knowledge and understanding and their perpetual disruption.

John Dee, alchemist and thaumaturgist, says in his narrative that in "all affairs of the world which we command, there is somewhat that is true and somewhat that is false: so who here can tell me what is real and what is unreal?" (20). Alchemy is one of the central tropes of this novel, and, with its emphasis on a process of purification through the sacred marriage of opposite principles, works as a near-perfect emblem of a dialectical inquiry into what is true and what is false. Alchemical transmutations not only transform base matter, but *require* its presence if the elixir of life is to be found. Thus the jarring violence that occurs in both Doctor Dee's and Matthew's narratives does not just provide an ironic counterpoint to their struggles for enlightened understanding. It is a sign as well of the vital though raw forces unleashed by such struggles. Matthew senses this after one bizarre sexual encounter, when he "understood ... that with such fury and excitement anything could be conjured into existence" (172). Soon after, in a passage reminiscent of the "lilies and mud" theme in *Lives of Girls and Women*, Matthew looks at some sunflowers "growing beside a rubbish heap near the back of the garden. 'It's amazing how they grow out of all this muck and dirt,' ... [his mother's lover] said" (179). This is just after Matthew has rediscovered his own roots in the painful secrets of a family past which he had buried in forgetfulness. Delving into London's past, Matthew

and Doctor Dee are exposed to the “muck and dirt” of their own lives; but while this process exposes them to “truths” about themselves that they had forgotten, it does not resolve all their contrary impulses into a fixed balance. Instead, it sets them in motion, disrupting the self-protective fixity of attitude and personality which both men had sought to maintain.

Alchemy has also been appropriated recently as a contemporary “symbol for writing” in which meaning is “mediated, refracted and fractured by the play of irony” (Meakin 7-8). Associated with alchemy in this regard is Hermes Trismegistos, one incarnation of the Greek god Hermes, “the mediator, the communicator, the ever-mobile, superimposed on the Egyptian moon-god Thoth, divinity of intelligence and mythic inventor of writing” (11). William Sherman has disagreed with the emphasis that Frances Yates has placed on this mythical figure in connection to the historical John Dee (xiv). Peter Ackroyd, however, pointedly links his fictional Doctor Dee to this founder of alchemy and the art of writing, further underscoring his use of this character as a locus for the anxiety inherent in the reading and writing process (*HD* 64, 68, 78). As Socrates has it in the *Phaedrus*, the Egyptian god Thamus warned Thoth (or Theuth) that the invention of writing was destined to work in a way that was counter to its intended purpose. Humanity’s

trust in writing, produced by external characters which are not part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them.

You have invented an elixir not of memory but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know

many things, when they are for the most part ignorant. (qtd. in Yates, *Art of Memory* 38)

That Ackroyd's novel resonates with ideas such as these that ironize the activities of reading and writing is by no means incompatible with Stanley Fish's notion of the dialectical process. In fact, Fish indicates that this kind of distrust in the written word is a crucial ingredient of it. But it becomes difficult to discern whether or not Ackroyd also intends to ironize, finally, all potential for actual vision and understanding. In *The House of Doctor Dee*, Ackroyd may be problematizing the very notion of "soul education," as it has been imagined by Fish and by Socrates. For, though Ackroyd's narrative techniques may seem to operate in a dialectical mode, they can just as easily be read as nihilistic, or, at the very least, as games played in which meaning itself is both endlessly deferred and discredited.

The reader watches as Matthew feels able, very early on in his research, to say of John Dee that "I knew now the full story of his life," claiming also to understand the "truth" of alchemy and the "true gold" of its "wisdom" (133). He explains, complacently, that "it became clear that ... [Doctor Dee] was too concerned with secrets and with mysteries ... [and] susceptible to the demands of envy and ambition. So there were times when he lost sight of that sacred truth he wished to investigate" (133). Matthew's "knowledge" is apt to make readers doubly uneasy. It may seem condescending, for one thing, that in this way one narrative overtly explains how to read the other. For another, Matthew's conclusions are, presumably, uncomfortably close to those which most attentive readers will have assumed by now to be the meaning of John Dee's story. This works, unfortunately, to implicate them in Matthew's own, clearly flawed, process.

Reading and knowing have been made too consistently suspect in this novel for Matthew's narrative to be seen as trustworthy—not least because, in the scene immediately following these insights, Matthew hurls a book about Doctor Dee at a hapless pigeon before stamping it to death (135-136).

Forms and formulae of knowing, then, especially those represented by and disseminated in books, become increasingly unsettled as the novel progresses, until even the expectation of uneasiness as a necessary part of the dialectical process cannot quite reconcile readers to their difficulties with this text. One might even say that the method whereby a Socratic dialectician provokes “soul growth” in another is eerily similar to the creation of the mythical homunculus. In this novel, the homunculus is a figure for the fanatical extreme to which the desire may be taken to create a living storehouse of knowledge in its maker's own image. Socrates explains that “the dialectician ... finds a congenial soul and then proceeds with true knowledge to plant and sow in it words which are able to help themselves and help him who planted them; words which ... bring their possessor to the highest degree of happiness possible for a human being to attain” (qtd. in Fish 17). But to trust that any one person could be the possessor and transmitter of “true knowledge” is made impossible in Ackroyd's text. Although each narrator at some point explicitly rejects the implication that he is anyone's homunculus or “little man,” with words and identity implanted in him, whether by father or by the writer of this novel, the truth of the matter remains an open question. No one vision stands intact by the end of the novel, inherited historical and literary forms of knowing have been debased throughout, and the imminent collapse of all human creations into the solipsistic universes of their individual “creators” is a possibility that cannot be denied. Matthew, for one, doubts that

he has an existence of his own independent of his father's various experiments. "I can't bear to look at myself" he says. "Or look *into* myself. I really don't believe that there's anything there, just a space out of which a few words emerge from time to time" (*HD* 80-81). Is, then, the quest for a creative vision that transcends personal limitations shown, finally, to be futile?<sup>5</sup>

Looking beyond this one novel, it is clear that the core of much of Ackroyd's fiction is based on the idea that no single person's artistic and/or moral vision can sustain itself in isolation. All creativity occurs, he seems to say, within a living tradition that enriches even as it circumscribes the possibilities of expression. Likewise, no creative artifact can stand alone, supported by just one person's will and knowledge; its success as a transmitter of meaning always and only occurs in a community of imaginative and interpretive effort. Ackroyd relentlessly highlights the fact that each individual person or created object is flawed or incomplete, perhaps irredeemably, in and of itself. Creative effort, then, that is directed towards self-aggrandizement only, out of balance with the importance placed upon communicating with what is beyond the self, dooms the creators to become their own homunculi, prisoners of time trapped within their own sterile self-images. This is the self-perpetuating cycle that Ackroyd ironizes in his texts, even as he attests to the inherent possibilities in creative expression. Acts of communication, however flawed, instigate relationships between self and other, as we see begin to occur with Matthew and John Dee. Within the spaces of relationship, Ackroyd suggests, the power of art resides and the boundaries of time and personality may be crossed.

With both of the narrators of *The House of Doctor Dee*, Ackroyd takes considerable pains to point out the meagre quality of their relations to other human

beings. Both of them speak of the value of relationship in the abstract, but act in ways counter to their “understanding.” They are alienated from their fathers, and untouched by their deaths; they are dismissive of their mothers (and wife, in Dee’s case); and they are stilted in their interactions with everyone else. A discernible shift occurs later in the text, however, which is marked as well by a softening of their predilection for didactic expression. Matthew and John Dee both are increasingly able to experience caring, most prominently in their relationships with mother and wife (which accords with the mystical union of male and female that is fundamental to alchemical transmutations). At the same time, both narrators become unable or unwilling to describe their experiences explicitly in words. Dee, devastated by his wife’s death, has only this to say: “How I took it, I mean not to tell” (244). For his part, Matthew evokes the breaking open of his emotional life in tangential fashion: “Something had risen within me, and dashed me against the brick wall of a front garden. ... I was struggling on the surface of some emotion more voluminous and powerful than anything I myself possessed. ... I saw a girl helping an old man across the road, and I could hear someone singing in the distance” (180).

Corresponding to the process by which Doctor Dee and Matthew become more open to the impact of others is the way Ackroyd’s text begins to ring loud with the echoes of other writers’ work. John Dee’s nightmare vision of a world without love mirrors Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, while his vision in the “garden of the true world” contains echoes of Hardy and of T. S. Eliot’s “Little Gidding.” Once pointed in that direction, Eliot’s line, “History may be servitude, / History may be freedom,” seems to underline one theme of this novel quite neatly (2168). The description of the garden itself almost exactly reproduces Swedenborg’s description of the afterlife, where lovers of learning go

once their desire for knowledge has been transmuted into a more spiritual vision (370-371). It is noteworthy that at this point in the novel, Dee's vision of the garden is explicitly *not* that of the alchemist, although at first he is tempted to see it in this way. The mother/wife/"someone other" who leads him here says, "This is no garden of alchemy. This is the garden of the true world. ... It is by heart that you must learn its lessons, for what good is knowledge if you do not live according to the same?" (*HD* 251). Alchemy as a symbol, like all others in the novel, is superseded or leads to others, and in so doing is left behind. Thus, though reading and writing have been unceasingly problematized in *The House of Doctor Dee*, echoes such as these affirm their value as part of an ongoing dialogue between writers and readers. This is a dialogue which survives and is validated by transmitting meaningful images that resonate throughout time, and provide stepping stones for each new participant. And while the seemingly endless play of irony in Ackroyd's novels may seem to leave no viable grounds upon which meaning may take root, irony does not, finally, militate against a sense of wonder in the manner David Meakin has suggested that it must (20-21). Grounds for wonder may, in fact, be found in the imaginative revisioning of London in this text. Here Ackroyd follows in the footsteps of a master of English visionary literature—William Blake.

““Sometimes I feel as if I'm excavating some lost city within myself. ... We think that there must be some secret part of us which is made of gold. Which does not rust, and which is not corrupted. Do you know the quotation? And yet, if we found it, it would probably be fool's gold”” (83). So says Matthew's friend Daniel, expressing in compact form the distrust of self and of moral absolutes aired throughout the novel. At the same

time, however, Daniel attests to the persistence of the quest for meaning and value, explicitly associating that internal quest, as do Matthew and Doctor Dee, with the idea of a lost city. He also, of course, refers obliquely (“Do you know the quotation?”) to his reliance upon written texts for what he is able to say and understand. Narrators, writers, readers, and texts have been thoroughly implicated in the relativism that dogs any attempt to “excavate” meaning. Yet the sheer persistence of the will to do so points to the possibility that each attempt, especially when dynamically interactive with every other, may provide a stepping stone to an expanded vision. In this novel, the city of London works as an analogue of that process, in being a place of community, literally and metaphorically, where mystical union may occur between all those who stand on the same stones and attempt to navigate their ways through similar paths.<sup>6</sup> That the literal and the visionary may coexist in the same place, as it were, is definitional of William Blake’s idea of London as it appears throughout his writings—and, as it happens, Ackroyd was working on his biography of Blake while he was writing *The House of Doctor Dee* (Onega, “Interview” 220). He has said that, for Blake, London “was not just the city of the poor and the repressed ... it was also the city he called infinite London, spiritual four-fold London. For him, it was a visionary city as well as a real city and he could understand the truth of his own imagination even as he walked through the streets of London” (*William Blake*).<sup>7</sup>

For Blake, London’s spiritual development mirrors the growth of the human individual, and works itself out in a complex interrelationship between four different levels of existence which he named London, Golgonooza, Jerusalem, and Babylon. In a process akin to the textual development of Ackroyd’s characters towards a greater

integration of their emotional and mental lives, one which involves confronting the “muck” as well as reaching for the “sun,”<sup>8</sup> Blake’s “City of Art,” or Golgonooza, has as its “foundation”

consciously deployed human warmth and love. It is a spiritual place that exists in London surrounded by the miseries of Babylon. ... Golgonooza is dynamic, a place of “becoming”.... It is a place *within* Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the Eternal City whereas Golgonooza is within Time, being built ... toward Eternity. ... In the process of assimilating London to Golgonooza, there is a struggle with the devastating influences of Babylon. Drawing the laborers of Golgonooza on is the hope of Jerusalem restored. The relation of ... Golgonooza to Jerusalem is one of growing correspondence. (Bogan 89)

Blake’s Golgonooza is thus “a multi-dimensional mandala-map, which charts the interior universe of the psyche” (Bogan 91). According to Blake’s schema, then, as Northrop Frye intuits, “the imagination exists immortally not only as [part of] ... a person but as part of a growing and consolidating city” (qtd. in Bogan 89).

The striking manner in which Ackroyd conflates the human self, the “father’s” house, the city, and the text in *The House of Doctor Dee* is similar to Blake’s textual rendering of London as the place in which three-fold man may develop into four-fold (or spiritual) man: the vision of four-fold London has to be “interiorized and discovered in your ‘own body’” (Bogan 97, 92). This applies especially well to the house that Matthew inherits from his father. A structure that has evolved over the centuries through one architectural style after another, with a very much older and broadly ranging foundation

now buried in the earth, it “resembled,” Matthew thinks, “the torso of a man rearing up, while his arms still lay spread upon the ground on either side. When I walked towards the steps, it was as if I were about to enter a human body” (*HD* 3). On his first day in the house, Matthew has a dream in which the house appears to have four separate doors, coloured black, white, green and red. Depending on the door through which it was entered, the house is either full of black dust or empty air, awash with water or burning like a furnace (9-10), an image echoing Blake’s conception of the different planes of reality contained within, or containing, the city of London.<sup>9</sup>

What aligns Ackroyd’s novel and Blake’s artistic vision even further is the awareness engendered by Blake’s works of their inherently “difficult position as articulate texts” (Peterfreund 101). Stuart Peterfreund explains that under what he calls “the less-than-ideal conditions of the fallen world, knowledge does not take textual form without impediments and the creative struggle necessary to overcome these, however imperfectly” (115). This struggle must be “recurrent rather than singular” (115). Finally, that process depends upon ongoing conversations between self and other: “If left uninflected by the language of the other, Albion’s language threatens to become a fixed text ... rather than giving way to the textual free play of heterology and dialogism ... in which each speaker literally puts himself or herself in the place of the other” (117).<sup>10</sup> Attempting to bridge the literal and the imaginary, self and other, is, as we have already seen with Buckler’s and Munro’s novels, “a continual exercise in *translation*, a *seeing through* the literal contexts of things ... to the significance they acquire in the light of a larger perspective” (Fish 25; emphases added).

The impact of such translations is ongoing and transformative, for they erode “the distinctions we are accustomed to make, between persons, times, places” (29). They may even instigate a “remembering” of some form of primordial unity that Socrates, for one, equates with all true learning. The mind’s capacity to remember may be trained by creating vivid and detailed images of a particular place in a manner similar to the mnemonic system described by Frances Yates (Fish 45). The memory that is stimulated by the dialectical process, however, differs from the memory that rhetoricians rely upon, being more in the order of what Fish calls a movement towards “salvation” (47). As an exemplar of this form of memory training, Fish’s description of the “periods” and transitions in John Donne’s sermon *Death’s Duell* can easily be translated and applied to *The House of Doctor Dee* with its movement around the city and through time. In Donne’s sermon, Fish says, we “move (supposedly) from one period to another ... but discover in each new period and section the same horrors we thought to escape” (53). According to Fish, Donne provokes his listeners and readers with promises of satisfaction that are endlessly deferred until they remember to set their sights on God alone, instead of hoping for clarity from mere conceptual reasoning. Ackroyd likewise provokes his readers with a textual “cycle of frustrations” (Fish 53), perhaps in order to spur them to a new relationship with—or memory of—a more creative engagement with reading, “knowing,” and remembering. Such an engagement, rather than searching for a point of stasis, might recognize instead the need to keep reopening what has been understood to further questions and further possibilities of seeing differently.

As the recurrent “place” of Ackroyd’s remembering (and of the re-remembering of the true self, in Blake’s terms), London is as much a self-consuming artifact as Stanley

Fish's ideal text, for its material reality, which Ackroyd renders so vividly in any time period, is progressively emptied out and replaced by the mystical London of his imagination. This city has been lost in the distant past but still exists nonetheless, unfinished and evolving, in some future state. The persistent naming of streets and locations recurring in both narratives is actually a part of the emptying out process, for, according to Michel de Certeau, walking the streets of a city actually wears out the old meanings of place-names so that they then "become liberated spaces that can be occupied" by the imagination (qtd. in Ball 232-233). This process is akin to the kind of memory that serves a dialectical purpose as opposed to that supporting a rhetorical intention. As Stanley Fish describes it, "in one tradition things are fixed in their respective places, in the other, a growing awareness of God's immanence makes all places and things one. In one tradition the categories by means of which the visible world is divided and made manageable are validated, while in the other those categories are collapsed when they are discovered to contain the same essence" (49).<sup>11</sup>

The work that both Matthew and Doctor Dee engage in of uncovering or remembering the past results in just such a "collapse" of divisions on many levels of the text: a deeper dialogue and understanding occurs between characters and within themselves, between the once separate narratives, and between this novel and other works in the English literary tradition. This collapse seems to be pushed to its limit, though, when Matthew's narrative apparently begins all over again, as Doctor Dee overhears a conversation between Daniel and Matthew that had occurred at the beginning of the novel. At that point, the writer "Peter Ackroyd" also enters into the text and into conversation with John Dee. Is this then a communion of beings in an overarching unity

promoting dialogue between opposing elements, or is this the collapse of all difference into the dominant One? Readers of Peter Ackroyd's work must repeatedly face the question of whether, in the end, it all comes back to him.

In William Blake's work, Ackroyd has said, a recognizable figure appears often, which in one of its several guises is that of "Urizen." Ackroyd finds that there are important resonances between this recurrent figure and Blake himself, because there is in ... [Blake's] pride, his ambition, his desire to control the world by creating his own mythological system, some shadowy resemblance to Urizen's own endeavours. Urizen is terrible precisely because Blake realised that those same characteristics had profoundly damaged and impeded him. ... Urizen is, after all, a maker of books and is always associated with them—his "book of iron on his knees" on which "he traces the dreadful letters" might be an image of Blake himself. ... Urizen writes "in horrible fear of the future," which must be controlled with "pen obdurate," again like Blake. ... But he is the worst part of Blake—the earthly part, the unhappy and thwarted aspect of his life, which led him to calculate and to systematize, sometimes losing his inspiration in a mire of obsessive detail and repetition. (*Blake* 378-379)

There are obvious affinities here between Blake / Urizen and the Doctor Dee that appears in Ackroyd's text. And according to its logic of the merging of the writer with his characters, one might suspect that Peter Ackroyd discovers these affinities within himself as well.

A dialectical process, Stanley Fish says, is ultimately “antidiscursive and antirational; rather than distinguishing, it resolves, and in the world it delivers the lines of demarcation between places and things fade in the light of an all-embracing unity ... marked by the transformation of the visible and segmented world into an emblem of its creator’s indwelling presence” (3). Obviously, in regards to what Ackroyd (and Socrates, for example) does, this can be read in two different ways, one of which is fairly disturbing. But Fish goes on to clarify the potential of dialectic in terms of the self-consuming artifact which, in fact, “signifies most successfully when it fails, when it points *away* from itself to something its forms cannot capture” (4). This, it seems, would include the “indwelling creator” of any text, since the identity construction of writer, characters and readers would always be in a state of movement, proceeding to the next articulation of form, while leaving previous forms behind. Part of the self-consuming process, then, would be to observe the obvious gaps or flaws in what appears to be the guiding vision of a text as much as in its characters and readers. As Fish says of John Donne’s sermon, “*Death’s Duell* serves us by refusing to serve us, by failing .... The preacher is, no less than we, the beneficiary of this failure” (70). The intrusion of “Peter Ackroyd” into his own text may be meant to be a self-conscious acknowledgement of such a failure. By openly indicating that his status as writer should be open to question, Ackroyd may be claiming the benefits of dialectic that Stanley Fish has described for himself and for his readers.

But as Fish admits of John Donne, so readers may find with Peter Ackroyd: many “may find it difficult to think of his as a self-deprecating art” (70).<sup>12</sup> However, by invading his own novel, Ackroyd effectively admits its failure as a stable artifact, and his

inability as writer to stay separate from his text or to keep from skewing his topic to suit his own concerns and desires, as John Dee pointedly reminds him. In a layering of indebtedness that Ackroyd would enjoy, Fish quotes Augustine quoting Ecclesiastes: “We speak many things, and yet attain not: and the whole consummation of our discourse is himself” (vii). In Augustine’s usage, “himself” is God, and holds out the promise of finally attaining to a vision of holy oneness, when all voices will be united in “one single voice, we ourselves also made one in thee” (vii). In Ackroyd’s work, readers must be sceptical about the identity of the “himself” whom we end up with: almighty Author or a writer willing to challenge and be challenged himself by the dialectical process apparently enacted in his work.

What is tricky about Peter Ackroyd is that he insists on having things both ways: he critiques reading, writing, and textuality while making them central to a rich and growing experience of subjectivity. He has openly said of his writing that “I suppose I could describe it as a process of exploration of myself. That when I began writing about other people, I was also writing about myself essentially” (Onega, “Interview” 212). This may appear to be solipsistic, to some degree, but as Stanley Fish has said, addressing the “charge of solipsism” that might be applied to his own work, “I would rather have an acknowledged and controlled subjectivity than an objectivity which is finally an illusion” (407). It seems to me that the way in which Ackroyd draws attention to his own “place” in the novel, thus rendering it overtly ironic, has the effect of provoking and then cancelling out a reader’s mistrust to some degree. It is actually here, in this doubling effect, that the author / writer begins to become trustworthy again. An ironic double vision turned on the self means that the self has been put in the place of another in order

to be able to see that way. For the self as “agent,” Paul Ricoeur says in *Oneself As Another*, “interpreting the text of an action is interpreting himself or herself” (179). “Reflexivity” such as this, he admits, “seems indeed to carry within it the danger of turning in upon oneself, of closing up, and moving in the opposite direction from openness” (180). But what Ricoeur proposes to mitigate this danger is the idea of a self that oscillates between *idem* and *ipse*: between the self as self-same, and the self that responds to the other’s call with “‘it’s me here’ (*me voici!*), to borrow an expression dear to Lévinas” (21-23). Ricoeur’s idea of the “self,” then, is of an entity *consisting* of this dialectical movement between same and other.

Don Ihde has said of Paul Ricoeur’s work that it is also dialectical, basing itself on the fact that “any single-perspective approach will always remain insufficient to penetrate the insights needed, and particularly such topics as self-understanding or human ontology” (“Paul Ricoeur’s Place” 64). Ricoeur, Ihde says, has the conviction that “any self-awareness is not simply limited, but simultaneously self-deceptive and thus must call for a deeper therapy from the *other*” (66).<sup>13</sup> Asserting that for the reader to do his or her job properly, “the egoistic I must recede” (“Intellectual Autobiography” 48), Ricoeur picks up the notion of distanciation once more in his exploration of a more productive idea of the self in *Oneself As Another*. In that text he asks again whether or not “a moment of self-dispossession [might be] essential to authentic selfhood” (138-139). And yet, correspondingly, “must one not, in order to make oneself open, available, belong to oneself in a certain sense” (139)? Just as narrative makes “productive” the “aporias of temporality,” likewise narrative addresses aporias to be found in the question of agency, giving them a “poetic reply” if not a “solution” per se (147).

In narratives that “recount the dissolution of the self” Ricoeur says, what is being suggested by the limiting cases produced by the narrative imagination is a dialectic of ownership and dispossession, of care and carefreeness, of self-affirmation and self-effacement. Thus the imagined nothingness of the self becomes the existential “crisis” of the self .... [I]t is necessary that the irruption of the other, breaking through the enclosure of the same, meet with the complicity of this movement of effacement by which the self makes itself available to others. For the effect of the “crisis” of selfhood must not be the substitution of self-hatred for self-esteem. (167-168)

Recognizing the self-consuming aspect of any form, whether self or text, does not negate its value as a place to inhabit or traverse, from any moment to another. Moments of being emptied out are a part of the dialectical process, where emptiness means openness to change and to different perceptions. By confronting the problems of the emptied out self, the proud self-contained self, the self-hating self—all of whom are faced with self-consuming artifacts imaged as body, text, house and city—the main question in *The House of Doctor Dee* becomes this: how does self relate to the self, as well as to the other? If it is possible for caring to be discovered in relationship with another, a similar recuperation might go on with regards to the self. Such a process may be perhaps brought about in part by “putting oneself in someone else’s place.” Then the prime ethical mandate, of doing unto another as to the self, becomes not a reduction of difference to the same, but grows out of a confrontation with the self *as* other and the recognition that the self is *as unknown*, finally, as any other. This unknown self is a living entity oscillating between *idem* and *ipse*, always discovering new aspects of itself, and always responding

to injunctions from the (necessarily imagined) other in a growing awareness of “mutuality” (Ricoeur, *OAA* 183).<sup>14</sup>

But “mutuality,” Ricoeur says, has “its own requirements which are not eclipsed by either a genesis based on the Same, as in Husserl, or a genesis based on the Other, as in Lévinas” (183). He points, therefore, to an imbalance in Lévinas’s formulations, in that the “self” must be able to respond to the “injunction of the Other” (189).<sup>15</sup> Ricoeur insists that what is needed is a “being who does not detest itself to the point of being unable to hear the injunction coming from the other” (189). “In truth,” he goes on to say, “what the [Husserlian] hyperbole of separation renders unthinkable is the distinction between self and I, and the formation of a concept of selfhood defined by its openness and its capacity for discovery” (339). Likewise, however, the “hyperbole of epiphany” or of radical exteriority on Lévinas’s side, is incapable of “awakening a responsible response to the other’s call, except by presupposing a capacity for reception, of discrimination, and of recognition .... If interiority were indeed determined solely by the desire for retreat and closure, how could it ever hear a word addressed to it ...?” (339).<sup>16</sup>

The question of who, then, the “I” or the “me” is who imagines, creates, responds and changes, and who recognizes mutuality remains, as Ricoeur willingly admits, unanswerable, an aporia:

I am nothing ... But who is I [?] ... [It] may well be that the most dramatic transformations of personal identity pass through the crucible of this nothingness of identity .... In these moments of extreme destitution, the empty response to the question ‘Who am I?’ refers not to the nullity but to the nakedness of the question itself. (*OAA* 166-167)

The identity, in other words, is as much a self-consuming artifact as the text, and is successfully used up in living, not in being permanently defined. In his own symbolic renderings of these aporias of the self, Ackroyd “will try to find a way out in every new novel, progressively refining his own imaginative answer to the modernist ‘inward turn’” (Onega, *Peter Ackroyd* 31). What he returns to, again and again, Onega says, is the idea of “this compound body-and-voice, made up of the great poets and artists of the past” which touches “immortality, not ... on the higher, metaphysical sphere of Plato’s Logos, but simply in the all too human realm of the Creative Imagination” (39-40). I am not sure, actually, that Ackroyd would be so definite as Onega is in excluding “higher realms” beyond the human in the imagining of this “cosmic body-and-voice,” although he would most definitely resist defining what those realms might be. At the very least, what is entailed in his writing is the re-imagining of the human and the sacred.

For Ackroyd, the imagination hinges upon what he has termed a “Catholic consciousness” (Onega, “Interview” 215). Although no longer a practising Catholic, Ackroyd says that “if you are formed in a Catholic education, you imbibe a sense of the sacred which never actually leaves you .... Either by instinct or intuition, or by an active act of identification, I am interested in those writers who add a visionary or sacred dimension to their prose or to their poetry” (209, 214). Interested as well in exploring the “latent Catholicism of the English race,” which had been “Catholic for 1,500 years and has only been Protestant for 400,” Ackroyd finds that what is characteristic about that Catholic sensibility is a

sense of transcendence and a sense of humour, which is almost the same thing .... I was thinking about people who ask me why I play with time

and history. Well, I suppose it is a Catholic consciousness trying to formulate faith in a different way. Trying to give the sense of the sacred some new dimension. But what this is, I don't know. (215)

In another interview, Ackroyd expands upon his understanding of this sensibility, stressing its apparently dialectical character: "The Catholic imagination ... goes from one extreme to another. It is theatrical and camp .... Catholicism is the religion of confession and symbolism; it depends upon external appearances, upon the belief that an object can be transformed by language" (Letvick). He recognizes the Catholic imagination as having affected his own approach to fiction in that, for him, fiction "is a way of creating an allegory or a vision, and I'm more interested in that than in what people call novels. I can't see the point in writing if that's not your proper motive" (Letvick).

An emergent aspect in Catholic theory that has not been as emphasized previously, according to J. C. Whitehouse, is that "of *becoming*, and of self-creation ...[,] that rather than the possession of a fixed and constant humanity our characteristic and uniquely human feature is an ability to grow and become more human" (5). Catholic writers influenced by this trend, Whitehouse reasons, see that "the recognition of a human being as a *mystery* implies the recognition of him as a *person*. This recognition is fundamentally a perception involving mutual communion and ... this is almost all one can say about the concept of the person" (6; italics in text). Whitehouse claims that Catholic writers of recent years have been concerned to modify the vision of humanity encoded in earlier Catholic dogma. Such writers are moving towards a perception of the human self, not as a fixed entity, but as "a being who defines himself in a community of selves and grows and becomes more richly and deeply himself in this situation of

intersubjective awareness” (7). In this situation, any one person’s growth and capacity for vision are stimulated “by collaborating with other selves, helping them to achieve their own freedom without using them as a means to his own ends” (7).<sup>17</sup>

These ideas may have been under-emphasized in traditional Catholic dogma, but certainly were not absent. Teresa of Avila, writing in the sixteenth century, seems to have been perfectly at home with them. In *The Interior Castle* she describes a contemplative path which plunges the self deep within itself, and leads to radical states of self-emptiness. In these states, communication or communion with an ultimate otherness, which in Teresa’s case is Christ, occurs. Traveling this path allows the self’s relationship with herself to be transformed gradually from a surface-oriented existence to one wherein, in deepening meditation and prayer, the self encounters otherness within her own core. This causes a transformation in both the conception and the function of the self, in mystical and exceedingly practical ways. In a seeming paradox, Teresa advocates a strong *self*-relation, at the same time that this self becomes progressively more and more emptied out. She oscillates between self-dispossession and re-engagement in a manner that is clearly similar to what Ricoeur describes in *Oneself as Another*. The self Teresa writes about becomes increasingly balanced and effective both in private and communal situations, even as she becomes less and less preoccupied or identified with herself. Proof of growth, finally, is to be judged in terms of the collective. The final test of the value of such mystical visions and experiences is always to be found in the fruits they bear outwardly in the community. Have they promoted expanded charity, willingness to serve, and increased humility, or have they exacerbated habits of self-focus and grandiosity? Believe me, she says, “ if you are not loving your neighbour you have not

attained union” (143). As Grace M. Jantzen clarifies, “Teresa is very clear that any experience that is genuinely from God will result in ‘virtues’, in a way of life which is characterized by kindness, compassion, tolerance for one another .... Knowledge was not a solitary quest, but was what Mary Frohlich has aptly termed ‘intersubjectivity’” (396-397).<sup>18</sup>

Teresa, in fact, in charting the movements between internal and external states of relationship, seems to be describing a dialectical process of soul growth. Stanley Fish has said that “the end of a dialectical experience is (or should be) nothing less than a *conversion*, not only a changing, but an exchanging of minds. It is necessarily a painful process (like sloughing off a second skin)” (2; italics in text). Teresa images this process in terms of the silkworm which spins a cocoon for itself out of itself and then is consumed, “dying” in its rebirth into butterfly form (128-129). In these and in other ways, Teresa’s work resonates with Peter Ackroyd’s *The House of Doctor Dee*.<sup>19</sup> One of the most striking resonances with *The Interior Castle* in Ackroyd’s novel is the way in which the vision of a crystalline castle both provides Teresa with the figure for the soul and translates almost simultaneously into her actual text. In her introduction to *The Interior Castle*, Mirabai Starr explains that when Teresa was assigned the task of writing her last book, her labour was illuminated by the following vision: “It all began with a vision the Beloved revealed to Teresa when she appealed to him for assistance. It was the image of a magnificent castle inside our own souls, at the center of which the Beloved himself dwells. Out of this vision Teresa saw the whole book unfold in a flash” (21-22). This image captures the sense of a progression inward towards the self’s centre where the other will be found, and also resonates with the mandala principle discussed in the

previous chapter. The interior structure of the mandala is often figured as a castle, the centre of which is inhabited by whatever deity is invoked by the practitioner.<sup>20</sup>

Ackroyd, too, as we have seen, works with interlocking symbols of body, text and house (as well as city and cosmos) as the shifting grounds for the exchange and transformation of energies. He emphasizes a threatening containment in a house haunted with repeating cycles of violence and transgression, a dying city leeching its inhabitants of vitality, and a homunculus trapped inside a transparent tube and planted in excrement. He then breeches the containment of the story in its textual form, however, by intruding as a character in his own novel, causing the boundaries between text, writer, character and reader to blur or disappear. Just as Teresa's readers would have to put into practice in their own lives the processes she describes, so readers of Ackroyd's novel must test out for themselves the implications of his fictional maneuvers. As Linda Hutcheon says, the "process of reading a fragmented text is such that readers can be implicated directly in the challenge to the boundaries ... between 'real life' and art" ("Modes" 84).

Perhaps this is the "bridge of light" that Ackroyd intends to build in *The House of Doctor Dee* when "he" calls to John Dee: "Oh you, who tried to find the light within all things, help me to create another bridge across two shores. And so join with me, in celebration .... Then will London be redeemed, now and for ever, and all those with whom we dwell—living or dead—will become the mystical city universal" (277). While he insists that the products of the human imagination are intrinsically flawed, Ackroyd seems just as adamant that they are nevertheless crucial to the endurance and development of a transhistorical community. In these terms, a fully realized vision may never be wholly achieved or transmitted by single artifacts or individual people. But the collective

movement towards vision, as facilitated by the reading and writing of texts, by a knowledge of history, or by an engagement with any form of art or knowledge, does appear, finally, to be affirmed as a “bridge of light” across which meaning may travel.<sup>21</sup>

Vision, then, remains a tantalizing possibility, despite the flawed corporeality of text, writer, and reader. Is *The House of Doctor Dee* a flawed novel? Definitely. But its very flaws enable it to participate in the ongoing dialogue which Peter Ackroyd has set up between his texts, between the present and the past, between writer and reader, and between the writer and his own imagination. The text as novel evaporates under sustained scrutiny, but the ideas contained within it do not, and neither does the destabilizing sensation felt by the reader whose expectations have been toyed with. Stanley Fish tells us that this discomfort is a healthy thing, provoking readers to surpass the existing horizons of their imagination. To give Ackroyd’s John Dee the last word (which the character would surely have appreciated): “The beholders are removed from their corporeal shapes in the surprise of this action, and in imagination fly upward ... to their first cause. These words are plain and easy English, but the reach of their meaning is further than you think” (21).

---

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Michel de Certeau's idea of the "occultation of the other" that historiography is susceptible to may apply as well to historical fiction such as Ackroyd's: "The other is the fantasm ... that it seeks, that it honors and [simultaneously] inters .... This contradictory project aims to 'understand' and to bury the alterity of that strange being ... or, what amounts to the same thing, to propitiate the dead who still haunt the present, and offer them textual tombs" (qtd. in Terdiman 5).

<sup>2</sup> Speaking about his own writing process, however, Ackroyd has said that he "certainly didn't feel any pressure; I didn't feel what Bloom calls 'anxiety of influence'" (Onega, "Interview" 212).

<sup>3</sup> In the film *William Blake*, Ackroyd says that he himself had a similar visionary experience of London as a child: he saw people moving as "transformed lines of light ... which seemed to have some ulterior and grander movement which I didn't quite understand. But I realized at that time that London itself could be seen as an organism ... and Blake himself has the very same sense. So for him, London was a spiritual reality, it was a part of the Divine vision."

<sup>4</sup> John Dee is an apt subject for Peter Ackroyd in another way. In *Chatterton* he had investigated the impossibility of finding where one artist's influence or words ends and another begins; in *The House of Doctor Dee*, Ackroyd admits, he transposed many of John Dee's own words directly into this text (275). William Sherman says that few of Dee's own writings can be called "original," however, since he also borrows heavily from other writers and thinkers. His books, like Ackroyd's, are full of "scholarly cutting and pasting" (122).

---

<sup>5</sup> Gerald L. Bruns, in *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, deals with the question of the futility or emptiness of “saying” anything in regards to Socrates’ dialectical—and ironic—process of question and answer. Naming Socrates a “Hermes” figure, or “the dialectician who goes back and forth endlessly between the One and the indeterminate Two” (23), Bruns identifies Socrates’ “well-known irony” as

not just his not saying what he means but his refusal to mean anything at all—his refusal to put anything but questions into words .... However—and appropriately perhaps—this is a matter on which it is difficult to speak without getting tangled in contradictions .... [W]hen Socrates does speak positively ... he does so in the name of someone else ... [which is] consistent with his characterization of himself ... as a kind of midwife .... Socrates will even speak in the name of Homer and the poets and tell a tale “as the truth” even though it will appear to his interlocutor as an obvious fabrication .... [And] one has to cope with Socratic joking.... The irony is that making fun of a *logos* does not necessarily mean that it is empty .... The deeper irony may be this: it is not absolutely out of the question that the *pseudos* is a way (sometimes the only way) for something to show itself, if only deceptively. (33-34)

<sup>6</sup> Ackroyd himself has a “theory of the existence of intangible ‘patterns of habitation, and patterns of inheritance which seem to emerge from the very streets and alleys of the capital’” (qtd. in Onega, *Peter Ackroyd* 68).

<sup>7</sup> Blake’s art, Ackroyd believes, is part of an “intimate spiritual communion with the art of the past,” which engaged in “preserving and reaffirming” it in an age that was

increasingly unsympathetic (*William Blake*). This resonates with Ackroyd's own resuscitation of archaic arts, sciences, and belief systems in much of his fiction.

<sup>8</sup> Just as the image of the sunflower in the muck links Ackroyd's themes and Munro's, further connections are to be found in Ackroyd's characterization of Blake's work and the circle Munro draws with a "thin line" to include all aspects of experience. He says that Blake "establishes a 'bounding line' of art or poetry that does not unite contraries but allows them to exist in harmony beside each other" (*Blake* 144). Akin to the mandala principle of "mapping the ground" in a way that allows limits to become known and then penetrated, Ackroyd says of Blake's art that

in London, he began to develop the notion of "Limits," named as "Opacity" and "Contraction," which through the mercy of Jesus are formed to bind and therefore to define error. In certain respects they resemble the clear and pure outline that he considered to represent the form of true art; but ... [they] also ... suggest a wholly new way of looking at the material world. It has been given shape and substance so that it may eventually be redeemed because, in seeing error, we may at last be able to cast it off. (294)

<sup>9</sup> Susana Onega reminds us that the colours of these four doors "are the alchemic colours ... of the four basic constitutive elements: earth ('dust'); air ('pale and empty'); water ('cloud' and 'fountain'); and fire ('furnace'). ... [T]he house, which is literally 'descending into ground' (*HDD* 5), has three storeys at underground, ground and above-ground levels that may be said to replicate the ... cosmic levels, and also their human equivalents, body, soul and spirit" (*Peter Ackroyd* 59). However, in dealing with these

---

symbolologies and their sources, Omega separates the cabalistic from the hermetic strands of influence, saying that the former is shown to lead only to “unhappiness” by focusing on the body (figured by the “Jewish” homunculus, which she equates with the golum), while the hermetic tradition leads to transcendence and love through “vision” (61-62). As Frances Yates has made clear, however, in her *Occult Philosophy*, Christian Cabala and Hermetic philosophy should not be deemed such separate influences in the thought of Renaissance scholars such as John Dee, since both, treated symbolically, served to point in the same direction of spiritual growth and religious syncretism. Yates says of the historical Doctor Dee that his “message ... [was] an appeal to a vast, undogmatic, reforming movement which drew its spiritual strength from the resources of occult philosophy,” a blend of Christian cabala, alchemy, and Hermeticism (103).

<sup>10</sup> In his biography of Blake, Ackroyd observes that it “has been said that Blake’s art is one of process and movement” in which “the main suggestion is one of continual activity and change ... animated by his profound sense of the energetic interplay between contraries and oppositions” (319).

<sup>11</sup> Of course, in a characteristically contradictory (or dialectical?) fashion, Stanley Fish has since switched his allegiance from dialectic to rhetoric. The opposition he previously described, as Steven Mailloux says, is overturned “in his later work, as he champions Sophistic Rhetoric over Platonic foundationalist philosophy” (115). Incidentally, Stanley Fish seems temperamentally similar to Peter Ackroyd as well: H. Aram Veesser says of Fish that his “knowledge that people are basically greedy and selfish coexists with his urgings to community and solidarity” (3).

<sup>12</sup> A comment, by the way, that boomerangs back on Stanley Fish as well.

---

<sup>13</sup> David Pellauer also speaks of a dialectical aspect of Ricoeur's work that may remind us of Ackroyd's: an "oscillation between demystification and restoration of meaning" (105).

<sup>14</sup> Richard Terdiman, in his discussion of Michel de Certeau's theorizing of alterity and heterology, comments that "there is an impulse within certain versions of poststructuralist thinking that radicalizes difference to the point that the possibility of response seems to fade out entirely" (7). Any attempt to imagine or to enter into communication with what is other is always in danger of such a collapse into the self-referential, closed universe of an individual. But, Terdiman says, the effort of imagination is not in vain: "In our post-referential world, in the face of our unmasking of the technologies and tropologies by which we create the simulacra of 'others' out of our own fancy or our own obsession, we need to understand how our apprehension of alterity still might be conceived as determined by *something resistant* to the free play of our signifiers" (8). Terdiman says that in this recognition of the "discursive effectiveness to alterity" there are "traces of a heartening, if unfashionable Hegelianism": "in the paradigms of the dialectic Hegel gave us a way of understanding the pressure under which the other places us" (8-9). So what is other is real *and* resistant, puts us under pressure, and cannot be forced into limited shapes for our own purposes. But this dialectical paradigm remains incomplete if the one who responds to this resistance and tries to encounter this reality is eradicated.

<sup>15</sup> Ricoeur reiterates later in this text that "it is impossible to construct this dialectic [of self and other] in a unilateral manner, whether one attempts, with Husserl, to derive the alter ego from the ego, or whether, with Lévinas, one reserves for the Other the exclusive

---

initiative for assigning responsibility to the Self" (*OAA* 331). Husserl, he says, relegates the sense of the "other than me" to "the status of a prejudice" (331). Lévinas "by a comparable, though opposite, hyperbole" constitutes "his conception of radical otherness" (332). Lévinas's idea of the "Same," Ricoeur says, "is bound up with an ontology of totality that my own investigation has never assumed or even come across" (336). Such an ontology means that "the self, not distinguished from the I, is not taken in the sense of the self-designation of a subject of discourse, action, narrative, or ethical commitment. A pretension dwells within it ... [which] expresses a will to closure, more precisely a state of separation, that makes Otherness the equivalent of a radical exteriority" (336).

<sup>16</sup> To such opposing extremes of philosophizing about self and other, Ricoeur says, he will "stubbornly oppose the original and originary character of what appears to me to constitute the third modality of otherness, *being enjoined as the structure of selfhood*" (354; italics in text).

<sup>17</sup> By contrast, the English novel since "the 1950s ... [has been] less confident in the capacity of its narrative to effect collective symbolic transformation" (Peach 183). Ackroyd, it appears, tends to oscillate between both of these contemporary trends, in a dialectical exploration of each stance. Another Catholic novelist who seems to do the same, exploring the ever-present spectre of solipsism and the tension between the possibility of an enlarged perception and a pessimistic view of humanity, is William Golding. In *The Spire* he investigates similar issues to those raised in Ackroyd's *The House of Doctor Dee*. Here too, humanity's capacity to receive and understand a transcendent vision is undermined even as it figures as the central concern of the novel.

---

Jocelin, the main character, fails to see or to understand his own egoism, the inflation of self that is a concomitant response to intimations of a mystical / spiritual connection which manifest primarily as an urge to create a monument to his divine vision. The weight of this novel seems to be on the impossibility of any true visionary discernment, even supposing that divine visions ever really occur. This scepticism is helped along by an examination of the endearing tendency human beings have of sacrificing others to their own fanatical sense of pre-eminence, their faith in their own folly. And yet, in a brief, almost to be missed couple of lines at the end of the novel, Golding affirms the reality of Jocelin's vision, even as he ironizes to the end any human interpretation of it, and of faith itself. Golding chooses never to establish overtly in his novel that Jocelin's folly, the church spire that no one thought would stand, was in fact the spire built on Salisbury Cathedral in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Jocelin's "folly," as he himself finally realizes, was in the emphasis he placed upon himself as the medium through which that vision would manifest, and his willingness to sacrifice others to his own purposes.

<sup>18</sup> See Mary Frohlich, *The Intersubjectivity of the Mystic. A Study of Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).

<sup>19</sup> It seems quite probable that Ackroyd has read her work, since he says in his biography of William Blake that Blake had a "great love for the writings of St. Teresa" (139).

<sup>20</sup> While some may be uneasy with Teresa's conception of this process, since for her what is encountered at the centre of the self is her beloved Christ, this "other" neither loses nor forfeits its alterity by communing with the self, *and* it triggers never-ending processes of self-transformation. These processes are based in a realization of the inherent emptiness of the self: John of the Cross, one of Teresa's closest spiritual companions, speaks of the

---

soul as being “[p]rofoundly established in the centre of its own nothingness” (qtd. in James 241). That Teresa’s emphasis is on an experiential dialectic of self and other, rather than on a conceptualized one, is evident in the occasional distaste she expresses for scholarly men who have not experienced what they talk about, but proceed only by the book (122). Also noteworthy is Teresa’s writing process, which occurs, according to her, from a place of “unknowing” (29-31).

<sup>21</sup> Gerald L. Bruns refers to Petrarch’s practice of reading which

means bridging time, not piercing a veil. But this means reawakening an antique spirit instead of reconstructing original meanings .... Petrarch reads Cicero in the spirit of Cicero, where “spirit” is not a metaphor (not just a metaphor) but characterizes the condition of intimacy in which understanding takes place. It would not be too much to describe this condition as ethical in the sense in which Emmanuel Levinas uses this term when he speaks of our relation to the other as a condition of proximity and exposure. ... [S]ubjectivity itself is structured “as other in the same,” that is, it is no longer a consciousness beholding its objects but a subject disturbed and even invaded by what is alien. (*Hermeneutics* 147-148)

Opposed to this is a “Cartesian hermeneutics, or the allegory of suspicion, in which the text comes under control of the reader as disengaged rational subject, unresponsive except to its own self-certitude” (149).

Chapter Five  
 All or Nothing? Testing the Magic Circles of Self and  
 Story in Adele Wiseman's *Crackpot*

Even more so than in Peter Ackroyd's *The House of Doctor Dee*, Adele Wiseman's novel *Crackpot* confronts the flaws that undermine every constructed form, including that of the self. At the same time, *Crackpot* resonates with mystical tradition in the most overt and layered way of all the novels discussed so far. Woven into the narrative of Hoda's struggles with poverty, ridicule, loneliness and neglect is a mythic dimension, a symbolic frame directly traceable to the Kabbalah, Jewish mystical writings that span many centuries and appear in many guises. As was the case in Ackroyd's novel, the dual nature of tradition as both gift and curse is explored, this time from the perspective of a woman whose life has been molded by the stories she has inherited from her father.<sup>1</sup> Hoda—larger than life, comically grotesque, sweet and vulnerable—is the subject of her father's mythic imagination, as Matthew was the subject of his father's esoteric beliefs in *The House of Doctor Dee*. Subject as well of nearly unbearable hardship, Hoda is caught in the ongoing struggles between genders, ethnic groups and social classes in her early- to mid-twentieth-century Manitoba community. The storytelling impulse and the function (both positive and bitterly negative) of narrative are held up to incisive scrutiny in this novel. However, again like Ackroyd, Wiseman also affirms the complex potential of narrative to communicate visionary possibility. Isaac Luria's cosmology, Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, and the *Shekhinah's* mythic presence in this novel will all help to test the limits of the magic circles of story and self in *Crackpot*. Finally, the circle itself works as a psychological metaphor for the empty yet effective (and affective) self, reading and living its life backwards and forwards at the same time.

From the outset, the focus in *Crackpot* is on the weaving of stories, beginning with the retelling of the story of Hoda's beginnings as seen through the imagination of her father, blind Danile. Here begins as well a clash between mythic and prosaic modes of vision. The first chapter recounts how Danile construes the most terrible occurrences in the sublime light of his own gentle and generous beliefs. It also highlights the disjunction between his version of events and the more cynical—or perhaps realistic—way his wife Rahel sees things, hedged about as she is by the pressing necessities her husband can avoid. Even as a child Hoda is aware of nagging discomfort when Rahel adds her commentary to Danile's stories: "Her mother seldom joined in the stories, but when she did something happened to them . . . . For some reason that she could not fathom, because her mother was the softest, safest person in the world, the stories hurt more when her mother helped to tell them" (30). As the novel progresses other stories come into focus and then pass away. There are the schoolchildren's tales, automatically generated to account for their teachers' idiosyncracies; the "comrades'" Marxist litanies of revolution and the workers' struggle; and the townspeople's legends about "crackpot" Hoda and the mysterious Pipick, secret offspring of Hoda's adolescence. Isaac Luria's cosmic imagery of the shattered vessels provides Wiseman with an apt metaphor through which to explore the construction of these fictions, as well as the problems of language, relationship and the self, each of which is implicated in this incessant story-telling. All of these are "leaky vessels" in the novel; everything is flawed (Belkin 162). Wiseman's use of this metaphor is overt and overflowing. She strews the text with repeated references to fragments, baskets, and "crackpots," as well as to Hoda's hugely capacious body and spirit that are subject to near-constant trauma and assault.

Wiseman's rendering of Luria's sixteenth-century creation legend appears in the epigraph to *Crackpot*: "He stored the Divine Light in a Vessel, but the Vessel, unable to contain the Holy Radiance, burst, and its shards, permeated with sparks of the Divine, scattered throughout the Universe." In order to understand this legend and how Adele Wiseman makes use of it, two primary kabbalistic concepts must be defined. One of these is *Ein Sof*, the infinite and unknowable, towards which the Kabbalah maintains "a mystical agnosticism": from *Ein Sof* come the emanations and differentiations of forces responsible for manifest creation ("Kabbalah" 557).<sup>2</sup> The other is that of the ten *Sephiroth*, or divine powers, which are the "intermediary stages between the first Emanator and all things that exist apart from God" (565).<sup>3</sup> Isaac Luria's mythological story of creation, which makes use of these concepts in startlingly imaginative form, occurs in three stages. The first is *zimzum* (or *tsimtsum*): *Ein Sof* contracts itself to create an empty space within which creation may take place.<sup>4</sup> The next stage is *shevirah*: when streams of light from *Ein Sof* flowed into that empty space, the "vessels assigned to the upper three *Sephirot* managed to contain the light that flowed into them, but the light struck the six *Sephirot* from *Hesed* to *Yesod* all at once and so was too strong to be held by the individual vessels; one after the other they broke, the pieces scattering and falling" (596).<sup>5</sup> Some flaw renders these vessels unable to perform their function and remain intact.

This primordial disaster accounts for the difficulty and chaos of life in this world: Some of the light that had been in the vessels retraced its path to its source, but the rest was hurled down with the vessels themselves, and from their shards the *kelippot*, the dark forces ... took on substance. These

shards are also the source of gross matter. The irresistible pressure of the light in the vessels also caused every rank of worlds to descend from the place that had been assigned to it. The entire world process ... was nothing less than a cosmic catastrophe. (596)

The shards of the vessels most infused with the light of divinity paradoxically sink the deepest, becoming the husks or shells which then imprison the light, impeding awareness of divine origins. The vessel of the last *Sephirah*, *Malkhut*, also cracks but not to the same degree (596). After this disaster, which unfolds throughout all the worlds and over eons of time, comes the final stage in Luria's vision: *tikkun*, or as Kenneth Sherman describes it, "the harmonizing correction and mending of the flaw" (168). Much of this cosmic restoration apparently has already taken place, but its final phases depend upon the actions of humanity (Bokser 18; "Kabbalah" 600). However, processes of dissolution and restoration repeat themselves over and over, for Luria's vision is not only linear, but dialectical as well: "Just as the first movement in creation was in reality composed of two movements—the ascent of *Ein-Sof* into the depths of itself and its partial descent into the space of *zimzum*—so this double rhythm is a necessarily recurring feature of every stage in the universal process" ("Kabbalah" 590).

Explaining her use of Isaac Luria's creation story, Wiseman has said that "it seems to me that the philosopher goes imaginatively at the world from one end, and the artist, the fiction writer, goes at it from another end. ... Luria attempted to sum up a whole vision of existence ... [which I then] developed into a kind of literal existence in terms of a group of people" (qtd. in Belkin 162). Hoda and Danile, both labelled "crackpots" by their community, are intensely involved in the struggles of a post-

*shevirah* world. The sweetness of their natures, and the vital force of Hoda's personality in particular, suggest that as "shards" of the original vessels they are more deeply imbued with *reshimu* or traces of that divine light than many of their compatriots. According to the logic of the Lurianic metaphor, they would therefore be entrapped in a harsher level of existence as well, having sunk lower into gross matter in consequence of the light they bear within themselves. Hoda and Danile both possess a keen sense of the tragic disorder of their world. As Danile explains, the "pieces don't match up; they won't hold still ... there are just too many pieces, each reaching for the others, and each being swept along in a different direction. You can't blame people. They don't know enough to be able to piece it all together. They can't even hold still themselves" (*Crackpot* 29). They hold tightly to an idea of the world as it should or could be, as expressed in Danile's stories, and in Hoda's longing for the arrival of the "good times" (112). But their lives are shattered repeatedly, as if they were especially marked out for disaster. Each time, however, Hoda and Danile attempt to mend their lives in ways, though flawed and inadequate, that mimic the cosmic healing they both believe to be possible. Wiseman's Lurianic metaphor works itself out in the endless weaving of Danile's stories and the baskets which he endues with "magical" potency (56), and in Hoda's endless attempts to make sense of her life. This, she believes, will finally make the "good times" possible—except that it "always seemed funny to Hoda that you had to love each other in such strange disguises before everyone became nice and everything turned out all right" (109).

The pull towards *tikkun* in this novel exists in a constant state of tension with the omnipresence of grave or simply ridiculous flaws. This is the central dynamic of *Crackpot*, constituted by the subsidiary issues of the characters' willful or unintentional

blindness; the incapacity of language and narrative to contain a whole, undistorted truth; and the agonizing hope and inevitable failings contained within every human relationship. Danile's storytelling is of key importance in this dynamic, as it is implicated in all of these issues while at the same time mirroring Wiseman's own narrative art. Danile's stories provide Hoda with a framework of identity so powerful that she is a "sturdy little vessel," able to survive incredible hardship (17). Yet his stories, along with his inability or unwillingness to confront the ugliness of their lives on its own terms, also cripple her. They encourage Hoda in a naïve faith in humanity which, beautiful as it might be, leaves her vulnerable to the rejection and disappointment that constantly beleaguer her. When Hoda attempts to tell her classmates Danile's story of her special origins, the resulting catastrophe impels her—by this time motherless and absolutely uninformed about sex—to leave school and become a prostitute.

In subsequent years, Hoda repeatedly sacrifices herself to preserve her father's innocence. She works for their mutual survival, acquiring knowledge of the world around her through her own solitary experience. Yet Hoda, too, behaves like her father. She lets her "bad thoughts" leak away through the cracks in her mind, because thinking and remembering are simply too difficult (170-171). She encourages Danile to believe that boys come to her for help with their schoolwork, rather than for sexual services (168-169). Because telling Danile the truth is too threatening, Hoda, in effect, tells *him* stories about her reality, thus aiding and abetting his habits of (not) seeing. Her son David, born when she is about thirteen and left secretly at an orphanage, lives a similarly fragmented life, permanently marred from its beginning by the cryptic, piecemeal, imagination-driven note she leaves with the baby to "explain" his special origins.

The fact, then, that Hoda's story can be framed so perfectly in terms of Isaac Luria's cosmology is not an entirely satisfying way in which to interpret the novel, since it features such an insistent clash between idealized fictions and "brute reality"(Bennett 50). The "perfection" of Danile's baskets underscores this problem. Painstakingly weaving these beautiful containers, Danile sustains the illusion of actively looking after his daughter's financial needs. He is unaware that Hoda forces her customers to buy these baskets as part of the fee for her services, in order to reduce their stockpile from accumulating, unwanted, in every nook and cranny of their home. These perfect baskets are just one more of her father's fictions that Hoda tries to protect. And yet, the beauty of his baskets and of his stories is never denied. The function of beautiful forms such as these becomes an acute question, then, not only because Wiseman writes a story of her own which can be framed quite "perfectly" by a legend inherited from her Jewish past. The question arises also because Hoda eventually returns, as a disillusioned adult, to her father's stories once again. She realizes with some fear

that she was in danger of forgetting ... the way they held you with wonder and the feeling that they were true, and the truth had a terrible tenderness in it as though it were holding in fierce but incredible compassionate hands all the aching fragments of all the aching lives, not because it was going to heal them ... but to reveal them to you, so that knowing nothing really, you could still for a moment know a compassion and a dignity beyond your pain .... Didn't she really hate those stories? Hadn't they betrayed her again and again ...? It was with great fear, as of a terrible,

impending loss, that she began once again to coax her father to tell her all about themselves. (360-361)

What is the purpose and value of inherited tradition, of stories, no matter how beautiful, if all are “leaky vessels,” incapable of containing real life in all of its layers? One answer to this question perhaps lies in developing a different understanding of the flaws or gaps through which the illusion of permanent meaning continually leaks away.

Michael Holquist, in his introduction to Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination*, explains that novels tend to emphasize “the gaps that always exist between what is told and the telling of it, constantly experimenting with social, discursive and narrative asymmetries” (xxviii). Such gaps are apparent from the beginning of *Crackpot*. Hoda is aware even as a young child of the differences between the language of stories and the proscriptive vocabulary of necessity: “When night came and Hoda was put to bed her blind father told her the good stories. These were real life, not yes and no and hush and shame shame say sorry. Daddy told her who she was and where she came from and what had happened. Real things” (13). These are not the only conflicting languages through which Hoda must interpret her experience. She struggles also to reconcile Canadian patriotism during World War One with her Jewish roots: “‘duty’ and ‘honour of your country’ were the things you said that made you feel ... just like everybody else in English”; but in “Yiddish the words that felt right when you talked of wars and soldiers were ‘when will they stop killing each other like wild animals and come home and look after their families?’” (46). Blending the cosmic schema inherited from her Eastern European father with Western fairy tale and cliché, Hoda translates her own story into that of the Frog Princess, Beauty and the Beast, and the Ugly Duckling (49), as well as

into an ongoing fantasy about the Prince of Wales, who was to become her “true love,” her “one and only” (44).

As Hoda grows older, she continues to identify with, integrate and then ultimately move through a variety of other languages as well, including that of Marxism. In her involvement with the worker’s struggle, in fact, she encounters another father-figure in the idealistic Mr. Polonick, whose ideas, she realizes, are appealing but frequently do not “match how things really worked” (253). Hoda attempts to make coherent sense of these contradictory languages, but the fact that all of them fail to suffice as fully satisfactory vehicles for meaning demonstrates that, as Bakhtin observes, it is impossible for any thinking person to

be completely incarnated into the flesh of existing sociohistorical categories. There is no mere [linguistic] form that would be able to incarnate once and forever all of his human possibilities and needs, no form in which he would exhaust himself down to the last word ... no form that he could fill to the very brim, and yet at the same time not splash over .... (*Dialogic* 37)

The character of Hoda embraces and then finds wanting many stories and languages, with an abundance of energy as overflowing as her abundant body. Character and language, as Bakhtin understands them, are not

represented in the novel as ... unitary, completely finished-off and indisputable .... [They are] represented precisely as a living mix of varied and opposing voices .... To a greater or lesser extent, every novel is a dialogized system made up of the images of “languages,” styles and

consciousnesses .... Language in the novel not only represents, but itself serves as the object of representation. Novelistic discourse is always criticizing itself. (49)

This self-criticism is performed in Wiseman's novel by an astonishingly flexible narrator whose voice and perspective repeatedly merge with those of different characters, only to pull away into a more measured voice and distant observing mode.

One of the most noticeable features of this flexibility, as it was in *The Mountain and the Valley*, is the shifting use of the word "you." In the first chapter, the narrative voice merges completely with Danile's storytelling, and the "you" being addressed is Hoda. By the next chapter, however, "they" become "you." When the neighbourhood children torment Hoda, she chases "you" but can't catch you because she is fat (34). In a complex passage not long after this, "you" and "they" shift quite markedly. Hoda wants to show off her unusual house and yard to the children of the neighbourhood, but "sourpuss Gertie" claims that her own parents' house is better (35). Without being distinguished by direct quotation marks, Hoda's thoughts merge seamlessly with those of the other children: "Well so what! And that dumb Thelma didn't have to laugh that way at what Gertie said, as if they had other secrets about you too .... But they weren't so mean when they wanted to come in the yard to play, the boys especially. You could have a lot of fun in Hoda's yard" (35). This play with pronouns continues throughout the novel, as the narrator aligns her voice with various characters and then pulls back to sketch in a larger picture of events from either a future or an editorial vantage point. As a result, the narrator's is a centre of consciousness continually on the move, and cannot be fixed in any one location, tone, or point of view. However, it is true that as Hoda grows

older, more disillusioned and more watchful, there are fewer distinctions between her voice in the text and that of the narrator. Often the only signal of narrative perspective, which continues to shift, is whether or not Hoda's father is referred to as Danile or as "Daddy."

In fact, a large part of Hoda's process in this novel is to learn a flexibility of perspective akin to that exhibited by the narrator. She must learn to *see through* different languages (as Del in *Lives of Girls and Women* must learn to see through bodies and stories) and become aware of the gaping holes undermining the idealized stories she has grown up with. Watching Hoda appropriate and deform various discourses by forcing them into dialogue with her own angle of vision and experience constitutes the often tremendously comic energy of the novel. In her visits to City Hall to get checked for venereal disease, for example,

Hoda would ramble on about things she had half-mulled over in her head  
 .... "Have you ever noticed that motto up front? ... 'Commerce, Prudence, Industry.' That's my motto too, in fact. I figure if it's good enough for my home town, it's good enough for me. Commerce? Any time you like. Prudence? What do you think I'm doing here with the bottle? Industry? Hell, I ain't had no complaints yet. I figure I'm a model citizen .... You take those three words, plus a little bit of this and a little bit of that .... Come to think of it, maybe they should change our motto up there altogether. Instead of those three words and those pictures, they should have a picture of a big, naked arse, and underneath it just two words, "RISK IT'!" (300-303)

Bakhtin identifies this kind of comic manhandling of languages and points of view as providing

the basic forms for incorporating and organizing heteroglossia .... All these forms permit languages to be used in ways that are indirect, conditional, distanced. They all signify a relativizing of linguistic consciousness in the perception of language borders—borders created by history and society, and even the most fundamental of borders (i.e. those between languages as such)—and permit expression of a feeling for the materiality of language that defines such a relativized consciousness.

(*Dialogic* 323-324)

Hoda, who knows “herself as a social being” (*Crackpot* 199), grows through an increasing awareness of language as “a living, socio-ideological thing, as heteroglot opinion” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 293). She experiences what Bakhtin calls the “vast plenitude” of languages, “all of which are equally capable of being ‘languages of truth’, but ... which are equally relative, reified and limited” (366-367). With an ever-present overabundance of energies, Hoda takes these various languages to heart, but always insists on making word and action coincide in ways that frequently disconcert those around her.

A coincidence of energy, word and action, as Harold Bloom reminds us, is embedded in “the Hebrew word for ‘word’, *davhar*” as opposed to “the Greek word for ‘word,’ *logos*.”

*Davhar* is at once “word,” “thing,” and “act,” and its root meaning involves the notion of driving forward .... This is the word as moral act, a

true word that is at once an object or thing and a deed or act. ... In contrast to this dynamic word, the *logos* is: speak, reckon, think. *Logos* orders and makes reasonable the context of speech, yet in its deepest meaning does not deal with the function of speaking. *Davhar*, in thrusting forward what is concealed in the self, is concerned with oral expression, with getting a word, a thing, a deed out into the light. (*Map* 42-43)

As a girl inspired by Communist slogans, Hoda literally thrusts herself into a workers' strike, interposing her body between a policeman's raised truncheon and another man's head, biting the officer's arm and pulling him off his horse (*Crackpot* 202). Later, however, having seen how often talk of "revolution" and "solidarity" was merely a thin veneer over a not-so-enlightened self-interest, Hoda reluctantly loses some of her fervour (251-252). In terms of the plight of the Métis, for example, she wonders

what sense did even Mr. Polonick make when he said, "Well Hoda, that's progress. At least we'd cure them of T.B. and educate them to join hands with all the other oppressed, and take them off the reservations, and they'd become free men just like anyone else." It irritated him when Hoda replied, "You mean we'll cure them of being Indians one way or another."

(291)

As she becomes sensitized to these holes in languages and stories, Hoda is progressively more aware of a corresponding emptiness within herself, even while she attempts to reinterpret and make an energetic match between words and actions in her world. During the Second World War, Hoda makes the "hollow spaces" of rhetoric and self converge in what she deems to be a worthwhile cause, keeping the

home fires burning .... Here at last was the larger struggle ... a use even for that great, hollow space inside of her that other people thought was packed so tight with guts and grease and mindless chuckle. Hoda became the regimental drum ... "Bundle for Britain," she cheered her clients on. "Fornicate for freedom," she invited one and all. (383)

Taking account of these empty spaces, forcing different strands of discourse into dialogue with her actual experience, making words speak from her point of view, all link Hoda to many different aspects of Jewish tradition. The stories of the Aggadah, for example, were often spawned as "a creative reaction to upheavals" and as "an attempt to develop new methods of exegesis" (Bruns, *Hermeneutics* 42). The storyteller who creates Aggadic legend "adds, deviates from, changes, or permutes the traditions he has received according to his own devices and the dictates of his own will" (52). The practice of midrash, too, in its never-ending process of finding new meanings in Torah, "is seen to affirm the integrity and authority of the text even while fragmenting it and sowing it endlessly.... [Midrash] is the open word, the open door, through which we are always just passing .... [Midrash transmits] the enduring power of the provisional which understands that it is provisional" (Hartman & Budick xiii). And, as far as Kabbalah is concerned, Harold Bloom asserts that Lurianic Kabbalah is, quite simply, "the ultimate model for Western revisionism" (*Map* 4). He adds that "Scholem's own descriptions of Kabbalah emphasize its work of *interpretation*, of revisionary replacements of Scriptural meaning by techniques of *opening*" (4; his italics). In many different aspects of Jewish tradition, experiences of text and narrative are seen as subject to limited interpretations, yet still remain open to ever-broadening possibilities for understanding.

In *Crackpot*, however, Wiseman also explores experiences that leave languages and texts so far behind that even the idea of the constructive nature of these gaps or flaws loses its relevance. In a desperate argument with his brother-in-law, for example, a terrified Danile hears “the feelings working against the words, smashing at the formal combinations of sound which tried to give them shape, cries merging with unheard cries, emotions dissolving in a chaos of emotion” (103). And Hoda, transfixed by fears that Danile is not as oblivious to her sexual activities as she counts on him to be, senses that language is nothing but fragile lines traversing a void:

Word to word, sentence to sentence, whether you knew them to be false or felt them to be true, spun out across an abyss, with you swinging helplessly from them, blindly spinning and patching and crisscrossing the net that was to catch and hold the shape of the darkness in which your life was forming, but instead was itself contained by the chasm. And sometimes ... Hoda felt a sudden rushing of wind, and didn't know where her words had gone and where her net was going, where her threads connected and what the meaning was of webs that were attached to her own. (248) <sup>6</sup>

Disillusioned by having to listen to the same old stories with which Danile seeks to contain their lives, Hoda suspects that “from the way Daddy talked, it was as though he had spun his last new thread, ... had completed his net to hold his life in, and just kept running back and forth and to and fro over the parts of the pattern he remembered” (249). By contrast, Hoda consciously recognizes that she is utterly unable to “deal with the fits of craziness” that plague her “in their own language” (287), because no words can express the emptiness that she finds at her own core.

Wiseman believes that language is only “one of the ways people think,” in any case (qtd. in Belkin 164). Hoda, she says, “recognizes [that] language is a means of coping with experience, but also, in fact, is very often a construct that comes between you and your acts and your experience” (164). And actual experience, Wiseman continues, is key:

These brief flashes of connection, of total telepathy or communication or whatever you want to call it, *are* brief flashes. ... These things happen to all of us. They’ve happened to me .... There are sensitives to whom, in fact, a great deal more happens .... I’m not sure of mystics, because the term always seems to be so closely connected with a particular kind of religious experience that I shy away from, but I mean the people who have experiences which, in general, are mystical experiences. (164)

Both Hoda and Danile are “sensitives” who exhibit, at different times in the novel, a perceptive ability unconstrained by normative boundaries. For Danile, the crucial instance is just before his wedding, a ritual marriage meant to stave off the plague. On his way to the cemetery where the ceremony will take place, he realizes that

[a]ll I could know was my immeasurable ignorance. *Very well*, I thought, *if that is all I can know let me know that at least*. And even as I was floundering thus, words fell away. I became one living alertness .... Do trees have eyes? What can the stars see? I saw what they saw and I knew what they knew then. Don’t ask me what it was, I couldn’t grasp the wholeness of it for long, but for one moment I knew, I acquiesced, and I was known. (26-27; italics in text)

Hoda, listening to her Uncle Nate tell funny but cruel stories about the orphanage where she has left her son, suddenly has access to knowledge of a person she has never met:

“But why?” Hoda cried out, shuddering, for Mrs. Limprig had crackled through her like a crazing of the flesh .... She cried out against expanding suddenly into another’s world, experiencing another’s flesh ... comprehending another’s anguish; why should she have to know that ...? ... *I know, I know, I know.* The very words expanded, vibrated with inexpressible meanings and dimensions of pain and exhilaration. It was gone almost immediately ... and Hoda, who had cried out against it, wanted it back ... the knowing that was not just trimmed to your head but flowed through your whole being .... Uncle was having too much fun to notice the collision and absorption and sundering of worlds. (271-272)

After this first experience, Hoda wonders not only if she might have it again, but also if “a human being could bear the pain of so much growth and such fierce illumination .... Words and their threaded links were merely a pretty game you played compared with real knowing. And yet that was how you spent your whole life, diddling with the trinkets and sniffing around the edges of what really was” (273-274). Though she longed to be able to share her experiences with someone else, Mr. Polonick for example, she suspects that he “would probably accuse her of being faithless to her atheism, or something, and badger her to admit that what she had felt could have meant this and that, anything but what it was .... Before she knew it, his reasonings would be standing triumphant over the corpse of her real experience” (274). If she attempts to capture her experiences in words, Hoda realizes, not only would they fail to suffice, but

she would have to contend with the gaps between her meaning and the meaning someone else would foist on her words. Better, then, to say nothing at all. But while this is Hoda's choice, it is not Wiseman's. She chooses to confront these inevitable gaps yet attempt to communicate the possibility of such experiences nonetheless.

The primary metaphor of the shattered vessels, therefore, takes on another layer of meaning in *Crackpot*, for some of its characters have the capacity to endure being thrown past, at least temporarily, the bounds of the known self. Danile, although capable of such openness once, is unable to remain open to repeat occurrences, to move past the beauty of his original experience and challenge it with renewed confrontations with life. He privileges his own version of the experience more than he privileges truth continuing to reveal itself, in all its contradictions and shocks. Hoda, by contrast is "unable to stop herself ... from trying to hunt down and capture the truth towards which her unwinding words seemed to beckon, perennially teasing her to the perennially incomplete revelation of words, and yet more words" (300). She functions in this novel as a kind of nexus through which a variety of languages and experiences flow, without ever being sure of a definitive identity of her own. Stripped progressively of layer upon layer of defenses, Hoda feels utterly empty: "What if she was like the layer-locked onion, and had no core, only function? Very well, then, Hoda too would continue to function, as best she could. Lucky onion that is not required to know itself and weep as well" (358-9). Battling encroaching periods of madness, without an adequate vocabulary to deal with them, Hoda contemplates an "existence that she could not comprehend and that did not comprehend her either. She, who had experienced at times an electrifying sense of the unity of beings ... felt the jagged chill of dislocation, of separation even of herself from herself" (312-

313).<sup>7</sup> She is aware that no one, neither her father, nor her customers nor the people in her town, ever “really looked at her. She wasn’t real life to them” (222). Living in a sort of exile, Hoda’s experience resonates with another layer of kabbalistic metaphor—that of the *Shekhinah*.<sup>8</sup>

Alluded to by Kenneth Sherman in his article on *Crackpot* but not fully explored, the *Shekhinah* is one symbol in Judaism that has changed in nature and role over time. In Rabbinic and Talmudic teachings the *Shekhinah* is simply “God in the world” (Scholem, KS 104), though there has been controversy over whether this means that the *Shekhinah* is an aspect of God or a separate entity created by God (“*Shekhinah*” 1350). The most significant change introduced by the Kabbalah into this concept is to portray the *Shekhinah* as the house of the soul (its container), rather than the supernal soul itself (Scholem, KS 106). A blurring of function persists in kabbalistic interpretations of this “entity,” which incorporates within itself correspondences to multiple levels of creation. The *Shekhinah* can be, for example, simultaneously associated with the third *Sephirah Binah*, or supernal Mother, and with *Malkhut*, the tenth *Sephirah*, the lowest feminine aspect most closely aligned with physical creation. In its higher form, the *Shekhinah* represents “the Mystery of the Mother and the Children. The sins of the lower beings cause the *Shechinah*—the mystery of Upper *Nefesh* [soul]—to become loosed from its ties above. This is the essence of the Mystery of the Exile of the *Shechinah*” (*Anthology of Jewish Mysticism* 189). In its lower aspect, the *Shekhinah* is “a complement to the universally human and masculine principle, the feminine, seen at once as mother, wife and as daughter” (Scholem KS 105). Whatever *Sephirah* the *Shekhinah* is associated with, what is crucial in all interpretations is the idea that she exists in a state of exile (106).

Sometimes imaged as banished queen or king's daughter, the pervading notion connected to the *Shekinah* is that the sins of the people of Israel banish her further from her source in *Ein-Sof*, while their concerted attempts at right action and piety are instrumental in effecting her redemption, or reunion with the Godhead. As Kenneth Sherman puts it, the *Shekhinah* is thus a powerful image of collective guilt (170).

Hoda's story, as she undergoes successive episodes of tragedy and betrayal that wear away her childhood faith in humanity, is persistently framed in cosmic terms that evoke, not only Luria's story of creation, but the idea of the *Shekhinah* as well. With her immense physical presence and emotional force, Hoda is a "world in miniature" (*Crackpot* 353), an image of abundance radiating forth an intensity of innocence, goodwill and hope. Full to bursting with an indefatigable urge to heal what she senses to be the skewed nature of the world, Hoda has faith in the "good feelings" and the "good time," which is a faith in the possibility of universal redemption. "She knew that time was coming, knew it even in her bad feelings, which were so awful you couldn't hold still with them. But the good feelings were there too, right under them, struggling to get out" (112). At town weddings to which she is drawn like a magnet (though usually uninvited), she watches the crowds "with a great, laughing, loving look" as if she is some earth-bound divinity (175). She is described as being "in the sky already. Only the soles of her feet kept contact with earthly things" (137). Hoda surveys her world, initially at least, with "ardent orbs of light" (137), "conscious of the boundless goodwill that was ready to flow in the universe, and of herself as a direct tap to the source" (126).

In her abundant earthiness and overflowing life, Hoda thus corresponds to the vessel of *Malkhut*, which just manages to stay intact under the forces of emanation from

*Ein Sof Malkhut*, although it did not shatter entirely, did crack a little under the strain. Hoda, seen as a bit “cracked” by most of her acquaintances, becomes more and more afraid of madness as she grows older and disillusioned, fearing that “all those feelings that were churning around ... inside of her would come splattering out in all directions” (113).<sup>9</sup> Wide open to life, Hoda cannot defend herself against the “awful looking feelings” in others’ faces (46), but, as if sensing that with every act of cruelty the “good times” of universal healing draw further away, she attempts to encompass people within a magic “circle of safety” (348). In her role as village prostitute, Hoda is both earth-mother and cosmic lover, hugely fat, all-encompassing and rejecting no one. As people in the community see it, she “spread her legs and let in the whole world” (246). The birth of her son is “the evacuation of continents” after “the ocean had already burst forth,” with Hoda seeming to deliver forth the world of physical creation (207). As mother / lover to the world, she feels bound to “fulfill the responsibility of reciprocal love” (137), no matter how shattering its demands upon her.<sup>10</sup>

But the *Shekhinah* and Hoda both exist in a state of exile, which Gershom Scholem describes, in terms of the *Shekhinah*, as “the separation of the masculine and feminine principles of God” (*KS* 108). This devastating separation

is usually imputed to the destructive action and magical influence of ... Adam’s sin [which] is perpetually repeated in every other sin. Instead of penetrating the vast unity and totality of the *sephiroth* in his contemplation, Adam, when faced with the choice, took the easier course of contemplating only the last *sephirah* (since it seemed to represent everything else) separately .... Instead of preserving the unity of God’s

action in all the worlds ... instead of consolidating this unity with his own actions, he shattered it. Since then there has been, somewhere deep within, a cleavage between the upper and the lower, the masculine and the feminine. (108)

Adam's original sin of limited vision is repeated throughout *Crackpot* by everyone around Hoda, most particularly by the men in her life. By regarding her only in her function as a prostitute, her customers re-enact the fundamental cosmic disaster, concretizing the exile of the *Shekhinah* and the disunity of masculine and feminine aspects of being. Danile's more than physical blindness not only pushes Hoda to her life of prostitution, but sanctions it as well, because his limited conception of her (though in another way so boundless) will not permit him to see the lengths to which she must go to help them to survive.

In both the Kabbalah and in *Crackpot*, however, these masculine and feminine elements are curiously layered. For example, the metaphor of the *Shekhinah* not only resonates with Hoda's nature and experiences, but with Danile's as well. In pre-kabbalistic terminology, Danile's peculiarly sweet disposition and otherworldly wisdom may be seen to exemplify the notion of the *Shekhinah* as the presence of God which sanctifies particular individuals ("*Shekhinah*" 1349). Another, oddly two-sided, connection between Danile and various images of the *Shekhinah* hinges upon his blindness. The *Shekhinah* is sometimes figured as "God's visage; His radiance" (Sherman 168). According to his mother's story, Danile lost his sight because he stared too long at the sun, though at the same time he stored the sun's sweetness within himself (14). On the other hand, the *Shekhinah* is also represented at times as having no eyes (Scholem, *KS*

141). In terms of these conflicting images, Danile is both the recipient of the *Shekhinah's* radiance, and, in the supposed shattering of the vessels of his eyes, he is the exiled *Shekhinah*, trapped in a world of darkness.

In a further blurring of function and of gender, it is possible to conceive of Danile as representing another, related figure in kabbalistic symbology: the *Adam Kadmon*. This is the primordial man, whose being is constituted by the various *Sephiroth*, and into whose cosmic form the first emanations from *Ein-Sof* were directed. His eyes then “refract the lights of creation emanating from the *Shekhinah*” (Sherman 168). As this light flows into the vessels designed to contain it, they shatter: “Thus, since that primordial act, all being has been a being in exile, in need of being led back and redeemed” (Scholem, *KS* 112-13). In that one image of creation, the *Shekhinah* straddles both origin and outcome: it is the pulsing light of God and the spirit of God in exile, enmeshed in the physical worlds. In a similar fashion, Danile embodies both masculine and feminine archetypes simultaneously. As the boy who absorbed the sun’s radiance and then transmits it to his daughter Hoda through his stories and his love, he is both the feminine principle receptive to masculine emanations and the *Adam Kadmon* whose refracted light almost shatters the vessel of his daughter, corresponding to *Malkhut*.

This multi-layering of cause and effect, and this simultaneity of gender and function, is consistent not only with the nature of kabbalistic thought, but with the multi-faceted relationships between men and women in Wiseman’s novel.<sup>11</sup> In them hope exists for the greatest degree of healing and the presence of mystery, yet they are the site of the keenest injury as well. This is especially to be seen in Wiseman’s handling of Hoda’s sexuality. While it is clearly tragic that Hoda engages in sexual relations at so young an

age, since she does so out of ignorance, necessity and a yearning for acceptance, Wiseman evokes an opposing element in this situation as well. From the beginning, Hoda divines sex to be something joyful and sacred. One scene, in which Hoda and a group of boys roast potatoes and make love in a ditch, is particularly evocative of this strange mixture of the tragic and the transcendent, the ugly and the beautiful:

Hoda ate the charred black spuds, smelling them deeply, tossing them from hand to hand ... smelling and licking her fingers afterwards. And then she lay on her back on a pile of leaves in the ditch with her dress rolled up, and the leaves crunching as she squirmed and sank deeper; as boy after boy rolled on her while his buddies raked the embers for the last few spuds, and in between boys she lay watching the early evening stars and smelling the smoking leaves and sucking the burnt black potato-leavings off her lower lip, and resting, and then she took the boys again and she couldn't help it, she laughed and laughed .... Nor did she even think to ask for money that time, nor did they think to offer to pay. (161)

In a post-*shevirah* world, sexual acts such as these are flawed imitations of the sacred union of masculine and feminine potencies so central to the unfolding logic of the Kabbalah.

According to these esoteric writings, the sexual embrace of man and woman is an enactment on an earthly level of the redemption of the *Shekhinah*. Herbert Weiner explains that in Judaism, in a manner akin to what has been discussed in Chapter Three in terms of Tantric Buddhism, “there is no ascent of the soul which does not involve the body—all the body, with its sweat and semen and smell, swelling with life juices or

putrefying with death .... Delicate and exquisitely spiritual fruits have drawn their strength from roots that were deeply immersed in the dark regions of unconscious bodily drives” (258).<sup>12</sup> In fact, Weiner asserts, what the central text of the Kabbalah, “the Zohar [.] is teaching ... is that grace, life, or joy cannot flow through the inner worlds and permeate ... external worlds until the proper couplings take place” (30-31). If such had occurred from the start, Gershom Scholem claims, if “in Adam’s first meditation on the earthly plane, he had succeeded in focusing as much on *Ein-Sof* as he had on *Malkhut*, the union between *Ein-Sof* and the *Shekhinah* could have been consummated on the first Sabbath of the world” (KS 115). Instead, a fundamental cleavage of masculine and feminine occurred, symbolized by “the premature consummation of the union between masculine and feminine, or, in the symbolism of the early kabbalists, the trampling of the young plants in Paradise, and the tearing of the fruit from the tree” (115)—an apt image for the young Hoda’s experiences.

But “cleavage” contains the word “cleave,” and “to cleave” is a verb with multi-layered significance, encompassing contradiction, as Mark C. Taylor points out. It means “not only to divide, separate, split, and fissure, but also adhere, stick, and cling. Cleaving, therefore, simultaneously divides and joins” (47-48). Moshe Idel explains the kabbalistic significance of this word: when the human being cleaves to its own soul, and when two people cleave together physically and spiritually, *devekut* occurs, which is the imitation in life of a mystical union with Supreme reality (*Kabbalah* 38-47).<sup>13</sup> Hoda’s and Danile’s experiences of expanded states of awareness are instances of *devekut*. And just as the *Shekhinah* is “the first goal of the mystic who tries to achieve *devekut*” and is “the first and closest for mystical contact,” so is sexual union on earth one of the first avenues for

apprehending the mystery of dynamic wholeness (“*Shekhinah*” 1354). Sexual relationships in *Crackpot* are a pale imitation of the mysteries of the Sabbath, the “*zivvuga kadisha*,” or sacred marriage (Scholem *KS* 138), but they still contain traces of divinity. When one of Hoda’s customers falls in love with a woman, for instance, he is gripped by “that tender euphoria in which even the most apparently earthly clod apprehends ... that he is fit for a far more rarified sphere than that which he normally inhabits” (*Crackpot* 375).

But, as with other cosmic metaphors in *Crackpot*, Wiseman tests the viability of this one in terms of the starkest of realities. In possibly the most painful scene of a very painful novel, Hoda is unable to prevent her son from buying sex from her because she recognizes that the damage already done to him would only be compounded if she rejects him: “Enough that he was fragile and she held him tenderly, and tried in the only way she knew how to make up for all the harm she had done” (353). In making love to her son, Hoda touches the “outermost boundary of aloneness that can be reached by a human being who is yet denied that privilege of loss of responsibility in suffering, which is the gift of madness” (357). Once again, as in *Lives of Girls and Women*, readers find themselves faced with a boundary situation in which concepts of morality dissolve into the empty space of a mapless moment. Incest with her son is the greatest expression of love that Hoda can muster, though it also demonstrates the hopelessly confused nature, in a post-*shevirah* world, of right and wrong. Hoda had always

wanted to do what was right. At first she had thought that what felt good was what must be right. Well, how was she to know? And how was she to know now that what felt just awful, what aroused in her a revulsion of

loathing at the very thought, was wrong? Oh she knew it was wrong all right, in all her flesh, wrong for her .... [But] it was for a reason, and because she was a person, and she had a debt, an enormous, inerasable debt, and because it was the only thing she could think of that she could do, that maybe she was fit to do for him. (352)

Wiseman has said that “in *Crackpot* there were a lot of things ... that I was putting to the test just to see where the boundaries were and what happened at the boundaries .... One of the questions I asked myself is what is the best possible reason for the worst possible deed. That is a boundary question” (qtd. in Butovsky 12-13). In this case, the “worst possible deed” is incest, a shattering experience Hoda undergoes in order to avoid doing further injury to the son who does not know that she is his mother.

However, as Raphael Patai has demonstrated, in the realm of the Hebrew Goddess, incest is not the “worst thing” at all but a norm, since “the human laws of sexual morality simply do not apply to her” (141). As a matter of fact, an apparently sexual embrace between cosmic parent and offspring is exactly what is required to effect universal healing of the rifts between worlds.<sup>14</sup> In the Kabbalah, two key paradigms in stories of creation are those of the parent and the cosmic lover. Often the two occur simultaneously, as in the case of the supernal Mother who is “the product but also the counterpart” of the masculine principle or “cosmic seed” (Scholem *KS* 103). In a “holy union of male and female powers” (104), animated and sanctified by love, “the masculine and feminine are carried back to their original unity, and in this uninterrupted union of the two the powers of generation will once again flow unimpeded through all the worlds” (108). Having sex with David, though it causes Hoda the deepest agony of her life, has

the peculiar effect of instigating a reconciliation between herself and her father. Through her pain, Hoda feels, for the first time “in what seemed like a long time, an acute and tender awareness of his existence” (357). In terms of the mythos of the Kabbalah, the infinite love expressed by the supernal Mother for her children cements her bond with the supernal Father. The redemption of the *Shekhinah*, the repair of the cleavage of masculine and feminine, and the mending of the shattered vessels in the process of *tikkun* are all to be accomplished, Isaac Luria taught, through the reunion of cosmic Mother and Father:

The *Sephirot Hokhmah* and *Binah* now become the *parzufim* [faces or aspects] of *Abba* and *Imma* (“father and mother”), which function in a dual capacity: they exist as a medium for the reindividuation and redifferentiation of all the emanated beings into transmitters and receivers of influx, and they also serve as the supreme archetype for that procreative “coupling” (*zivvug*) which, in its metaphorical aspect of “face-to-face contemplation” ... is the common root of all intellectual and erotic unions. (“Kabbalah” 599)

Such a union enables the return of the *Shekhinah* to *Ein-Sof*, as daughter to father, and as lover to beloved, in “a unity in which all opposites are equal” (558).

According to Luria, the final stages of *tikkun* depend upon the actions of men and women in the physical world. Such a motion toward *tikkun* is initiated at the end of *Crackpot*, when Hoda agrees to marry Lazar (who is risen from the dead, literally). Kenneth Sherman says that such a union must occur for Hoda to be complete: “To make herself whole, Hoda must find a man” (172). More to the point, I think, is that Lazar has

also been “emptied out” of everything and survived, having climbed back up out of a pit of death and bodily disintegration. Lazar knows about necessity, about what boundaries must be broken to survive extreme circumstances. He asks Hoda, who wants to hold on to the wounds of her past,

“Should I have died then? ... Should I not have dragged myself out from under them? Should I not have crawled over them, clawing and grasping their jaws and their hair and their bullet-ridden flesh? Yes, my fingers sank into bloody holes, and I gripped and tore and pulled myself over them. Should I have remained with them in the pit until morning, when the others returned and poured the lye? ... They gave the lye to the whole of my life, wife, mother, children, village .... You really want to cherish the past, Hodaleh? All right. Help me to bring my dead flowers to life from under a field of lye. But they are dead. And I left them .... [T]hat’s all my past amounts to, a horrid, jellid, fleshy consistency in the terrain over which I will crawl for the rest of my life.” (421-422)

Recognizing their kinship in being “two broken-down old crocks ... rolling down the street ... and leaking our insides out,” Hoda promises to help him (422). That sexual union will be the locus of this healing is implicit in Hoda’s dream of a “wall-to-wall mattress” that will encompass all her relationships,<sup>15</sup> with Lazar, her father and her son(s), past and future. “‘Sons!’ cried Danile” in Hoda’s dream. “‘Lovers!’ she confessed, weeping extravagantly” (426): “Soon, she promised extravagantly, in the ardour of her vision, they would all be stirring the muddy waters in the brimming pot together” (427). These muddied waters are an image of past and present corruption, and

of that future state when the *Shekhinah* will be fulfilled in all of her blurred roles as mother, wife, and daughter. Hoda as a goddess figure is capable of inviting all that is into the empty space of her self in a massive creation and reunion of selves, functions, energies and languages.

In her dream, Hoda draws “[w]ith a magnanimous gesture ... the magic circle around them, showing all she knew” (427). In the Kabbalah, the circle is the feminine form of divine emanation to which belongs “all processes dominated by natural, immanent necessity” (“Kabbalah” 594).<sup>16</sup> It is a recurrent image in the novel, as Hoda continually forms “magic circles,” which are then shattered repeatedly. Her father’s stories are her first circle of meaning. She offers them to the other children, only to watch them fail to communicate her truth: “The circle was broken. They were scattering from her in all directions” (47). She imagines later that she can offer her customers a “circle of safety” inside her sexual embraces during World War II, only to see it fail once more as they are sent overseas and the body count begins (384). Why, then, in a novel that challenges the construction of forms designed to “contain” reality, does Hoda’s story end with yet another magic circle?

The circle, Michael Eigen explains, is a powerful image related to the psyche and its endless oscillation between fullness and emptiness, thus mirroring the Lurianic metaphor of the repeated shattering and repair of cosmic vessels. The circle is also an image of the inner self which powerfully unites psychology and mysticism. In *The Psychoanalytic Mystic*, Eigen discusses the work of W. R. Bion in which “O” figures as a symbol of the self and of the cosmic unknown. One can speak of Bion’s O, Eigen says,

as zero, but O is also *Omega*, everythingness and nothingness .... O may represent the impact of the Other .... O is for the orgasmic element that permeates, charges and sustains experiencing .... O is a circle, the rounds and rhythms of life, eternal returns and reversals, crisscrossing currents, a geometrical representation of the constructive-containing mind that pulsations explode .... Kant's thing-in-itself, Plato's Form, Eckhart's godhead, Milton's formless infinite, Kaballah's Ein Soph, the Christian Incarnation[,] ... revelation of how one is or isn't, gifts and horrors of history, the shell that entombs one and the fire that burns the shell .... O as a notation explodes itself (39-40; 78)

In language that accords with Wiseman's need to test out the power of cosmic metaphors against the harshest of human realities, Eigen describes analytic processes and mystical experiences as consisting of moments of "[u]nintegration, creative chaos, and nothing ... [which] enabled self to shed shells" (32). He claims that the

story cuts two ways. Mystical illumination and the facts of life need to learn how to live together. Body needs warmth, spirit illumination. Why pit one against the other? ... There are mysticisms of emptiness and fullness, difference and union, transcendence and immanence. One meets the Superpersonal beyond opposites or opens to the void and formless infinite. There are mystical moments of shattering and wholeness .... We meet O not simply as peace, but turbulence, even catastrophe .... If we stay open to impact as best we can, something gets through. (13; 20)

Various readings of the Kabbalah authorize this risky move from the cosmic to the psychological in the interpretation of symbols such as the circle or Bion's O. Moshe Idel says that kabbalists understood the *Sefiroth* to be, not only universal entities but "psychological processes or human qualities" (*Kabbalah* 146). Daniel C. Matt explains that, while at first the *Shekhinah* is "the opening to the Divine ... [o]nce inside, the *sefirot* are no longer an abstract theological system; they become a map of consciousness" (*Zohar* 37). Accordingly, the "*sefirot* generate the ultimate confusion of identities: human and divine. Such sublime confusion catalyzes the process of enlightenment" (34). On this "psychological plane," Matt goes on to say, "[Adam's] sin corresponds to the splitting off of consciousness from the unconscious" (215). Once this correspondence between the psyche and upper levels of cosmic reality in kabbalistic symbology emerges, the human being can be seen as

but half of a greater unit, the circle .... The shared metaphor of the circle as a symbol of the union of the human and the Divine is deserving of closer examination; its occurrence as part of the description of human perfection recalls the Jungian conception of the mandala as a symbol of individualization .... The recurrence of the metaphor here allows us to understand that these ... [kabbalistic] references to the circle are not only a literary description; they also point to a vision of a circle during an experience interpreted as unitive. (Idel, *Kabbalah* 63)

The Jungian psychoanalyst, June Singer, regards such "unitive" experiences as instances of "transpersonality," which involve the shifting of levels or modes of function. "The movement toward the transpersonal is experienced as a series of shifts and changes

in consciousness, usually with the uneasy feelings that accompany disturbances of equilibrium” (*Love’s Energies* 62). Singer goes on to explain that such processes cannot be conceived of as “linear-sequential” (159). In terms that are reminiscent of Ricoeur’s understanding of narrative, Singer says that a

cyclical movement would better describe a transpersonal view of developmental process .... Each cycle incorporates the insights derived from previous experience, so we come to the same vista, but we regard it from another level. The helix, then, would be a better symbol for the unfolding stages of human development in a transpersonal context. The cycle of eternal return is experienced over and over again, and on many levels, ascending and descending like the angels in Jacob’s dream, going between heaven and earth (159-160).<sup>17</sup>

In the process of peeling away the layers, first of parental dictates, then of wider social dictums, Singer says, the self may become something of a “rebel” and some of its movements may seem “regressive”:

The chief tools for functioning in the ego realm are *logos* and *eros*, reasoned intellect and passionate feeling. In the realm of the transpersonal Self, the chief tools are *intuition*, which means direct knowing, and a *suspension of the habit of uncritically accepting “received knowledge,”* which is passed on through custom or tradition or consensual agreement .... If the *integrated* ego state means that the person feels secure in a particular perspective or world view, then the *transpersonal* state admits a

certain amount of disintegration, or a loosening of ego boundaries ... (61-62; her italics)<sup>18</sup>

Experiencing disintegration in this way is like living life in reverse. In her dream at the end of the novel, Hoda's son David claims that "*Backwards ... she inhabits her life*" (427). For the *Shekhinah*, too, the prescribed path is a backwards one, as she attempts to retrace her way to reunion with *Ein Sof*. Yet, the motion for both is also a forward one, since healing can occur only through their continuing to exist, to function, and to do what they must in their many-faceted capacities.<sup>19</sup>

Michael Greenstein writes that "*Crackpot* is a vessel whose muddy waters of meaning seep out through a 'backwards' reading" (25). It is, in fact, at the point of union between Hoda and Lazar that the mythic significance of relationship and the subterranean metaphor of the *Shekhinah* fully emerge. To understand this novel, then, is to circle through a backwards reading of Hoda's experiences. Hoda's whole life entails an unravelling of identity and narrative constructs as she moves from the closed beauty of Danile's stories to a radical state of openness which she interprets as an emptiness inside herself, like the "onion" which has "no core, only function" (359). Paradoxically, however, this divestiture of a fixed identity fulfills both Hoda and her story. Though successive tragedies strip away her layers of protection and leave her bare, she sees, experiences, and survives it all. Thus she lives up to the mythic promise of her father's stories about her, not in terms of idealistic, happy-ever-after endings, but in terms of the circles of self and self-understanding getting constantly redrawn, stretching to include as much as they can within their flexing boundaries.

Stories are circles that strain towards wholeness as well, attempting to contain everything in a harmonious whole, to master all the diverse strands of experience. There is an obvious problem with this, and blind, softly stubborn Danile is its exemplar. But Wiseman does not negate the storytelling impulse or its “hunger for the transcendent, the revelatory” (Bennett 49). Instead she demonstrates the multi-faceted potential of the creation of narrative. Falling into the gap between idealized expectations, languages and stories, Hoda then inhabits the gap, becoming aware of constructed forms, their layers, and how to read and make them speak in various ways. Danile’s stories provide a solid base for Hoda which she must first dismantle, discovering the emptiness (which is another way to say formlessness or mystery)<sup>20</sup> at their heart, and then make hers, transforming the stories and herself in the process. According to the Lurianic creation story, processes such as these have the potential for healing on microcosmic and macrocosmic levels. The breaking and repair of the vessels of the cosmos and of the human individual happens again and again, in small cycles and large, in spiralling movements backward and forward which create states of dynamic wholeness. Within the magic circle that Hoda envisions at the end of *Crackpot*, all of creation will soon “be stirring the muddy waters in the brimming pot together” (427).

---

Notes

<sup>1</sup> There is also an interesting link between the kabbalistic language in this novel and Ackroyd's references to Blake's layering of mundane London with cosmic Jerusalem. Herbert Weiner says that "the Kabbala ... teaches that everything in the world above has its analogue in the world below.... And so there is a heavenly Jerusalem which corresponds to the Jerusalem whose light and sounds ... [come] through the window" (13). Another similarity between Wiseman's novel and Ackroyd's is that both have taken shape in consciousnesses formed by particular religious backgrounds. Wiseman says that hers is "a Jewish consciousness" (qtd. in Belkin 152), as Ackroyd's is Catholic. Neither of them is "religious" as such, but both acknowledge a search for new renderings of the "sacred" (Bennett 49). Finally, both Ackroyd and Wiseman admit that writing about the experiences of fictional characters allows them to explore aspects of themselves.

Wiseman, speaking of her real-life model for the character of Hoda, found that "eventually, the vision [of her] became internalized as a part of my psyche. I often feel as though she's an enlarged version of something in myself" (qtd. in Belkin 161).

<sup>2</sup> Daniel C. Matt explains that for their concept of *Ein Sof* the kabbalists drew on Neoplatonic and Aristotelian teachings but were not confined to them. *Ein Sof*, or the ultimate reality, is inaccessible to thought and has no attributes. This accords with both Avicenna's and Maimonides' conception of the Infinite (*Zohar* 22-23).

<sup>3</sup> Originally, the *sephiroth* figured in the Kabbalah as "numerical potencies"; but in the Middle Ages they began to take shape as "stages of God's being, aspects of divine personality" (Matt, *Zohar* 33). Beyond the mediation of the *sephiroth*, God as *Ein Sof* is "unmanifest ... [and] cannot be described or comprehended" (33). The *sephiroth* are

---

“often pictured in the form of Primordial Adam or as a cosmic tree growing downward from its roots above. As the kabbalists were quick to point out, these images should not be taken literally; they are organic symbols of a spiritual reality beyond normal comprehension” (33). As, according to Genesis, human beings manifest as an “image of God,” these “*sefirot* are the divine original of that image. As Primordial Adam, they are the mythical paragon of the human being, our archetypal nature. The human race has lost this nature, but if one were to purify himself, he would reconnect with the *sefirot* and become a vessel for them” (34). There are many variants to the spelling of these words. I will be following Gershom Scholem in spelling the plural form “*sephiroth*,” and the singular “*sephirah*.”

<sup>4</sup> The withdrawal of *Ein Sof* from this emptied out space is not quite complete according to some kabbalist interpretations: a residue of the divine, called *reshimu*, remains which apparently is intended to “prod” creation to remember its relationship with the Infinite (Bokser 18).

<sup>5</sup> Note that in this wording, the vessels and the *sephiroth* are not precisely coterminous. The vessels are forms, rather, that are meant to contain the *sephiroth* which are perhaps more aptly described as energetic processes.

<sup>6</sup> In a poem entitled “Spaces,” Wiseman reiterates a similar idea: “It’s not the words the danger’s in, it’s in / the drops between, it’s in the spaces of the dream / we fall .... write how terror gathers in the spaces / and the fall is a recurring dream” (89).

<sup>7</sup> Gerald L. Bruns, discussing the “tragic knowledge” engendered by ongoing interpretive processes such as Hoda’s, comments that, according to Gadamer, “experience is a process of disillusionment or divestiture that leaves us standing before the world without

---

the protection of familiar concepts” (*Hermeneutics* 155). According to Stanley Cavell, Bruns says, “the resolution of tragic action means not just the working out of catastrophe but the overcoming of that ‘refusal to accept’ that Gadamer identifies as our characteristic response to the unfolding of what happens” (188). Hoda’s ability to surpass her father in an openness to experience instils in her character its tragic and comic elements, for, as Bruns goes on to say, “experience does not consist in positive knowledge ... [but] in openness to experience, tragic as it often is .... As the saying goes, a tragic sense of life helps one to achieve flexibility and resilience of the comic hero” (259).

<sup>8</sup> Hoda’s image of the “layer-locked onion” signals the pertinence of the shift to kabbalistic metaphor, for

kabbalists like to use images such as the layers of an onion, or the shell and kernel of a nut, or the outer and inner membranes of the brain to illustrate this contrast between outer and inner layers of truth and reality. They do not deny the plain sense or surface meaning, the *nigleh*, or the revealed aspect of an act, idea, or text; they want only to say that there is also a deeper, less obvious, and more profound significance to the same words or deeds. (Weiner 6-7)

<sup>9</sup> Raphael Patai emphasizes the strength of emotion associated with the *Shekhinah* as well, explaining that it is “the loving, rejoicing, motherly, suffering, mourning, and, in general, emotion-charged aspect of deity” (32).

<sup>10</sup> Daniel C. Matt explains that the tenth *sephirah*, *Malkhut*, has many names and functions: “Earth, Moon, *Matronita*, Mirror, Rose, Throne of Glory, Justice, Garden of Eden, Holy Apple Orchard. She reflects all aspects of Divinity and sustains all the worlds

---

below, though ‘She has nothing at all of Her own’” (*Zohar* 36). According to Patai, the Daughter aspect of the *Shekhinah* “plays the greatest role as the central figure in both divine happenings and relationships, and the occurrences through which human fate, and in particular the fate of Israel, is propelled forward. She is the central link between the Above and the Below” (135).

<sup>11</sup> A simultaneity of gender and function pervades kabbalistic thought. Moshe Idel explains that the feminine principle “represented the individual human soul or intellect in her relation to the active intellect or God, viewed as masculine” (*Kabbalah* 209). But at the same time, the “lowest divine potency, the *Shekhinah*, plays the feminine role in the relationship to the *Zaddick*, the righteous human being, who functions as the male” (209). A logic to the overlap of function and the layering of symbolic realities is to be found in the notion of the *Sephiroth*, whose existence “overflows without interruption or new beginning into the secret and visible worlds of Creation, all of which in their structure recapitulate and reflect the intradivine structure” (Scholem, *KS* 101). *Adam Kadmon*, as well, is understood to recur in all of the lower worlds (“*Adam Kadmon*” 249). This multi-layering of cause and effect and of symbolic reference in kabbalistic terms works out aptly in relation to Wiseman’s text.

<sup>12</sup> An interesting link exists between this emphasis on the body as a cosmic symbol, Hoda’s Shekinah-like function, and Bakhtin’s idea of the carnivalesque:

In grotesque realism ... the bodily element is deeply positive .... As such it is opposed to severance from the material and bodily roots of the world; it makes no pretense to renunciation of the earthy, or independence of the earth and the body. We repeat: the body and bodily life have here a cosmic

---

and at the same time an all-people's character .... This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable .... The leading themes of these images of bodily life are fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance. (Bakhtin, "Introduction" 11; 19)

<sup>13</sup> Moshe Idel explains that

although *devekut* is a preeminently personal experience, it serves here as an opening toward an other-oriented action. Mystical union, or communion, thus serves as a vehicle used by the individual in order to better serve the community; personal perfection is transformed into a means of contributing to the welfare of others .... [T]he attainment of mystical union is tantamount to the change of the worshipper into a channel by which the supramundane influx reaches the terrestrial world. (*Kabbalah* 53)

<sup>14</sup> This intermingling of sex with maternal love occurs elsewhere in the novel. David, held by Mrs. Tize after his substitute mother has committed suicide, feels that that "was love, that time was love, the real McCoy, wrestling with her, all those tits, hundreds of them, all over him, pressing up against him and rubbing him all over while he fought and screamed and yelled and hurt and hurt and hurt" (326). And Hoda is called "Mama Hoda" by the soldiers who come to her for paid solace before they leave for war (383).

<sup>15</sup> In his notes to the *Zohar*, Danile C. Matt states that the "*Shekhinah* is called Bed in the *Zohar* .... [S]ee Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, pp. 258-9. Cf. Talmud, *Shabbat* 55b, where it is said that Jacob kept a bed in his tent for *Shekhinah*; cf. Rashi on Genesis 49:4" (272).

<sup>16</sup> The "point" of the second *sephirah*, *Hokhmah* ("Wisdom"),

---

expands into a circle, the *sefirah* of *Binah* (Understanding). *Binah* is the womb, the Divine Mother. She receives the seed, the point of *Hokhmah*, and conceives the seven lower *sefirot*. Created being too has its source in Her; She is called “the totality of all individuation.” She is also “the world that is coming,” constantly coming and flowing. (Matt, *Zohar* 34)

<sup>17</sup> Singer’s notion of the helix in the evolution of the self resonates with the language used to describe the dialectical process of creation and destruction that Luria visualized:

The light which entered ... in a straight line after the *zimzum* has ... two aspects from the start: it arranges itself both in concentric circles and in a unilinear structure, which is the form of “the primordial man that preceded every first thing.” The form of a circle and of a man are henceforth the two directions in which every created thing develops. Just as the first movement in creation was in reality composed of two movements—the ascent of *Ein-Sof* into the depths of itself and its partial descent into the space of *zimzum*—so this double rhythm is a necessarily recurring feature of every stage in the universal process. (“Kabbalah” 590)

<sup>18</sup> As Paul Ricoeur has said in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, “[c]onsciousness is a movement which continually annihilates its starting point” (113). Gerald Bruns claims that this is the “tragic knowledge” engendered by the endless process of interpretation that the self must engage in, of language constructs, of the self, and of life, and “entails what elsewhere is called the ‘critique of the subject’. It is emancipation from false consciousness achieved ... by the encounter with the otherness of reality, or with that which refuses to be contained within—kept at bay by—our conceptual operations and

results” (*Hermeneutics* 189). Putting this into terms dealing with the life of language itself, Mikhail Bakhtin says that, alongside “the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward” (*Dialogic* 271-272). As far as the Kabbalah is concerned, the

innovative techniques of Kabbalistic interpretation are part of a profound transformation that goes on at the heart of Judaism, culminating in what Jacques Riviere calls “a kind of assault on the absolute” which changes the Jewish view of man as well as its view of language. Like many phenomena in modern literature, Kabbalah is an attempt to transmute reality through the power of words. Both activities are part of “a vast incantation towards the miracle.” (Idel, *Kabbalah* 152-153)

And for Adele Wiseman, finally, reading and interpreting are “part of a larger struggle between individuals and society over control of their thoughts, their freedom to choose, and even their physical being”; Wiseman thus insists on “the mutual contamination of the lived life and the lived reading” (qtd. in Bennett 47).

<sup>19</sup> Another instance of the interplay of opposites, this forward and backward motion reflects on a deeper level “the dual nature of the evolution of the world through the *hitpashetut* (‘egression’) and *histallekut* (‘regression’) of the divine forces” (“Kabbalah” 547), or the simultaneous emanating of light into the created worlds and the flowing of light back to its source.

<sup>20</sup> Herbert Weiner reminds his readers that *ayin* “in Hebrew means *nothing*” but when its letters are “transposed can mean *I* ... [and is] synonymous with what the sages called

---

*yesh*, the one true richness and treasure of life” (41). Weiner also writes that one of the favorite teachings

of Dov Baer ... was based on the kabbalistic doctrine of the *eyin*, the great Nothing which in Kabbala became a synonym for the *ein sof*, the infinite potential of all existence. All creation had to pass through this stage of nothingness .... This was the moment, the Magid claimed, of contact with the *sefira* of *chochma*, the profoundest level of creation that precedes all differentiation and is therefore beyond comprehension. Hence the temporary turning of something into nothing had to precede every great moment of self-renewal. (162)

### Chapter Six

#### “Outside our small safe place flies Mystery”: Paradoxical Spaces of Self / Possession in A. S. Byatt’s *Possession*.

Whether in the form of prized artifacts, the painstaking reconstruction of historical personalities, or a fiercely defended zone of self-expression, the desire to possess some fragment of “truth” drives most of the characters in A. S. Byatt’s *Possession*. This fixation on various objects around which fragile identities are constructed obviously forces readers into the Lacanian territory of the fissured subject. Security of self-identity is certainly in short supply amongst these characters, but their desire is not only evidence of unappeasable lack; it also figures as a drive towards deepening experiences and expressions of self and other. Byatt explores the light and shadow sides of “possession”—a word which itself oscillates between the notions of ownership and of being invaded or possessed by something other. Various aspects of the desiring and creative “self” emerge in the process which can be elucidated with help from Walter Benjamin, Michael Eigen’s mystical re-visioning of the Lacanian subject, and a brief look at a Sufi philosopher’s understanding of the relationship between the human being and the Real. As this novel explores the often contradictory impulses and capabilities of selves and their constructs, truth is seen to be both a highly charged and a highly slippery commodity. This, while in itself not a new idea, is not presented in this novel as a dead end (or as an excuse), however. For in an ongoing dialectical exchange between self and other, and within the patchwork of fictions that inevitably form around experience, Byatt suggests, vital traces of “truth” may emerge to guide the questing self, though they will always elude the grasp and the grasping.

Dialectic is built into the very structure of *Possession*. As with *The House of Doctor Dee*, readers of this novel are faced with a doubled narrative, divided in this case between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Byatt's narratives are even more fragmented than Ackroyd's, however, since the prose is regularly interrupted by excerpts from poetry, fairy tales, and journal entries. A third-person, omniscient narrator intrudes into Byatt's text as well, although somewhat more conventionally than Peter Ackroyd's, in a manner that seems anachronistic in this apparently postmodern text. It can appear, in fact, that the construction of multiple view-points and narrative techniques collapses into one dominant voice which pops up from time to time to remind readers of who holds the strings of this self-consciously intricate webbing of image, idea and metaphor. In *Possession*, readers are presented with a mass of recurring motifs: quests, labyrinths, containers full of hidden treasure, underworlds and reflecting surfaces of mirror and glass appear throughout. Above all, what recurs are lines, in the form of lines of verse, strands of spider web and golden hair, and rays of light. Linking disparate times and characters, these repeating images trace their way through and illuminate the central oppositions of this text: manipulative lies versus imaginative truth, static forms of knowledge versus free-flowing creativity, multiplicity versus singularity, and passivity versus dynamic (although always partial) agency.

The contrasting epigraphs to the novel, from Nathaniel Hawthorne and Robert Browning, highlight these oppositions from the outset with their focus on the author as one who mediates between voices, between fact and fiction, between times, and between the living and the dead. The full title of Byatt's "novel" is *Possession. A Romance*. The excerpt from Hawthorne explains that when "a writer calls his work a Romance, it need

hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude”: Romance aims, not at the “minute fidelity” of the novel, but at the author’s right to arrange circumstances as he or she will in order to remain faithful to “the truth of the human heart.” Browning’s “Mr Sludge, the Medium,” however, relies on sleight of hand to manipulate the gullible: “I veritably possess them ... / And all this might be, may be, and with good help / Of a little lying shall be ... / ...All as the author wants it.” Ending with “How many lies did it require to make / The portly truth you here present us with?,” this excerpt makes an interesting bridge to the opening of Byatt’s own “portly,” five hundred-odd page volume.

Shifting from these quotations from “real” historical figures to a poem by the fictional Randolph Ash, the novel proper begins. Ash’s poem starts by asserting the reality of what it represents (“These things are there”), before soaring into the realm of myth. The first “thing” the prose begins to describe next is, significantly, a book, “thick and black and covered with dust” (*Possession* 1). This text by Vico “had been maltreated in its own time” but will soon spring open with living messages to the present age (1). These messages are not to be conveyed, however, so much in Vico’s own writing as in the book’s function as a container for the voice of Randolph Ash in the form of marginalia and unsent letters. Just as the first poem in *Possession* begins by enumerating “The garden and the tree / The serpent at its root, the fruit of gold / The woman” before making the leap into the mythic, so Byatt’s narrator tells us of the time, the library, the table, the book and the atmosphere, as she pulls the reader into her narrative (1-4). In the London Library, Roland enjoys the company of “poets and thinkers” both living and dead, imagining them all as being engaged in similar quests (2). Just as he is thus pleasantly aware of an intermingling of times in this particular place, so the reader is also

made vividly aware of the contact between Roland's time and that of the nineteenth century, in the form of the "black, thick, tenacious Victorian dust" that covers the book Roland is holding in his hands (2).

The passing of Roland's personal time is also marked insistently, from his presence in the library at "ten in the morning, one day in September 1986," through 10:30, 11:00, and then

11:15. The clock ticked, motes of dust danced in sunlight, Roland meditated on the tiresome and bewitching endlessness of the quest for knowledge. Here he sat, recuperating a dead man's reading, timing his exploration by the library clock and the faint constriction of his belly (1-4).

Within that infinitely large space of the eternal "quest for knowledge," Roland's temporality, the specificity of his place, the solidity of his body and its stomach, all confront the distant time and reality represented by the old letters which spring dynamically from within Vico's text. Here too begins a confrontation between what Roland "knows" of Randolph Henry Ash and the explosive possibilities contained in these letters. (As will gradually be uncovered, two important poets, whom scholars had never seen as even remotely connected, not only had a significant impact on one another artistically, but had a secret affair as well). Suddenly dispossessed of his certainties about this beloved poet, Roland finds himself within another infinite space, that of "his own huge ignorance, a grey mist, in which floated or could be discerned odd glimpses of solid objects" (7). Without fully understanding the importance of his discovery until he teams up with Maud Bailey, a Christabel LaMotte scholar, all Roland can be sure of is that the

voice he encounters in those letters is not that of the Randolph Ash he believes he knows so well. Impelled by its urgency, Roland steals the letters and embarks with Maud on their quest for the “end of the story” that will drive them for the rest of the novel (7-8).

These first pages thus emphasize an insistent boundary-crossing in terms of fiction and reality, times and spaces. Roland’s transgression of the bounds of academic property and propriety crystallizes another element running throughout these pages. The notion of commodification, of economic possession, is introduced right away: Ash’s poem, *The Garden of Proserpina*, ends with Hercules’ theft of the golden apple. Roland’s reading of Vico then elaborates on the myth of Proserpina, stolen by the god Pluto and taken to the underworld: “His Proserpine was the corn, the origin of commerce and community” (4). Grain, also called “apples of gold ... must have been the first gold in the world while metallic gold was unknown” (4). Such gold, mirrored in images of golden Proserpina and later in the golden hair of Maud and Christabel, also introduces the issue of sexual possession through the conceptualization of the female body as commodity. Implicit as well is the question of whether such “objects” (grain, apples or women) are prized for their life-giving qualities or for their instrumentality in economic systems of trade and ownership.

Thus intertwined are the mythic and the mundane, the “fictional” and the “real,” not to mention the dislocated self subjected to systems and symbols of barter and control. The question soon arises, as it did in the epigraphs by Hawthorne and Browning, of who controls (or is controlled by) the creation and perpetuation of these oppositional yet interrelated constructs. In the sly picture of academia that follows upon Roland’s theft of the letters, the dual nature of the notion of “possession” crops up once again. At its most

basic level, represented by James Blackadder and Mortimer Cropper, there is the competition for possession of the most facts, documents, references and artifacts to do with Randolph Ash. In one respect this is a matter of economics, purely and simply. Cropper and Blackadder also, however, share a hunger for mastery of the academic discourse on Ash, although for somewhat different reasons. Roland, in his quieter way, shares this desire for mastery, for he reads Ash's work with

a kind of predictive familiarity; he knew the workings of the other man's mind, he had read what he had read, he was possessed of his characteristic habits of syntax and stress. His mind could leap ahead and hear the rhythm of the unread as though he were the writer, hearing in his brain the ghost-rhythms of the as yet unwritten. (130)

These readers are personally invested in what they individually know of their subject. To find out something new and striking is what every scholar in the novel hopes for. Each new discovery, however, (especially if made by someone else) threatens to upset whatever construct they may have erected around Ash or LaMotte and the meaning of the poets' (and their own) work. Hence, these constructs are exposed as the patchwork of fiction and fact they indeed are every time new "facts" emerge.

A reverse form of "possession" threatens Cropper and Blackadder in their attempts to master the Ash material: they run the risk of being mastered by it in return. Cropper's identity has been painstakingly and proudly built around his (often quite underhanded) quest to document every last aspect of Ash's life and writings. But Cropper's repeated attempts to celebrate and record his own life in writing always stall at the same point. After he describes handling for the first time a letter written by Ash to

Cropper's great-grandmother, he becomes stuck. It was "almost, he sometimes brushed the thought, as though he had no existence, no separate existence of his own after that first contact with the paper's electric rustle and the ink's energetic black looping" (105).<sup>1</sup> Blackadder too, although considerably less obsessive than Mortimer Cropper, is an expert on Ash who has committed thirty years to his "great edition," the footnotes of which "engulfed and swallowed the text" (27; 28). At times, Blackadder allows "himself to see clearly that he would end his working life, that was to say his conscious thinking life, in this task, that all his thoughts would have been another man's thoughts, all his work another man's work. And then he thought it did not perhaps matter so greatly" (29). Blackadder acquiesces to his "subordinate" status because, as a young man studying under F. R. Leavis, he had been shown "the terrible, the magnificent importance and urgency of English literature and simultaneously [been] deprived of any confidence in his own capacity to contribute to, or change it" (29; 27). Imagine, then, the impact upon men such as these when they find out that the picture of Randolph Ash that they have invested their lives in creating turns out to be, in large part, erroneous.

The fragile sense of self linking Cropper and Blackadder is endemic to all of *Possession's* twentieth-century characters, engulfed as they are by theories of signifying chains, fragmented subjectivities and belatedness. Roland, who thinks "of himself as a latecomer," is particularly representative of this postmodern self (10). Having been "trained in the post-structuralist deconstruction of the subject," Roland is completely at ease with Ash's habitual "ventriloquism" and webs of metaphor, but if asked about his own life and work would be completely at a loss (9; 27). Thinking "of himself as though he were an application form, for a job, a degree, a life," he attempts only to measure up to

the expectations others have of him, while being depressingly conscious of his failure to do so (10). Oppressed by his long worn-out relationship with Val, Roland cherishes “visions of solitary activity and free watchfulness” (13), but until impelled into movement by his discovery of Ash’s letters, feels helpless to create such spaces for himself. Perceptions of art mimic perceptions of life: tellingly, Roland thinks that his prized photographs of R. A. Ash “seemed somehow more real as well as more austere” than painted portraits, “because they were photographs. Less full of life, the life of the paint, but more realistic, in the modern sense, according to modern expectations” (17).

Obviously, life and creativity are correlated here, and the realistic capture of details may lack both, however paradoxically “true to life” it might be (a point Alice Munro makes also). This paradox is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s distinction between information and storytelling. Whereas information “lays claim to prompt verifiability” and must “sound plausible,” it is “half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation .... [The] most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them” (89). According to Benjamin, stories allow their recipients the agency and freedom which “information” denies them. Information not only renders its recipients passive; it “does not survive the moment in which it was new. ... A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time” (90). The stories Benjamin remembers with nostalgia are particular to teller and listener, yet transmit continuity. A proper story reignites in each person his or her own creativity and processes of understanding, and thus is altered by new circumstances,

yet maintains links within a larger, generational context. Once “meaning” is fixed, controlled and bartered, however, the life of the story is lost and its power to trace continuity falters (92-95).<sup>2</sup>

Another link between Byatt’s *Possession* and Walter Benjamin exists in their focus on the fairy tale. For Benjamin, the fairy tale is a form of story that has counsel to give in a manner hard to come by in this modern age: “The fairy tale tells us of the earliest arrangements that mankind made to shake off the nightmare which the myth had placed upon its chest” as well as how “to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and with high spirits” (102). The fairy tales in *Possession* likewise feature ill-equipped and simple souls who face the pressure of choice in their quests through labyrinthine or pathless expanses (58-67; 150-156). In these tales, cynicism and magic co-exist: their protagonists are well aware of the narrative plots that drive them, yet remain open to possibilities for claiming some degree of agency in the wonderfully inscrutable, though apparently ordered, worlds in which they find themselves. These tales perhaps provide Byatt’s readers with reflections upon the no less mythical nature of the world today, whose scientific and theoretical “images” of reality require as much counsel advocating courage, cunning and self-assertion as did older forms of cosmic myth.

A more uncanny affinity between Benjamin’s thought and Byatt’s novel (especially when viewed in relation to Wiseman’s *Crackpot*), is to be found in the essay “Unpacking My Library,” which casts Benjamin in a Mortimer Cropper-like light. In it, Benjamin describes the obsessive pleasures to be found in the

relationship of a book collector to his possessions ... [involving] a very mysterious relationship to ownership ... [and] to objects which does not

emphasize their functional, utilitarian value .... The most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of individual items within a *magic circle* in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them. (59-60; my italics)

Here again is the attempt to possess life, memory and identity within a magic circle of ordered and protected meaning. While he writes with (one hopes) tongue-in-cheek, it is clear that for Benjamin, book-collecting provides a magical solace, a chance to assert personal control over a welter of experience. He affirms at the same time, however, that the actual chaos of life always threatens to burst through the safety zone of this magic circle. To fortify oneself with the “various ways of acquiring books ... [is] merely a dam against the spring tide of memories which surges toward any collector as he contemplates his possessions. ... Thus there is in the life of a collector a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order” (60). However much Benjamin expresses nostalgia for old forms of storytelling and for the possibility of holding onto meaning in the shape of a collection of books, he respects more the forces of change that disrupt the permanence of these forms. In “The Task of the Translator,” for instance, capturing meaning yields precedence to the multitudinous and shifting life of language itself:

For the sake of pure language [the translator] breaks through decayed barriers of his own language.... Just as a tangent touches a circle lightly and at but one point, with this touch rather than with the point setting the law according to which it is to continue on its straight path to infinity, a translator touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point

of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux. (80)<sup>3</sup>

Byatt's novel, which likewise celebrates both the formal beauties and the disruptive powers of life and language, explores as well this "dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order."

In *Possession*, proliferating images of containment are violated or dissolved, their integrity destroyed, their barriers breached. A fairy tale glass coffin shivers apart at the touch of a magic key; newly discovered texts reveal clues about closely guarded secrets; old hiding places are discovered; a grave is desecrated; and identities shift and change under the pressures of love or the discovery of new knowledge. The urge to confine and conceal co-exists with the urge to disclose. Ellen Ash hides letters in a box placed on top of her husband's coffin in a semi-invitation for the "ghouls" who might (and do) one day dig them up (462). Christabel LaMotte hides the letters she exchanged with Randolph Ash beneath an old dolls' bed, yet sows clues as to their whereabouts in a poem which Maud successfully interprets (82-84).

Forms of enclosure in this novel are by no means presented in an exclusively negative light. Roland's and Val's mouldy, cat urine-scented basement apartment and the dusty Ash factory in the bowels of the British Museum are undeniably claustrophobic. Other controlled spaces, however, are made to look seductively appealing, or, at the very least, restful. Mortimer Cropper's Stant Collection is a "white temple shining in the desert sun, enclosing cool courts, high staircases and a kind of glass honeycomb of silent cells, radiating carrels and mounting interlinked storage and study rooms, their frames gleaming and gilded" (106-7). Maud Bailey's apartment, her "bright, safe box," is "bright

white, paint, lamps and dining-table; the carpet was a Berber off-white. The things in this room were brilliantly coloured in every colour, peacock, crimson, sunflower, deep rose” (137; 51). This intermingling of claustrophobia with beauty, fixity with cleanliness and order, mirrors the paradoxical activities of poets like Randolph Ash and Christabel LaMotte who capture expansive moments of insight by framing them in tightly regulated words. Texts themselves are symbols of both fixity and permeability in this novel. Although solid artifacts, potential energies are stored in them in a kind of stasis that may be remobilized through the next reader’s intervention and subsequent re-encounters with each text.

Buildings of various kinds are also physical images of containment that clearly function as metaphors for identity constructs. The two Victorian households of Randolph and Ellen Ash and of Christabel LaMotte and Blanche Glover have become “two academic centers .... Shaping the actions of these academic camps are the mythic figures of Ash and LaMotte, around whose fictive personae scholastic and theoretical systems of exclusion have developed” (Fountain 204). Maud’s carefully regulated persona imprisons itself in Tennyson Tower in an office that is “glass-walled on one side, and lined floor to ceiling with books on the others. The books were arranged rationally, thematically, alphabetically, and dust-free” (40). Christabel lives out her independent yet lonely final years as “an old witch in a turret” (500). That these characters depend upon the confinement they suffer is clear. Maud can “do nothing with ease and grace except work alone, inside these walls and curtains, her bright, safe box” (136). Ellen Ash cannot relax her acute self-protection long enough to release the “locked gateway” of her body, so is never able to consummate her 40-year marriage to Randolph (459). Beatrice Nest walls

herself within “a small cavern constructed of filing cabinets ... almost bricked in by the boxes containing the diary and correspondence of Ellen Ash” (27). Determined to resist being possessed (and therefore erased) by another, these women, especially Maud and Christabel, erect an impregnable aloneness to encase their hidden vulnerability.<sup>4</sup> Though they all recognize that the merging of self and other in love may be “ecstatic and transfiguring,” they fear it because it threatens “the privacy of the soul” (Holmes 236).

Yet, for real “*conversation* Beatrice would have given everything ... [that] civilised talk and raw passion which everyone must surely want, and yet which no one, as she looked around her small world ... seemed to have” (113-114). To be truly in conversation and *conversant* with another is a most threatening and a most longed for thing in this novel. But how can conversation occur when its participants have neither a secure sense of self nor any real sense of where self ends and otherness begins? Roland, who for much of the novel longs at most for an expanse of clean white bed all to himself (267), feels how nearly impossible it is to both find a place of rest for himself *and* succeed in communicating with another. He

had learned to see himself, theoretically, as a crossing-place for a number of systems, all loosely connected. He had been trained to see his idea of his “self” as an illusion, to be replaced by a discontinuous machinery and electrical message-network of various desires, ideological beliefs and responses, language-forms and hormones and pheromones. Mostly he liked this. He had no desire for any strenuous Romantic self-assertion .... [But he] was in a Romance, a vulgar and a high Romance simultaneously, a Romance was one of the systems that controlled him... (424-245)<sup>5</sup>

How, amongst the fictional systems that necessarily dominate the experiences and perceptions of the unknowing self, can true intercourse take place? Furthermore, how can one's own voice and thoughts be distinguished from those of another? Randolph Ash writes of this concern to Christabel LaMotte:

I speak to you as I might speak to all those who most possess my thoughts—to Shakespeare, to Thomas Browne, to John Donne, to John Keats—and find myself unpardonably lending *you*, who are alive, my voice, as I habitually lend it to those dead men—Which is as much as to say—here is an author of Monologues—trying clumsily to construct a Dialogue—and encroaching on both halves of it. Forgive me. (177)

The novel's focus on the issues of mediumship, ventriloquism and the questionable responsibility of the artist who uses such talents speaks to these central questions.

When Roland releases Randolph Ash's letters to Christabel LaMotte from their interment in a tightly bound and dust-encoated text, "the dead leaves" come alive with his touch and attention, and continue "a kind of rustling and shifting, enlivened by their release" (3). The letters that Maud intuitively retrieves from their hiding-place in Christabel's old bedroom, "wrapped in fine linen, tied with tape, about and about and about, like a mummy," also unlock secrets never before known about the Victorian poets. Both of these moments echo the release and transmission of messages from the dead by the spiritualist mediums described later in the novel, in the story of Mrs. Lees and in Ash's poem "Mummy Possesst." The fact that these mediums may indulge in trickery, in little "fictions," to heighten the effects of the "truths" they present links this kind of mediumship with the author or poet who also mediates between fact and fiction, truth and

lies. In “Mummy Possest,” for instance, the speaker asks, “if I construct a fictive eye-witness account—a credible plausible account—am I lending life to truth with my fiction—or verisimilitude to a colossal lie?” (168). In a letter to an admirer fascinated by spiritualist séances, Ash speaks to the link between that art and his, and the uneasy relationship between mediumship and an artist’s talent for ventriloquism:

I myself, with the aid of the imagination, have worked a little in that line, have ventriloquized, have lent my voice to, and mixt my life with, those past voices and lives whose resuscitation in our own lives as warnings, as examples, as the life of the past *persisting in us*, is the business of every thinking man and woman. But there are ways and ways, as you must well know, and some are tried and tested, and others are fraught with danger and disappointment. (104)

Randolph Ash freely admits that his work is implicated in such questions concerning the artist’s accountability, and the propensity for a (in twentieth-century terminology) Lacanian subject to lose track of itself (and *its* subject) in the play of signifiers. Quite obviously, Byatt’s own work is implicated as well.

While *Possession* features shifting voices and chronologies, as well as the interpolation within the main narrative of poems, fairy tales, and journal entries, its discontinuity and variety are unified by recurring myths, images and symbols. The interjected poetry and tales reinforce the imagery and themes on display in the main prose narratives, while a continuity of symbol, phrasing, thought and humour pervades both the nineteenth- and twentieth-century plots. The narrator is also omnipresent in this novel, marked as it is by subtle intrusions of her commentary and explanation. Since the tone

and inflection of these intrusions and interjections into the main narrative are the same, what has the appearance of multiplicity is clearly subject to one overarching voice and vision. This attempt to inhabit a variety of voices and stances is not a negative thing, though it does give rise to the kind of questions discussed above, since such attempts cannot fully succeed in eradicating one's own characteristic bias, or angle of entry. But by extending one's imagination into another's territory, as Randolph Ash does, perhaps the living presence of both may be achieved, although each may be altered in the process in ways that are difficult to discern.

In this potential interconnectedness of voices, selves and perspectives, language is that which, *almost* above all else, mediates the relationship between self and other.<sup>6</sup> But with the dual and duelling aspects of "possession" being explored in this novel, along with its recurring references to Lacanian theories of subjectivity, Byatt quite obviously confronts the contemporary question of whether there is any space for effective individual agency within or outside of language systems. While she acknowledges the force of the "self-referring, self-reflexive, intuned postmodernist mirror-game or plot-coil" (421), Byatt both engages in this game of mirrors and subverts it. Celebrating narrative pleasure, and suggesting that it offers real possibilities for communication and communion between selves, she transforms Lacan's image of the helplessly fractured subject from one which is predominantly negative to one of great creative potential. Fractured and refracted images of the self are reflected in the abundance of mirrored surfaces in this novel, from glass-lined offices and bathrooms, to fairy tale crystal coffins and metal boxes, and frozen depths of water in a winter landscape. Maud Bailey peers into the cracked, icy surface of a pond and wonders,

[w]ere there fish? ... The ice was ridged and bubbly and impure.

Whatever was beneath it could not be seen. She moved her hand in little circles, polishing, and saw, ghostly and pale in the metal-dark surface a woman's face, her own, barred like the moon under mackerel clouds, wavering up at her. Were there fish? (142).<sup>7</sup>

A person who attempts to look below the surface of appearances into the alien world of the other, while encountering only her own barred image, is obviously in Lacan's territory, which features an irrevocably "barred subject ... and barred Other" (Eigen 140).<sup>8</sup>

Lacan's subject begins with a mirrored image: during the "mirror stage" in the life of an infant, a movement towards an articulated social self commences with the recognition of an external image which, when internalized, necessitates the splitting off, or foreclosure, of a preconscious world of perceptions. Recognition thus becomes misrecognition as it is used in service of the creation of an ego-identity (*Écrits* 1-7). At first, this process is embedded in what Lacan terms the "imaginary": a realm of images, "conscious or unconscious, perceived or imagined" upon which the newly-formed ego is founded (Sheridan 279). As time goes on, however, the ego is increasingly subjected to and constituted by language and by "Law," so that "[h]enceforth it is the symbolic, not the imaginary, that is seen to be the determining order of the subject" (279). Suspended between the pressures of the symbolic order which defines it as subject, and an absent "real" which traumatizes it with an occasional *tuché* or shock (*Four Fundamentals* 53-55), Lacan's subject is driven by imaginary desire. Founded upon a fundamental wound

that has resulted in the loss of a primal condition of unity, this fissured subject is always in search of what will make it whole once again.

Various forms of *objet a* pervade the desire world of the subject, corresponding to and provoking its sense of lack. Somehow straddling the divide between the symbolic order and the realm of the imaginary, the *objet a* resonates as well with the power of the unknowable real. The “gaze,” an equally important feature in Lacan’s thought,

may contain in itself the *objet a* of the Lacanian algebra .... In so far as the gaze, *qua objet a*, may come to symbolize this central lack expressed in the phenomenon of castration, and in so far as it is an *objet a* reduced, of its nature, to a punctiform, evanescent function, it leaves the subject in ignorance as to what there is beyond the appearance ... (*Four* 76-77)

The frustrated subject desires (and fears) the other’s gaze, but, in fact, “*You never look at me from the place from which I see you*”; furthermore it can never actually locate itself in the place from which it looks (103). Because of the bar or split that is foundational to the subject function, subject and other can neither be localized nor truly identified (Eigen 140).

The lack of definitively distinguishing marks between self and other is further complicated by the fact that the subject looks to the gaze of the other to confirm itself and to facilitate the construction of its identity, while the other looks to the subject’s gaze for the same reason. Gazed upon, subjected, and gazing at others as an agent of their own subjectivity, subject and object thus continually interpenetrate and attempt to possess one another. This being the case, the subject may be seen as *complicit* with the gaze. A further possibility tends not to be over-emphasized by Lacan: in a sense the subject may

be seen to actively participate in the process whereby the gaze imposes a false image upon it.<sup>9</sup> Lacan says that the gaze intervenes at the moment when the subject is caught “sustaining himself in a function of desire” (qtd. in Silverman 130). Kaja Silverman explains that the “gaze confirms and sustains the subject’s identity, but it is not responsible for the form which that identity assumes” (145). She cites Freud as asserting that “object-cathexis and identification are initially indistinguishable,” and goes on to say that “identification has the great virtue of making it possible for the ego to transform itself into the desired object, and thereby to promote self-love” (317).

The subject identifies with an image as much to defend itself from the real as to comply with the pressures of the symbolic order. Caught between the insistent gaze of the symbolic order and the equally insistent gaze of what has been split off and lost, the subject cringes as much from an encounter with the unknown real as it does from the impinging symbolic order. According to Michael Eigen, Lacan’s notion of “desire” functions to protect the subject from too much of the real in the form of *jouissance*, as well as to both counteract and comply with the forces of symbolic Law. Eigen quotes Lacan as saying that desire constitutes “a prohibition against going beyond a certain limit in *jouissance*”; he explains further that

[w]e work with oppositions and unities of desire and Law, the limiting poles or structures that make us possible. Our identities are brakes and limits enabling living .... Desires crystallize or organize *jouissance* in characteristic ways. They give *jouissance* ‘a local habitation and a name’. Our equipment can’t take too much of *jouissance* as such, but relates to *jouissance* through particular desires. (134; 136)

In Lacan's discussions of the scopic field in which the gaze functions as *objet a*, the "mirror-image" appears again in the form of a mediating screen between subject and object, the look and the gaze. The subject looks at a "subject of representation" and is subjected to the gaze looking back from the represented image, which then "turns *me* into a picture" (105). Lacan affirms in this regard that "the human subject, the subject of desire"

is not, unlike the animal, entirely caught up in this imaginary capture. He maps himself in it. How? In so far as he isolates the function of the screen and plays with it. Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze. The screen is here the locus of mediation.

(*Four* 107; qtd. in Silverman 149)

As the subject oscillates between opposing forces, it is constrained to function as an image created in response to other images, but it remains capable of *playing with* these images nonetheless (Silverman 149).

Both subject and object, the origins of the gaze and of the look, are mere vanishing points on opposing sides of this obscuring image / screen (*Four* 83; 105-106).<sup>10</sup> And yet, Lacan says, "what determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which ... I am *photo-graphed*" (106). Contained in these words is the sense of a subject mapped by the action of the light and the gaze, but the ambiguous use of the preposition "through" obscures or confuses the subject's role in this process. Silverman explains that the "gaze occupies two domains simultaneously; in its

capacity as light, and as that which is foreclosed from the subject, it partakes of the real, but in its status as ‘the presence of others as such,’ it clearly belongs to the symbolic” (152). And what is “light,” for Lacan, and what are its effects? The eye (which can no more be equated with the gaze than the penis can with the phallus in Lacan’s system, and yet is its representative) “emerges from what Lacan calls ‘the function of seeingness’, which both precedes and antedates it” (Silverman 145). It might be, then, that “light” is associated with this undefined “function of seeingness” and participates, as the gaze does, in both the real and the symbolic order. Whatever light may be to Lacan, it seems to constitute a duality of vanishing points, both within the most interiorized limit of the self and/or the real, and without, at the furthest extreme of the symbolic order. “Light” may be, then, in a leap of speculation which Lacan would probably detest, perception or consciousness prior to subjective limitation.

In any case, light certainly has powerful effects on the characters in Byatt’s novel, in two cases being instrumental to the mystical visions experienced by Randolph Ash and Roland (182; 265). The refraction of light into a dynamic multitude of vibrant colours is also one of the things that works to disrupt the static pictures these characters have of each other and of their world of possibilities. Early on in the novel, Roland looks at Maud as they labour together over the Ash and LaMotte letters, and sees her transformed. Maud tends to get fixed within an “ice queen” stereotype, in which her personality is assumed to match her pale, controlled beauty—the “doll’s mask” she sees in the mirror that has “nothing to do with her, nothing” (57). Roland looks over at her in the freezing library where they work and finds that the flood of sunlight through

stained glass worked to defamiliarise her. It divided her into cold, brightly coloured fires. One cheek moved in and out of a pool of grape-violet as she worked. Her brow flowered green and gold. Rose-red and berry-red stained her pale neck and chin and mouth. Eyelids were purple-shadowed. The green silk of her scarf glittered with turreted purple ridges. Dust danced in a shadowy halo round her shifting head, black motes in straw gold, invisible solid matter appearing like pinholes in a sheet of solid colour. (133)

As her image is thus seen to break down and shift, likewise the reserve maintained between Roland and Maud begins gradually to disintegrate as well. The enlivening power of colour pervades Byatt's novel, in counterpoint to the dark or lifeless spaces inhabited by its pallid twentieth-century characters. In one such instance, Roland finds a sea anemone at the shore where he and Maud are researching Ash's travels. It is the "colour of a dark blood-blister ... above a layer of glistening gritty sand, pink and gold and bluish and black. It looked simple and ancient, and very new and shining. ... Its colour was like cornelian, like certain dark and ruddy ambers." (252). Possessed of "a vigorous crown of agitating and purposeful feelers ... [its] stem or base or foot held the rock and stood sturdy" (252). The simple dynamism of its self-presence offers a striking contrast to these "exhausted scholars and theorists," whose unaccustomed bare feet "were white on the sands like things come up out of the blind dark" (267; 269).

In a cavern by a waterfall, Roland feels the impact of light itself in an experience that is somewhat reminiscent of Plato's allegory of the Cave:

Roland looked at the greenish-goldish-white rush of the fall .... As he looked, the sun came out, and hit the pool, showing both the mirror-glitter from the surface, and various live and dead leaves and plants moving under it .... *Inside* the cavern ... what appeared to be flames of white light appeared to be striving and moving upwards. Wherever the refracted light off the water struck the uneven stone, wherever a fissure ran, upright or transverse, this same brightness poured and quivered along it ... building a kind of visionary structure of non-existent fires and non-solid networks of thread inside it. He sat and watched for a time, squatting on a stone, until he lost his sense of time and space and his own precise location and saw the phantom flames as though they were the conscious centre. (265)

Here is moving water, not frozen, and potentiality emerging from within fissures; here is a vision of depths as well as of mirroring surfaces; here refracted light provokes a shift in states wherein an observing subject loses himself in the experience of something other, at least temporarily. To allow for the potential for an expanded, or a “mystical,” vision within a limited subjectivity in this way is something that Lacan may or may not have approved of, as Michael Eigen admits. For Lacan, Eigen explains,

mystical feeling is [merely] an imaginary way to feel more whole. ... Still, beyond the equations of mysticism with madness, there is the life of the unconscious subject, giving birth to revelation-response, “pulsations from the slit,” the living word, the drive towards truth, bringing silence to the brink of new possibilities, new worlds of meaning. ... Whether or not Lacan would agree, there *is* a kind of mystical feeling connected with the

unconscious subject, at least with some of its workings some of the time.

... It may not have religious content in the old-fashioned sense. But it does carry a sense of mystery, the thrill of unknowing, shivers of awakening. It does have a sense of taking us deeper into life, opening experience. (19)

Eigen's work as a psychoanalyst attests to the possibility that people may be capable, as Roland seems to be here, of shifting states beyond the bounds of the known self in a manner that yet connects to something deeply interior within it as well.

Eigen says of Freud's theories, upon which Lacan bases his own, that what may not always be noticed is that Freud's depiction of id, ego, and superego means that we are not one with any or all of them. We are more than the sum of our stories .... Winnicott uses terms like "transitional experiencing" and "potential space" to suggest movement *between*: between inner and outer, self and other, mind and body, id, ego, and superego. ... We can look for ourselves between positions. (53-54)<sup>11</sup>

Finding space for movement within our stories is something that Walter Benjamin attests to as well. According to him, mystics and storytellers share an ability to move through and to translate extremes of experience into their opposites, since for both "the lowest stratum of created things ... is directly joined to the highest" (107). He quotes Paul Valéry as saying that

observation [for an artist] ... can attain an almost mystical depth. The objects on which it falls lose their names. Light and shade form very particular systems, present very individual questions which depend upon no knowledge and are derived from no practice, but get their existence and

value exclusively from a certain accord of the soul, the eye, and the hand of someone who was born to perceive them and evoke them in his own inner self. (107-108)

Such moments of (in)sight offer reassurance to the subject / self that it is possible to experience something beyond itself, however impossible to describe, capture or hold.

Moments of absorption such as Roland experiences allow the self to experience what Krishnamurti describes as observing without an observer—meaning without the identity-subject (261-265).<sup>12</sup> Michael Eigen believes that when this happens, the “circle” of the self

opens or begins to open. One begins to branch out from the living center, just as one had closed oneself into the dead center .... It is the back-and-forth movement that is most important .... The closed circle may well be a super-assertion of uniqueness in a super self-protective mode, so afraid of violation that there is total closing off and shutting down. Or massive shut down may be an attempt to so control the Other that the Other is brought totally (as a delusion or hallucination) within one’s boundaries (and vice versa). ... What matters most is not the state or moment one is stuck in, but the loss of movement, the pulsation at the boundary, ... the ability to cross over. (Eigen 58-59)

If there are in fact “pulsations from the slit,” or *tuchés* from the real, lines of light and life may be able to penetrate enclosed spaces of self-representation and crack them open, forcing them to become both more permeable and more self-aware. If so, the “fissures” of

the divided self can be regarded as spaces opening into increased creativity as much as they are the wounds of an old loss.

Byatt claims such freeing spaces for the postmodern subject by suggesting that valid possibilities remain for self-expression and for actively participating in ordering those energies which shape it. As her narrator says about the “postmodern mirror-game” discussed above,

connections proliferate apparently at random, that is to say, with equal verisimilitude, apparently in response to some ferocious ordering principle, not controlled by conscious intention, which would of course, being a good postmodernist intention, *require* the aleatory ... but structuring, but controlling, but driving, to some—to what?—end. Coherence and closure are deep human desires that are presently unfashionable. (421-422)

That this ordering impulse is reflected in the writer’s craft is central to the working out of the plots in *Possession*, and seems connected to the unhesitating intrusions into the text of Byatt’s omniscient narrator as well. After all the discoveries made by the other characters by the end of the novel, a final “fact” about Ash and the child of his union with LaMotte is revealed, which none of the other characters find out about. The picture created is one of a free and secret space of time shared between father and daughter, never to be known by or subject to the interpretation of anyone else.<sup>13</sup> Thus the postscript closes off the novel in the same way the two epigraphs begin it, with the narrator / writer asserting her presence and the power of her imaginative vision. The writer’s imagination creates in this

way what might be called an “interspace,” where the question is not so much who is mediating whom, but whether or not creative intercourse, or conversation, occurs.

The ability to work with the intermediating spaces of the imagination is something Randolph Ash possesses, not only in his poetic renditions of other characters’ voices and experiences, but in his own life as well. Riding on horseback through the light and shade of a forest, he sees a “creature” lying in a pool half in and half out of the water, but cannot tell “whether this manifestation were a reality, or a hallucination” (183).

Confronting this blurring or doubling of possible worlds, Ash

had the sensation, common enough, at least to me, that I was moving out of time, that the way, narrow and dark-dappled, stretched away indifferently before and behind, and that I was who I had been and what I would become—all at once, all wound in one—and I moved onward indifferently, since it was all one, whether I came or went, or remained still. Now to me such moments are poetry ... the source of the driving force of the lines—And when I write *lines* I mean the lines of verse indeed, but also some *lines of life* which run indifferently through us—from Origin to Finish. Ah, how can I tell you? ... a fan or tunnel of lines, narrowing not to blindness, not to Nought, but to the Vanishing point, to Infinity. (182)

Here the life of language is linked to lines of life itself in their shared energies, along with the ultimate inexpressibility of them both since each perceiver is confined to his or her own subjective viewpoint. And yet, the imagination figures as the multiplying, unifying

source of coherence able to feel its way from any limited stance to a fleeting sense of the whole. As Ash writes to LaMotte,

Do you know—the only life I am sure of is the life of the Imagination ....

Remember that miraculous saying of the boy Keats—I am certain of nothing, but the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of the Imagination ... [W]ithout the Maker's imagination nothing *can live* for us—whether alive or dead, or once alive and now dead, or waiting to be brought to life. (168-69)

This emphasis on the imagination necessitates a return to Lacan's notion of the "imaginary" to see if it too contains powers similar to what Byatt and Ash claim for it. As mentioned above, Lacan speaks of the way the "human subject," unlike other animals, is not "entirely caught up in this imaginary capture"—this creation of doubles or masks through which games of survival are effected (*Four* 107). On the contrary, Lacan says, "[h]e maps himself in it": "It is through this separated form of himself that the being comes into play in his effects of life and death, and ... it is with the help of this doubling of the other, or of oneself, that is realized the conjunction from which proceeds the renewal of beings in reproduction" (107). This mapping is carried out because the subject is capable of playing with the screen that mediates between "mask" and "gaze" (107). The important idea here, to my mind, is that *spaces* predominate in these processes. There is space between the being and the mask or image that he or she assumes for survival purposes; there is also space between that image and its symbolic rendering. The "closed system" of the symbolic order, then, is split in much the same way as is its subject: it is full of gaps through which occur energetic processes or movements. The

imaginary plays a helpful role for the subject in that it persists in at least a partial opposition to the realm of the symbolic (that “closed system” of signifiers that constitutes the subject against its will). Therefore the imaginary can highlight, and force further open, those gaps that do exist within the symbolic order.

Beyond this, however, is another helpful aspect belonging to the imaginary realm as described by Lacan (who usually only focuses on its negative dynamics of misrecognition and loss). The imaginary—characterized by the grasping of the ego towards images of wholeness to counteract insufficiency—is a movement towards unity and ability that enables the human infant to create a sense of self that will help it to survive the crucial early stages of its existence, when it is utterly vulnerable. The imaginary is constructive, therefore, in both senses of the word, even though it is based upon a leap into an image of otherness. The real problem with the imaginary seems to be the tendency of the ego-self to lean on a reification of these images. The “inner dynamic” of the mirror stage “moves rapidly from *insufficiency* to *anticipation* ... from an image of a *fragmented body* ... to the armour, donned at last, of an alienating identity, whose rigid structure will shape all the subject’s future mental development” (Sarup 64). The “product of successive inventions,” the ego is “not the agent of strength but the victim of an illusion of strength,” which constantly “needs reinforcement from the Domain of the Imagination” (65).

However, as Madan Sarup emphasizes, there is no reason to negate the possibility that within the gaps that persist in these images is to be found breathing space for thought and play. Because there is a difference between how we see ourselves and the point from which we are observed, because there is a difference between the imaginary and the

symbolic, the human ego / subject / self has room for choice (103). The point is, I believe, that the imaginary is a powerful site of forces for survival and creation: the infant self grabs onto images of strength and unity to support itself through stages of fragility. Problems occur when the movements become fixed in certain patterns, and when the energies of the self centre upon the defense of these acquired (and inaccurate) images. By re-engaging with the imaginary as a realm equal in potency to the symbolic, however, the self can re-visit and re-think these images and become cognizant of the gaps between them and the definitions promulgated in the symbolic realm. Observing these gaps, living in them, exposes the self to more of the impact of the “real,” of what cannot be slotted into either realm in its entirety, perhaps even enabling it to become more acclimatized to those occasional irruptions or shocks from the real that Lacan admits do occur. A self able to recognize the gaps within its own constructs (and in the systems that have formed it) will be less offended or threatened by what does not fit into these constructs, and will be able to engage in a freer movement from image to image, definition to definition. Knowingly fragile and in a state of incompleteness, the self’s strength is to be found in flexibility, not in a fixity of armoured concepts that resist shocks to these images.

This, in fact, is the agency that I—and I believe Byatt—claim for the self. Aware that the “truths” available to it are partial, the human self can respond to circumstances and choose different paths with a consciousness of its own limits, but with an openness to experiences that go beyond these limits if and when they occur. Agency means to participate in these processes with awareness and the willingness to shift, change and take note of what happens. Writers and readers of poetry and of imaginative prose participate in processes whereby the language of the symbolic order and the images of the imaginary

realm are forced into a dialogue which keeps reopening the borders of both. Writers and readers may thus be receptive to what slips in between, and is not captured by either. To think and to choose in the gaps, to hold spaces open for choice and thought is partly an act of the will. Writers, readers, mystics and lovers repeatedly make the choice to be available to what is other and attempt to learn from it, to move to the next formulation, the next action, while “knowing” that these are not final nor wholly free. But to claim a small space of freedom means to be loyal to what is other, and to the self’s right to do so. This is an act of the self recognizing itself as mediating between these extremes. Agency means to commit to what is beyond any “closed system,” whether of identity, society or signifying “chains.” Small spaces of freedom can be held open by acts of will and of creativity and by attempts to learn by expanding and *thinking through* the gaps between the symbolic and the imaginary. Lacan himself says that it is a function of “love” to cut through the “knot of imaginary servitude” every human self labours under, and that after that point, “the real journey begins” (*Écrits* 7).

Byatt persistently links this notion of intermediating spaces created by the imagination with the intermediating spaces created by the “heart’s affections” (168). Love and the imagination are both observed to have generative or regenerating powers in this novel. Lovers can be for one another, as Ash claims, messengers “from some urgent place of the spirit where essential poetry sings and sings” (193). Writers and readers, too, can partake in the sharing of blurred boundaries which serves to expand the fragmented, subjective, limited self beyond its previous identity-constructs. Thus, yet another form of possession occurs in the novel: that of interpenetration, of allowing the perceived truth of the other to enter within the self, and enabling a heightened sense of communication

whether physically, emotionally or in the realm of ideas. Ash says to LaMotte, “I have no designs on your freedom ... I respect and honour and *admire* that freedom and the product of it, your work, your words, your web of language” (185). Roland and Maud likewise agree to attempt a love that allows free space for the sanctity of the individual. Their long delayed sexual union invokes one of the West’s most primal stories of the link between sexuality, exposure to an increase in knowledge and the loss of secure boundaries: the aftermath of their union generates the “smell of bitten apples. It was the smell of death and destruction and it smelled fresh and lively and hopeful” (507). The ability to withstand such moments of *jouissance* is seen in this novel to belong to both lovers and poets.

It is, finally, about paradox. Randolph Ash says that the “true exercise of freedom is—cannily and wisely and with grace—to move inside what space confines—and not to seek to know what lies beyond and cannot be touched or tasted. But we are human—and to be human is to desire to know what may be known by any means” (200). Byatt is concerned to reclaim some agency for the human self that speaks, reads, writes and loves, even though language and the desire of the other may in fact *form us*, speak us, drive us. She insists upon the interaction of different spheres: that of the limited, fragmented, practically nil subject, and that of the self who must *be there*, watching and speaking, for anything to occur. And what does occur is paradoxical, for contradictory impulses always exist: to expand and contract; to possess and be possessed; to be alone so as to be free, and to escape the small prison of the identity by attending to something other. Experience oscillates between polarities: any one tendency, taken to its extreme, becomes its opposite.

One man whose thought links all of these different aspects of oscillation between states of reality, the importance of the imagination and love, and the potentiality within the human being is Ibn al-‘Arabī, a Sufī philosopher and mystic. In his introduction to *The Bezels of Wisdom*, R. W. J. Austin provides an overview of ‘Arabī’s thought: working with a picture of the Cosmos that has affinities with that of Plotinus, ‘Arabī partakes of a tradition of thought which

indicates that the primordial and fundamental polarization ... within the Reality is that of Self-Consciousness ... [or] the original Self-polarization of the Reality into subject and object, knower and known. This is by no means as simple as it sounds, since it is not a question of the one being active and dominant while the latter is passive ... [T]here is rather a relationship of mutual conditioning going on by which each, at once, experiences and determines the other. (Austin 27)

Ibn ‘Arabī uses many images to work through the implications of these ideas: one is that of the mirror, while another is that of the “Creative Imagination ... by which the essentially latent images of reality are projected onto the screen of the illusion of otherness” (27-28). And for ‘Arabī, “love and mercy, both of which require polarity and relationship, that is to say they require ‘another’, an object, lie at the center of the creative process” (29). In ‘Arabī’s system of thought, the human being has the potential to become the “Perfect Man,” with the ability to function as “the all-important link or medium between the two poles of Reality .... Having called man the link, however, it is necessary,” Austin insists,

to point out that any link itself is important only so long as it serves to effect communication and relationship between things ... the link itself having no meaning per se, except by reference to the things it links. Thus man, considered in himself and by himself, is an absurdity while assuming enormous significance. (34)

The Sufi tradition as a whole is characterized by its emphasis on the ecstatic loss of self in an overwhelming experience of love for the Reality, the Beloved. But embedded as it is within Mohammed's teachings in the Koran, Sufism always reintegrates the importance of individual mystical experiences of the Reality within the unfolding life of the larger community (Frager 14-19).<sup>14</sup>

Byatt, via Randolph Ash, envisions a community as well in which the "individual appears for an instant, joins the community of thought, modifies it and dies; but the species, that dies not, reaps the fruit of his ephemeral existence" (4). The key here, as it was with Peter Ackroyd, is the contribution made by each individual in looking for and passing on the vital connections that each can find within his or her own particular experience. The biggest paradox seems to be that letting go of the self—whether in relationship with another or in the letting go of fixed ideas in the exploration of shared thoughts and writings—enhances the self rather than obliterating it. In the intercourse between self and other, an amorphous yet effective personhood may emerge that has a heightened sense of clarity and potential for creativity, such as Teresa of Avila describes. The relationship shared by Randolph Ash and Christabel LaMotte, although brief, unleashes in them both an intense period of artistic creativity which has an impact on others over generations. Maud Bailey ventures out of her self-protective façade and opens

up to a broader understanding of LaMotte and the family heritage that binds them.<sup>15</sup>

Roland Michell quests to find the “truth” about Randolph Ash and ends up finding his own creative voice:

he heard the language moving around, weaving its own patterns, beyond the reach of any single human, writer or reader. He ... heard his own strange, necessary meaningless *lists* ... and saw what they were. He saw too that Christabel was the Muse and Proserpina and that she was not, and this seemed to be so interesting and *apt*, once he had understood it, that he laughed aloud. Ash had started him on this quest and he had found the clue he had started with, and all was cast off .... He could hear, or feel, or even almost see, the patterns made by a voice he didn't yet know, but which was his own. ... [He] saw he had things to say which he could say about the way shapes came and made themselves. (472; 475)

The self and its fictions turn out to be endlessly permeable, changeable and communicative: they can always say something new. The self, this Lacanian “nothing,” this system of relays *is* fully itself when it is attentive to these oscillating extremes and when it observes the spaces that open up for different forms of perception and expression. As Randolph Ash says about the mystic possibilities mapped out within his own creative work, “[a]ll these new sights and discoveries ... have started off *shoots* of poetry in every direction. I say shoots in Vaughan's sense, ‘Bright shoots of everlastingness’ ... brightness of scintillation and flight of arrows, and growth of seeds of light” (256).

---

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Byatt has encoded in Cropper's name that he will be the worst example on the spectrum of theft and the self-interested pursuit for possession of knowledge. A "cropper" is a person that works on the land in return for a share of the yield (reinforcing the idea we see at the beginning of *Possession* of the golden crop of grain that is simultaneously the stuff of myth and of trade); also, to "come a cropper" is to sustain a comical failure. The mindlessly repetitive cropping by animal or machine that harvests or eats these crops, mimics the way that Cropper incessantly gathers in his stolen photocopies of Ash documents, treasure which he then hoards in the Stant Collection. This link between consumption and possession of knowledge gets picked up again in a complex of images in the early part of the novel: James Blackadder pictures himself working with "the pickings, digestion and leavings" of Ash as an owl compresses the "bone, tooth and fur ... which had run, died, and made its way through owl-gut" (29). The way that both Blackadder and Beatrice Nest, rooted in the underworld of the Ash factory, take shelter in "the mighty Ash" (95) is echoed in Ash's verse about "The creeping Nidhogg, [who] with his sooty scales / Gnaws at the great Tree's root, and makes his nest, / Curled in the knotted maze on which he feeds" (22).

<sup>2</sup> The possibility of attaining such "perfection" in art, Benjamin says, depends on not being dominated by the passing of time in the way that an information society is. Essential to the creation of works of art is that each attempt is framed within a context of eternity in which "sustained, sacrificing effort" alone makes sense (93). The pace of life in an information age "no longer permits that slow piling on top of the other of thin,

---

transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate picture of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings” (93).

<sup>3</sup> These words suggest an interesting link between Benjamin and Bakhtin. Their ideas about the story and the novel seem to be diametrically opposed, until one realizes that they are both attesting to the *life of language*, which is what Byatt also is doing. For Bakhtin, the power of language is in its ability to instigate dialogue and a movement away from reified form. Benjamin, on the other hand, is nostalgic for the truth and power communicated by the fixed forms transmitted by oral storytelling and the epic—the forms of which are “fixed” because still relevant *in life* to their speakers and listeners. Actually, however, Benjamin is very close to Bakhtin in “The Task of the Translator.” In this essay, Benjamin states specifically that the life of language is served by the dialogue between languages, rather than slavish adherence to copying an original:

In the individual, unsupplemented languages, meaning is never found in relative independence, as in individual words or sentences; rather, it is in a constant state of flux—until it is able to emerge as pure language from the harmony of all the various modes of intention. Until then, it remains hidden in the languages .... [I]t is translation which catches fire on the eternal life of the works and the perpetual renewal of language. (74)

<sup>4</sup> The tower, as in the poetry of Yeats and Pound, as well as in Tennyson’s “Lady of Shallot,” has often been a metaphor for the construction, protection and declaration of personal identity. The name of LaMotte, incidentally, is not only a play on “la mot” as Thelma Shinn suggests (182): a “motte” is also a mound of earth upon which a castle or tower is built.

---

<sup>5</sup> This is reminiscent of Hoda's status as a "flow-through nexus" that was discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>6</sup> A. S. Byatt, like Adele Wiseman, is resistant to the idea that language encapsulates all of the human being's ability to think and to experience. She is made uneasy by the theorists and "believer[s] ... who ascribing too much power to language, reduces its range" (*Passions* 5).

<sup>7</sup> This scene reminds me of an old Sufi (and also Buddhist and Christian) meditation image: repeated sessions of contemplation are seen as "polishing the mirror" of the self so that it can better reflect reality without impediments or distortion. Al-Ghazzali, for instance, says that "[y]our heart is a polished mirror. You must wipe it clean of the veil of dust that has gathered upon it, because it is destined to reflect the light of divine secrets" (qtd in *Essential Sufism* 102). Further to this idea of an observing self that is cut off from seeing past surface appearances, Peter Dews (in an appropriately refracted quotation) quotes Lyotard quoting Borges as saying that for the people of Canton, "the Fish was a shifting and shining creature that nobody had ever caught but that many said they had glimpsed in the depths of mirrors .... In those days the world of mirrors and the world of men were not, as they are now, cut off from each other" (48). Dews goes on to say that, in the necessity for "reflection" that subjectivity entails, "[c]onsciousness becomes a kind of self-contained theatre, divided between stage and auditorium: energy is transformed into the thought of energy, intensity into intentionality" (49).

<sup>8</sup> This link is furthered by an explicit reference one of Byatt's characters makes to Lacan's mention of "flying-fish" with "transparent skin" (*Écrits* 12; *Possession* 138).

<sup>9</sup> The sense of the subject's agency in Lacan does emerge from time to time in statements such as this one: "The mode of my presence in the world is the subject in so far as by reducing itself solely to this certainty of being a subject, it becomes active annihilation" (*Four* 81).

<sup>10</sup> Lacan discusses the artist and his painting in this regard (109-112), but the page, the poem, or text is another form of screen and image, being a two-sided thing the writer has gazed upon, that is then looked at or gazed upon by the reader. On the page, the poet or writer is subjected to the reader's gaze: he or she becomes implicitly a subject also as readers attempt to piece a sense of him or her together through the material, and is built as a subject under readers' scrutiny of his work. We can picture the writer looking to what has been written to try to see what the readers will see and judge. At the same time, we can picture ourselves subjected to a writer's critical gaze: are we reading properly? Thus a gaze and a look emerge from both sides of the text as screen.

<sup>11</sup> Eigen goes on to say that "Freud marveled at the plasticity of the psyche .... Meditating on our capacity to change states may enable us to be a bit freer from entrapment by any one state, and to get as much as possible from the states we go through .... The very *experience* of changing states can be highly charged, numinous" (102). When describing a patient who became more adept at state-shifting, Eigen says that a

field opened in which polarities fed each other, became interchangeable, dissolved and endlessly reconstituted. At the same time, so much happened in the interstices of polarities, that polarities became hindrances as well as anchors. The holy war was over. Self $\Leftrightarrow$ Other appeared with a double arrow between them, the bi-directionality meaning flow,

---

reversibility, together-apart, towards-against-away, the ever shifting  
distinction-union movement, zero-one-two-three-infinity, the variable  
*between*. (106)

<sup>12</sup> Lacan claims that “there is no such sensation of being absorbed by vision” (*Four* 80). As usual, I read Byatt as playing directly against statements such as these with her own phrasing: when Roland’s “contemplation was interrupted by Maud,” she asks him ““What’s absorbing you?”” (265).

<sup>13</sup> I must admit, however, that the paradox of the reader being let in on the secret and allowed the guilty satisfaction of stolen narrative pleasure denied the others seems to sneak the reader into complicity with a controlling author in an underhanded, Mortimer Cropper kind of way.

<sup>14</sup> From Sufism also comes the pithy saying that indicates the futility of attempting to possess knowledge in fixed form: “A donkey with a load of books is still a donkey” (*Essential Sufism* 79).

<sup>15</sup> Incidentally, as far as inherited “plots” are concerned, Byatt not only refers to the narrative plots that drive us all, such as Romance or Quest, but also to “family plots” (of which Freud’s “family romance” is only one). In this regard, the fact that Maud exhumes the truth of her “origins,” at least as far as her maternal ancestry is concerned, from a sealed-up box atop a coffin seems quite fitting, to say the least. Once that grave is ripped open and the box unsealed, Maud is freed to make new connections, with herself and with others.

Chapter Seven  
Minding Our Ps and Qs: Conclusion

So we end, as we began, with paradox. As Ernest Buckler, Alice Munro, Peter Ackroyd, Adele Wiseman and A. S. Byatt demonstrate in their novels, the paradox of narrative is that it can both reify meaning and enable movement to occur within and beyond its own layered constructions. At the same time, narrative mirrors the paradoxical self that has otherness at its core, yet is (from moment to moment) a coherently organized structure capable of both receptivity and agency. What has been described as oscillation and dialectic are probably necessary conditions of paradox, of simultaneity unfolding in time and space. Levels pertain: on the level of “the finite brain” (*Possession* 163), the movement between opposite poles of existence and expression dominates perception. On the level of existence mystics experience or imagine, opposites occur at once and concur, without negating each other. Stories, fictional or otherwise, appear to be one of the best ways humans possess to explore and make temporary sense of the paradoxical self and its experiences, because of their ability to contain and shift amongst various levels of meaning.

Hannah Arendt’s ideas about stories and the human self are likewise paradoxical.<sup>1</sup> Arendt’s work is important because she searches out how a citizen of the world might reclaim agency in the face of mass thinking in which individual persons become insignificant. I find her thinking paradoxical, however, because she locates the power to perceive and express meaning in the hands of the storyteller (in this case, mostly of “real” historical events) and not in the individual experiencing these events:

the light that illuminates processes of action, and therefore all historical processes, appears only at their end, frequently when all the participants

are dead. Action reveals itself fully only to the storyteller, that is, to the backward glance of the historian, who indeed always knows better what it was all about than the participants. ... What the storyteller narrates must necessarily be hidden from the actor himself, at least as long as he is in the act or caught in its consequences, because to him the meaningfulness of his act is not in the story that follows. Even though stories are the inevitable results of action, it is not the actor but the storyteller who perceives and “makes” the story. (*Human Condition* 191-192)

Arendt’s notion of stories seems to shut out the individual from participating in creating or understanding the meaning of his or her own life. It also emphasizes a kind of closure or fixity of meaning that is contradictory in a thinker like Arendt who emphasizes the need continually to reopen experience and concepts to further thought. Byatt, for one, points not only to the mixed motivations of every storyteller, but also to the need for the perpetual reopening of stories, of those constructs which attempt to own and sum up the significance of another’s life and work. In *Possession*, what cracks open these constructs is exposure to more of the actual *life* of the individual, and as the postscript makes clear, there are always spaces left unmapped, things experienced but never communicated.

Arendt’s ideas are of great interest to me nevertheless because she preserves a real space for *acting in* the world, at the same time that she insists on the necessity for a *distancing from* the world in order to create a corresponding place for real thought. This effort to think then loops around and conditions, indirectly, the capacity individuals have to take meaningful action. She advocates, in fact, the linking of the ability to *be in* the world at “ground level,” and the ability to maintain a distance from it at the same time,

observing and contemplating in those spaces that great mystics have attempted to map out for us as well. Narrative, as a way to think through life, is—aside from the one caveat mentioned above—an important part of Arendt’s thought.

Melvyn Hill believes that “Hannah Arendt’s concept of storytelling—the fundamental form of thinking about experience—is central to the relationship between thinking and acting in her work” (287). Storytelling unites “remembrance and reconciliation”: “Telling the story, then, is the ‘thinking completion’ of the event ... the form of dialogue in which I think with myself about what has happened. And this Hannah Arendt believed everybody does” (288). Hill quotes her as saying, in *Men in Dark Times*, that the “story reveals the meaning of what otherwise would remain an unbearable sequence of sheer happenings” (289). Stories not only enable individuals to work through the impact of events; they also make possible “a common understanding of reality, and so, a world, possible for us in our plurality ... [S]torytelling must be understood not just as the primary form of thinking about experience, but also as the primary form of communicating with each other about experience” (289). Another quotation from *Dark Times* reveals that Arendt is in accord with Benjamin’s idea of the difference between stories and information, in that stories communicate “meaning without committing the error of defining it” (290). Finally, a statement from “Understanding and Politics” links both Byatt’s notion of the imagination as an intermediating force and Ricoeur’s focus on the function of distanciation in narrative. In this essay, Arendt asserts that it is imagination that “alone enables us ... to put that which is too close at a certain distance so that we can see and understand it ... [and] to bridge abysses of remoteness until we can see and understand ... as though it were our own affair” (qtd. in Hill 292).

Arendt also recognizes the paradoxical nature of stories, however, in that they may actually prevent the kind of thinking that she fought to stimulate and defend, and result in the kind of thoughtlessness that made an Eichmann possible. Be “loyal to life” she insists: “don’t create fiction but accept what life is giving you, show yourself worthy of whatever it may be by recollecting and pondering over it, thus repeating it in imagination: this is the way to remain alive” (qtd. in Hill 299). Hill explains that in the conflict she finds subsisting within narrative itself,

Hannah Arendt formulated the dilemma with which existence confronts us—as much in the sphere of private as of political life: do we reconcile ourselves to “what life is giving” by our ability to think through experience in the form of stories, or do we attempt to “create fiction” out of life by narrowing the access to experience to a set of ideological preconceptions? The fictions of mankind have a deadening effect on existence; the stories of men alert the imagination to the possibilities of living and acting. (299)

Arendt remained vocal to the end of her life about the crucial importance of reclaiming or recognizing possibilities for agency within identity constructs, languages and social systems that seem to preclude freedom of thought and choice. In *The Life of the Mind*, she revisits her trip to Jerusalem for the Eichmann trial. There, all she could find to distinguish Eichmann from so-called normal humanity was an extraordinary degree of “*thoughtlessness*,” nothing more (4; italics hers):

Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognized function of protecting

us against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking attention that all events and facts make by virtue of their existence. If we were responsive to this claim all the time, we would soon be exhausted; Eichmann differed from the rest of us only in that he clearly knew of no such claim at all. (4)

Arendt asks herself as a consequence whether “the activity of thinking as such ... [could] be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing” (5). She wonders what we are “doing” and “where are we” when we “think,” which seems to lead her, quite unwillingly, into the realm of metaphysics (8). She foregrounds the gap between concepts and actual experience, but also the necessity to attempt to think and to communicate anyway, in spite of all gaps in our ability to do so:

Wittgenstein’s famous aphorism “What we cannot speak of we must be silent about,” which argues on the other side [from Heidegger’s assertion of the similarities between philosophy and poetry, and their efficacy], would, if taken seriously, apply not only to what lies beyond sense experience but even more to objects of sensation. Nothing we see or hear or touch can be expressed in words that equal what is given to the senses. Hegel was right when he pointed out that “the This of sense ... cannot be reached by language.” Was it not precisely the discovery of a discrepancy between words, the medium in which we think, and the world of appearances, the medium in which we live, that led to philosophy and metaphysics in the first place? (8)

Arendt does not mount a defense of metaphysics, but tries to work her way to a distinction between meaning and knowledge. Going back to the “death of God” phenomenon which seemed to ring the death knell for all possibility of ultimate meaning as well, Arendt wonders if it may not

be wise to reflect upon what we really mean when we observe that theology, philosophy, metaphysics have reached an end—certainly not that God has died, something about which we can *know* as little as about God’s existence (so little, in fact, that even the word “existence” is misplaced), but that the way God had been thought of for thousands of years is no longer convincing; if anything is dead, it can only be the traditional *thought* of God. And something similar is true of the end of philosophy and metaphysics: not that the old questions which are coeval with the appearance of men on earth have become “meaningless,” but that the way they were framed and answered has lost plausibility. (10)

She insists at the same time that, “however seriously our ways of thinking may be involved in this crisis, our *ability* to think is not at stake” (11).

It becomes more important than ever, she believes, to recognize different modes of that ability, and not to confuse the tasks, purviews and purposes of these different modes. Going back to Kant, Arendt distinguishes between “two faculties, reason and intellect, [which coincide] ... with a distinction between two altogether different mental activities, thinking and knowing, and two altogether different concerns, meaning, in the first category, and cognition, in the second” (14). In a manner that links her thought and Byatt’s, Arendt acknowledges that the “temptations to make the equation ... between the

‘urgent need’ to think and the ‘desire to know’—are very great, and by no means due only to the weight of tradition” (15). It is due as well, she says, to the pervading influence of a scientific mode of cognition that now dominates the expectations of all modes of thought (15-16). The resulting confusion between cognition and thought, knowledge and meaning is great, and this “blurring [of ] Kant’s distinction between reason’s concern with the unknowable and the intellect’s concern with cognition” wreaks havoc on an individual’s ability to claim for him or herself the right to think, no matter how little of “knowledge” or ultimate “truth” may ever be possessed (16). A.S. Byatt would seem to agree. In *Passions of the Mind*, Byatt says that she makes use of literary theory and philosophical concepts when they are applicable, but that her “temperament is agnostic”: she remains a resolute “non-believer and a non-belonger to schools of thought,” preferring to remain open to “many ways of coming at inevitably partial visions of truth” (“Introduction” 2).

A clash between these kinds of “schools of thought” is evidenced in the account of a round-table discussion in which both Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida participated (Lawlor 131-163). Leonard Lawlor says that Ricoeur does, finally, affirm a *telos*: his questions aim towards answers, although they are never to be quite obtained, so that what appears is a negativity of *telos* and of closure. Derrida affirms, on the other hand, the absolutely random, the blankness of the blank space out of which the aleatory occurs (123-129). Even though I appreciate the questioning spaces opened up by Derrida, my own basic affinity is with Ricoeur’s metaphysical “wager”<sup>2</sup>—but it is important to recognize that both men’s positions are equally speculative. Whether a person leans more towards the possibility of ultimate meaning or the possibility of the absoluteness of

chance is a matter of belief, personal experience and choice. Neither can be proven or defended to one whose choice or affinity is different, although certainly a dialogue can ensue.<sup>3</sup>

In *Tragic Thoughts at the End of Philosophy*, Gerald L. Bruns, exploring various ethical stances towards “the other,” identifies another set of opposing theories:

One theory—call it the P-theory—tries to characterize the ethical in terms of our beliefs, desires, values, principles, perceptions, actions, experiences, and so on. The other—call this the Q-theory—tries to characterize ethics in terms of how we are with respect to other people, or more accurately, to the other as singular and irreducible .... Among recent P-theorists ... ethics is still conceived in terms of a moral spectator, a perceiving agent .... Now against this a Q-theorist like Emmanuel Lévinas would say ethics cannot even get under way until we get rid of the idea of “the primacy of perceptive intuition.” (107-108)

I would say, as Ricoeur does in *Oneself As Another*, that what comes closer to an adequate picture of how selves function among other selves is a combination of these two positions: an oscillation between a perceiving self capable of claiming *some* agency at *some* moments and the direct object, the “me” as Lévinas puts it, to whom things happen to which that “me” must respond from moment to moment. In other words, where Bruns characterizes a P-theorist like Martha Nussbaum’s vision as being essentially comic while Lévinas’s is tragic (110), a mediation between the two results in the acknowledgement of the function and reality (the functionality) of both modes of vision

and response. It seems more reasonable to view these as opposite poles of experience, with experience itself in a state of flux between the two, always intermingled.

Mary Frohlich offers this insight: the quest for “patterns” which is “typical of the way modern thought makes its first approach to [any] phenomenon” pursued to “its logical conclusions ... results in a sort of ‘dead end’ . To focus entirely upon the subjective structures of the mediation of experience is to risk ending in darkness, incoherence and fragmentation, as the deconstructionists demonstrate” (5; 10-11). She proposes a category of “intersubjectivity” as a guide to these kinds of questions (11). Northrop Frye, arguing against too stiff an adherence to any particular “school of thought” in the realm of literary criticism, has this to say:

The principle of manifold or ‘polysemous’ meaning, as Dante calls it, is not a theory any more ... but an established fact. The thing that has established it is the simultaneous development of several different schools of modern criticism, each making a distinctive choice of symbols in its analysis .... The student must either admit the principle of polysemous meaning, or choose one of these groups and then try to prove that all the others are less legitimate. (*Anatomy* 71-72)

Literature, Frye believes, militates against such closed-minded thinking, since there is a genuine mystery in art, and a real place for wonder ... . The work of imagination presents us with a vision, not of the personal greatness of the poet, but of something impersonal and far greater: the vision of a decisive act of spiritual freedom, the vision of the recreation of man. (88; 94)

The aim of an “ethical criticism” of literature is “transvaluation”: to develop the skills that enables the critical reader to both understand his or her own conceptual frameworks and to “to compare them in some degree with the infinite vision of possibilities presented by culture” (348). This means inhabiting a “state of intellectual freedom .... The current tendency to insist that man cannot be a spectator of his own life seems to me to be one of those lethal half-truths that arise in response to some kind of social malaise” (348).

The skills learned in reading and studying literature are those of *shifting levels*. James Winchell, in his study of Simone Weil’s paradoxical mode of expression, indicates that there is a natural fit between these ideas and the study of mystical meaning: “Different levels of existence, different types of knowledge and different perspectives upon their intersubjective boundaries: these are at once the signs and referents of mystical language” (72).<sup>4</sup> He explores the idea of “performative” sentences which, by the enormity of the ideas posed and juxtaposed, induce in the reader an act of contemplation similar to that which lurks behind such statements. While the reader’s understanding may not grasp the paradox, the activity of connection induced by such sentences mimics that of the mystic who apparently *does* intuit, or at least deal in, paradoxical experiences of this kind (75). As he works this idea out in relation to Weil’s statement that “[p]urity is the ability to contemplate filth,” Winchell explains that this

claim for the “ability to contemplate filth” sparks my perception that these startling, impossible or even nonsensical conjunctions signify a different kind of existence, a kinetic curve freed from conceptual stasis. The conventional difference between “purity” and “filth” is effaced, and a new difference established. (74)

These performative sentences are opposed to the “constative” sentence, which “designates a kind of statement designed not to change reality, but instead to characterize it as true or false” (75-76). According to Winchell, Simone Weil shares with Wittgenstein a concern for

a crucial boundary-distinction between mystical manifestations of experience—i.e., that which is by definition higher, or unspeakable ... and the inadequate representation of that experience in conceptual language .... This apparently clear dichotomy breaks down in both writers, however, when they confront the generative capacity of language both to critique in concept and to caricature in imitation what Theodor Adorno has called the “conceptual fetishism” of philosophy .... Mysticism therefore might be said to oppose foundationalist philosophy and to present it with a range of semantic impossibilities, or even “non-sense.” For mysticism’s bewitching challenge to our intelligence emerges in its structural relation not only to the unspeakable, but also to radical alterity, or the unknowable. (81-82)<sup>5</sup>

Bernadette Roberts, a practicing mystic, puts things a little more simply: “Perhaps the only philosophy or theology that can help us cross the stream is one that admits ... [that] when you have learned it all and lived it thoroughly, then you had better get ready to have it all collapse when you discover the highest wisdom is that you know nothing” (108).

Thus, the crucial relevance of the study of literature, and more, of the activity of reading and writing stories. We are told by many contemporary theories that we have very few real choices as individual beings formed by language and social constructs, and

that the idea of or search for transcendence is falsified at the outset. So, why read, why write? Quite simply, because these practices model *aliveness*, as Hannah Arendt has said. To engage with stories, as we have seen in *The Mountain and the Valley*, *Lives of Girls and Women*, *The House of Doctor Dee*, *Crackpot* and *Possession*, develops the ability to pay attention to detail, to catch traces of what may have been missed the first time around. Reading (and writing) stories inculcates the skill of being in and out of the plot, in and out of the identity, in and out of social constructs at the same time. As exercises in communication and communion, imaginative narrative offers us ongoing quests for understanding, and always stimulates different angles of perception, different modes of expression. Studying literature promotes flexibility because literature will always provoke further mystic mappings of story and of self. In the interspaces—between text and reader, reader and identity, writer and narrator, narrator and characters—observation of and contact with transformative energies can occur, sparking movement away from order and back towards it once again. The stories and the selving continue, in paradoxical processes dominated by an open-ended *telos*. Writers of fiction such as Buckler, Munro, Ackroyd, Wiseman and Byatt, mystics and contemplatives, and even some theorists, chart these necessary spaces, helping them to remain open to movements in and out of mystery, in never-ending spirals of meaning.

---

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Melvyn Hill makes a comment that links Arendt's ideas with those of Byatt in the previous chapter when he says that it "was Vico who first argued that we can understand and know what men do themselves from their stories, because we know them as the authors of their deeds" (298).

<sup>2</sup> Ricoeur speaks of the "ontological vehemence" that runs throughout his ideas of the self and of narrative ("Intellectual Autobiography" 38), and the fact that he has "pleaded on several occasions in favor of a return to ... speculative discourse on the level of the highest order of conceptual articulation" ("Reply to G. B. Madison" 93-94).

<sup>3</sup> Mary Frohlich, working out a "theory of mystical transformation based in Bernard Lonergan's foundational theology" (xv), says that every speculative system is based upon an act of fully engaged human consciousness making an existential decision about where it finds truth. Such an act, obviously, cannot be totally and definitively captured in words, for the act necessarily sublates its own objectification and articulation .... It is important to note that every human being has in fact implicitly made such a "founding act" of choosing an horizon. (26)

<sup>4</sup> Winchell identifies the main "problem of mysticism in our time, especially after the 'linguistic turn' of philosophy" as being the language used to express it. Are the mystic's claims to insight or illumination reducible somehow to a mere manipulation of words, attributable ultimately to the arbitrariness of language itself? Clearly, the experience of reading shows that the answer is no. The relation between

---

the mystic's meaning and the reader's cognition cannot be reduced to a function of language, nor to the maddeningly indeterminate "contingency of the sign." (72)

<sup>5</sup> Grace M. Jantzen cautions us, however, to be careful how far we take any definitive opposition between philosophy and mysticism:

Philosophers—even philosophers of religion who in recent years have been considerably preoccupied with mysticism—appear notoriously reluctant to study the primary literature: we have seen this also in Lacan and Irigaray. Mysticism is presented not in its own right but as the "other of the same," the binary opposite of philosophical rationality. It is portrayed, therefore, as ecstatic, irrational, ineffable, subjective and private, rather than as genuine alterity. (390)

If mystical literatures were to be engaged instead as the works of thinking people who are attempting to communicate their experiences in as rational a fashion as possible, Jantzen wonders, "[m]ight the study of mysticism perhaps enable precisely the revisioning of rationality called for by the recognition of the failures—the moral and spiritual failures—of modernity?" (390).

Works Cited and Consulted

- Ackroyd, Peter. *Blake*. London: Vintage, 1999.
- . *Chatterton*. London: Penguin, 1993.
- . *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*. London: Minerva, 1995.
- . *English Music*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992.
- . *Hawksmoor*. London: Penguin, 1993.
- . *The Great Fire of London*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988.
- . *The House of Doctor Dee*. London: Penguin, 1994.
- . *The Plato Papers*. London: Vintage, 2000.
- “Adam Kadmon.” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Vol. 2. Jerusalem: MacMillan, 1971. 248-249.
- Anthology of Jewish Mysticism*. Trans. Raphael Ben Zion. Intro. Gershon Winkler. New York: The Judaica Press, 1981.
- Appel, Gersion. *A Philosophy of Mizvot. The Religious-Ethical Concepts of Judaism, Their Roots in Biblical Law and the Oral Tradition*. New York: Ktav, 1975.
- Arendt, Hannah. *Essays in Understanding*. Ed. Jerome Kohn. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1993.
- . “Introduction.” *Illuminations. Walter Benjamin Essays and Reflections*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969. 1-51.
- . “Introduction.” *The Life of the Mind*. New York: Harcourt, 1978. 3-16.
- . “On Hannah Arendt.” *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*. Ed. Melvyn A. Hill. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979. 301-339.
- . *The Human Condition*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1998.
- Argüelles, José and Miriam. *Mandala*. Berkeley: Shambala, 1972.
- Atkinson, Clarissa W. *Mystic and Pilgrim. The Book and the World of Margery Kempe*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983.
- Aurobindo, Sri. *The Future Evolution of Man. The Divine Life Upon Earth*. Ed. P.B.

- Saint-Hilaire. Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press, 2003.
- . *The Integral Yoga. Sri Aurobindo's Teaching and Method of Practice*. Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Light, 1993.
- . *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Silver Lake, WI: Lotus Light Pub., year not given.
- Austin, R. W. J. "Introduction." *Ibn al-'Arabī. The Bezels of Wisdom*. Trans. R. W. J. Austin. Toronto: Paulist Press, 1980. 1-41.
- Bailey, Alice A. *Esoteric Psychology*. Vol. 1. New York: Lucis, 1991.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Introduction." *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984. 1-58.
- . *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*. Ed. and Intro. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Ball, John Clement. "Post-Colonial London: The Metropolis as 'World City' in Commonwealth Literature." *6<sup>th</sup> International Literature of Region and Nation Conference*. Ed. Winnifred M. Bogaards. Vol. 1. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Saint John: University of New Brunswick, 1998. 224-238.
- Barker, Pat. *The Ghost Road*. New York: Plume, 1996.
- Barthes, Roland. *S/Z An Essay*. Trans. Richard Miller. Preface. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.
- . *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. Note. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.
- . *Writing Degree Zero*. Trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995.
- Beckwith, Sarah. "A Very Material Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe." *Medieval Literature. Criticism, Ideology & History*. Ed. David Aers. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986. 34-57.
- Belkin, Roslyn. "The Consciousness of a Jewish Artist: An Interview with Adele Wiseman." *Journal of Canadian Fiction*. 31/32 (1981): 148-176.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- Bennett, Donna. "'Let me get it right': Adele Wiseman as Essayist." *Room of One's*

*Own*. 16.3 (1993) : 45-57.

*Bhagavad-Gita. The Song of God*. Intro. Aldous Huxley. Trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood. New York: Mentor, 1954.

Bissell, Claude. *Ernest Buckler Remembered*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989.

Bissell, Claude. "Introduction." *The Mountain and the Valley*. New Canadian Library No 23. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970.

Bloom, Harold. *Agon. Towards a Theory of Revisionism*. New York: Oxford UP, 1982.

---. *A Map of Misreading*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.

---. *Kabbalah And Criticism*. New York: Continuum, 1981.

---. *Omens of the Millennium. The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams, and Resurrection*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1997.

Bogan, James. "Blake's City of Golgonooza in *Jerusalem*: Metaphor and Mandala." *Colby Library Quarterly*. 17 (1982) : 85-98.

Bokser, Ben Zion. *The Jewish Mystical Tradition*. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1981.

Brooks, Cleanth. *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1947.

Brooks, Peter. "Reading for the Plot." *Narratology: An Introduction*. Eds. and Intro. Susana Onega and José Angel García Landa. New York: Longman, 1996. 251-261.

Bruns, Gerald L. *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1992.

---. *Tragic Thoughts at the End of Philosophy. Language, Literature, and Ethical Theory*. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern UP, 1999.

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970.

Buckler, Ernest. "My First Novel." *Ernest Buckler*. Ed. Gregory M. Cook. *Critical Views on Canadian Writers*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972. 22-27.

---. *Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974.

- . *Oxbells and Fireflies: A Memoir*. New York: Knopf, 1968.
- . *The Cruellest Month*. Intro. Alan Young. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977.
- . *The Mountain and the Valley*. New Canadian Library. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989.
- Butovsky, Martin. "Interview with Adele Wiseman." *Room of One's Own*. 16.3 (1993) : 5-14.
- Buxton, Jackie. "What's Love Got to Do With It? Postmodernism and *Possession*." *English Studies in Canada*. 22.2 (1996) : 199-219.
- Byatt, A.S. *Passions of the Mind. Selected Writings*. London: Vintage, 1993.
- . "People in Paper Houses: Attitudes to 'Realism' and 'Experiment' in English Postwar Fiction." *The Contemporary English Novel*. Ed. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer. London: Edward Arnold, 1979. 19-41.
- . *Possession: A Romance*. London: Vintage, 1991.
- Campbell, Jane. "'The Somehow May Be Thishow': Fact, Fiction, and Intertextuality in Antonia Byatt's 'Precipice-Encurled'." *Studies in Short Fiction*. 28.2 (1991): 115-23.
- Canadian Oxford Paperback Dictionary*. Ed. Alex Bisset. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2000.
- Carrera, Elena. "The Fertile Mystical Maze: from Derrida's Dry Theological Gorge to Cixous's Dialogic Disgorging." *Trajectories of Mysticism in Theory and Literature*. Ed. Philip Leonard. London: Macmillan, 2000. 94-112.
- Castaneda, Carlos. *Journey to Ixtlan. The Lessons of Don Juan*. New York: Pocket Books, 1974.
- . *Tales of Power*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974.
- . *The Eagle's Gift*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981.
- . *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui way of Knowledge*. New York: Ballantine, 1972.
- Chamberlain, Daniel Frank. *Narrative Perspective in Fiction: A Phenomenological Mediation of Reader, Text, and World*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.
- Chapman, Ron. Class Lectures. Meditation: Theory and Practice. August 1992- Present.

Ottawa, ON.

Clark, David L. "Otherwise than God: Schelling, Marion." *Trajectories of Mysticism*. 133-176.

*Compact Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Ed. Catherine Soanes. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.

Connell, Matt F. "Through the Eyes of an Artificial Angel: Secular Theology in Theodor W. Adorno's Freudo-Marxist Reading of Franz Kafka and Walter Benjamin." *Trajectories Of Mysticism*. 198-218.

Connor, Peter. "'The Emptiness of Intelligent Questions': Georges Bataille and the Mystical Tradition." *Trajectories of Mysticism*. 177-197.

Cook, Gregory M. Ed. *Ernest Buckler*. Critical Views on Canadian Writers. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972.

Dan, Joseph. "Midrash and the Dawn of Kabbalah." *Midrash and Literature*. Eds. Hartman and Budick. New Haven: Yale UP, 1986. 127-139.

De Certeau, Michel. "Mysticism." *Diacritics*. 22.2 (1992) : 11-25.

---. *The Mystic Fable*. Vol. One. Trans. Michael B. Smith. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1992.

De Laplante, Lori. "Understanding Somatization: A Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Approach." PhD dissertation. School of Graduate Studies, University of Ottawa, Psychology Dpt. Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 2002.

Derrida, Jacques. *Cinders*. Trans., Ed., and Intro. Ned Lukacher. University of Nebraska Press, 1991.

---. *Glas*. Trans. J. P. Leavey and R. A. Rand. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986.

Dews, Peter. "Adorno, Post-Structuralism and the Critique of Identity." *Mapping Ideologies*. Ed. Slavoj Zizek. New York: Verso, 1994. 46-65.

Dolzani, Michael. "The Infernal Method: Northrop Frye and Contemporary Criticism." *Centre and Labyrinth. Essays in Honour of Northrop Frye*. Ed. Eleanor Cook, et. al. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985. 59-68.

Dresner, Samuel H. *The Zaddik. The Doctrine of the Zaddik According to the Writings Of Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polnoy*. New York: Schocken Books, 1974.

- Dupré, Louis. *Transcendent Selfhood. The Loss and Rediscovery of the Inner Life*. New York: Seabury Press, 1976.
- Dvorak, Marta. *Ernest Buckler. Rediscovery and Reassessment*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2001.
- Eigen, Michael. *The Psychoanalytic Mystic*. New York: Free Association Books, 1998.
- Eliot, T.S. "Little Gidding." From: *Four Quartets. The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Ed. M.H. Abrams. 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. Vol. 2. New York: Norton, 1993. 2164-2170.
- Emerson, Caryl. "Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich." *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory. Approaches, Scholars, Terms*. Ed. Irena R. Makaryk. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993. 242-244.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Basic Selections from Emerson. Essays, Poems & Apothegms*. Ed. Eduard C. Lindeman. New York: New American Library, 1954.
- . "Nature." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Eds. Nina Baym et al. New York: Norton, 1989. 384-412.
- . "The Over-Soul." In *Essays and English Traits*. Harvard Classics. Ed. Charles W. Eliot. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1969.
- Essential Sufism*. Ed. James Fadiman and Robert Frager. Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1997.
- Everman, Welch D. *Who Says This? The Authority of the Author, the Discourse, and the Reader*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1988.
- Eysteinson, Astradur. *The Concept of Modernism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990.
- Fee, Margery. "Ernest Buckler's 'The Mountain and the Valley' and 'That Dangerous Supplement...'" *Ariel*. 19.1 (1988) : 71-80.
- Finney, Brian. "Peter Ackroyd, Postmodernist Play, and *Chatterton*." *Twentieth Century Literature*. 38.2 (1992) : 240-61.
- Fisch, Harold. "The Hermeneutic Quest in *Robinson Crusoe*." *Midrash and Literature*. Ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick. New Haven: Yale UP, 1986. 213-235.
- Fish, Stanley E. *Self-Consuming Artifacts*. Los Angeles: U of California Press, 1974.
- Fountain, J. Stephen. "Ashes to Ashes: Kristeva's *Jouissance*, Altizer's Apocalypse, Byatt's *Possession* and 'The Dream of the Rood'." *Literature and Theology: An*

- International Journal of Theory, Criticism and Culture*. 8.2 (1994) : 193-208.
- Fowler, Rowena. "The Art of Alice Munro: *The Beggar Maid* and *Lives of Girls and Women*." *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction*. 25.4 (1984) : 189-198.
- Frager, Robert. "Introduction." *Essential Sufism*. 1-31.
- Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1985.
- Freud, Sigmund. *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*. The International Psycho-Analytical Library. No. 35. Ed. Ernest Jones. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1949.
- . *Totem and Taboo. Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. Trans. James Strachey. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961.
- Fries, Maureen. "Margery Kempe." *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*. Ed. Paul E. Szarmach. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984. 217-235.
- Frohlich, Mary. *The Intersubjectivity of the Mystic. A Study of Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1957.
- . *Words With Power. Being a Second Study of the Bible and Literature*. Toronto: Penguin, 1992.
- . "History and Myth in the Bible." *The Literature of Fact*. Ed. Angus Fletcher. New York: Columbia UP, 1976. 1-19.
- Garson, Marjorie. "Synecdoche and the Munroian Sublime: Parts and Wholes in *Lives of Girls and Women*." *English Studies in Canada*. 20.4 (1994) : 413-29.
- Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*. Ed. Catherine M. Mooney. Philadelphia: U of Penn. Press, 1999.
- Gibbs, Robert. "Afterword." *The Mountain and the Valley*. New Canadian Library. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989. 297-302.
- Gilbert, Paula Ruth. "All Roads Pass Through Jubilee: Gabrielle Roy's *La Route d'Altamont* and Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*." *Colby Quarterly*. 29.2 (1993) : 136-148.

- Glendinning, Simon. *On Being With Others. Heidegger-Derrida-Wittgenstein*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Golding, William. *Darkness Visible*. London: Faber and Faber, 1980.
- . *The Spire*. London: Faber and Faber, 1964.
- Goldsmith, Joel S. *Realization of Oneness. The Practice of Spiritual Healing*. Ed. Lorraine Sinkler. Secaucus NJ: Citadel Press, 1980.
- Green, Deirdre. *Gold in the Crucible. Teresa of Avila and the Western Mystical Tradition*. Longmead, Dorset: Element Books, 1989.
- Greenstein, Michael: "The Fissure Queen: Issues of Gender and Post-Colonialism in *Crackpot*." *Room of One's Own*. 16.3 (1993) : 20-31.
- Gross, Francis L and Toni Perior Gross. *The Making of a Mystic. Seasons in the Life of Teresa of Avila*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.
- Guenther, Herbert V. and Chögyam Trungpa. *The Dawn of Tantra*. Ed. Michael Kohn. Berkeley: Shambala, 1975.
- Handelman, Susan A. *The Slayers of Moses. The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation In Modern Literary Theory*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982.
- Hardy, Thomas. "The Voice." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Ed. M.H. Abrams. 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. Vol. 2. New York: Norton, 1993. 1707-1708.
- Harkness, Deborah E. "Shows in the Showstone: A Theater of Alchemy and Apocalypse in the Angel Conversations of John Dee (1527-1608/9)." *Renaissance Quarterly*. 49 (1996) : 707-737.
- Harris, Margaret. "Authors and Authority in *Lives of Girls and Women*." *Sydney Studies in English*. 12 (1987) : 101-113.
- Hartman, Geoffrey H. & Sanford Budick. "Introduction." *Midrash and Literature*. ix-xiii.
- Heinemann, Joseph. "The Nature of the Aggadah." *Midrash and Literature*. 41-55.
- Hill, Melvyn A. "The Fictions of Mankind and the Stories of Men." *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*. 275-300.
- Holmes, Frederick M. "The Historical Imagination and the Victorian Past: A.S. Byatt's *Possession*." *English Studies in Canada*. 20 (1994) : 319-34.

- Holquist, Michael. "Introduction." *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*. By Mikhail Bakhtin. xv-xxxiv.
- Hopenwasser, Nanda. "Shouldering the Burden of One's Spiritual Heritage: Rabbi Hayyim Vital's 'Serial Transmigrations' of Soul." *Mystics Quarterly*. 28.3 (2002) : 122-135.
- Hopper, Stanley R. "'Le cri de Merlin!' Or Interpretation and the Metalogical." *Anagogic Qualities of Literature*. Ed. Joseph P. Strelka. Yearbook of Comparative Criticism. Vol. IV. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1971. 9-35.
- Hulbert, Ann. "The Great Ventriloquist: A.S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance*." *Contemporary British Women Writers*. Ed. Robert E. Hosmer Jr. London: MacMillan, 1993. 55-65.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- . "Modes and Forms of Narrative Narcissism: Introduction of a Typology." *Narratology: An Introduction*. Eds. and Intro. Susana Onega and José Angel García Landa. Longman Critical Readers. New York: Longman, 1996. 203-214.
- Idel, Moshe. "Infinities of Torah in Kabbalah." *Midrash and Literature*. 141-157.
- . *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1988.
- Ihde, Don. "Paul Ricoeur's Place in the Hermeneutic Tradition." *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. The Library of Living Philosophers. Vol. XXII. Ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. Chicago: Open Court, 1995. 59-70.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Mentor, 1958.
- Jantzen, Grace M. "Power, Gender and Ecstasy: Mysticism in Post / Modernity." *Literature & Theology*. 11.4 (1997) : 385-402.
- Jarraway, David R. *Going the Distance. Dissident Subjectivity in Modernist American Literature*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2003.
- . "Sublime Objects and Mystic Subjects: Some Lacanian Speculations About Canadian Fantasy Literature Via Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone*." *Worlds of Wonder: Readings in Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature*. In Reappraisals: Canadian Writers. 26. Eds. Jean-Francois Leroux and Camille La Bossiere. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004. 81-94.

- Jeffrey, David Lyle. *People of the Book. Christian Identity and Literary Culture*. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996.
- Johnson, Patricia Altenbernd. *On Arendt*. Wadsworth Philosophers Series. Belmont CA: Wadsworth / Thomson Learning Inc, 2001.
- Jung, C. G. *Aspects of the Masculine / Aspects of the Feminine*. Trans. R.F.C. Hull. Intro. John Beebe. New York: MJF Books, 1982 / 1989.
- . "A Study in the Process of Individuation." *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Trans. R.F.C. Hull. Bollingen Series XX. Vol. 9 Part 1. Ed. Herbert Read, et al. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980. 290-354.
- . "Commentary." *The Secret of the Golden Flower. A Chinese Book of Life*. Trans. Richard Wilhelm. New York: Causeway Books, 1931. 77-136.
- . "Concerning Mandala Symbolism." *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. 355-384.
- . "Concerning Rebirth." *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. 117-147.
- . "The Psychological Aspects of the Kore." *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. 182-203.
- . *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga. Notes of the Seminar Given in 1932 by C.G. Jung*. Ed. Sonu Shamdasani. Bollingen Series XCIX. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1996.
- "Kabbalah." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Vol. 10. Jerusalem: MacMillan, 1971. 489-602.
- Kerby, Anthony. "Hermeneutics." *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory*. Ed. Irena R. Makaryk. Toronto: U of T Press, 1993. 90-94.
- Kermode, Frank. "Endings, Continued." *Languages of the Unsayable. The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*. Eds. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser. New York: Columbia UP, 1989. 71-94.
- Kempe, Margery. *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Ed. S.B. Meech & H.E. Allen. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1940.
- . *The Book of Margery Kempe. A Modern Version by W. Butler-Bowdon*. Intro. R.W. Chambers. New York: Devin-Adair, 1944.
- Klein, A.M. *The Second Scroll*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1994.

- Krishnamurti, J. *Total Freedom. The Essential Krishnamurti*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Trans. L. S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1980.
- . *Hannah Arendt. Life is a Narrative*. Trans. Frank Collins. Toronto: U of T Press, 2001.
- . *Strangers to Ourselves*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1991.
- Kulyk Keefer, Janice. *Under Eastern Eyes. A critical reading of Maritime fiction*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1987.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits. A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1977.
- . *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1981.
- Lawlor, Leonard. *Imagination and Chance. The Difference Between the Thought Of Ricoeur and Derrida*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.
- Leonard, Philip. "Introduction." *Trajectories of Mysticism in Theory and Literature*. x-xviii.
- . "Divine Horizons: Levinas, Derrida, Transcendence." *Trajectories of Mysticism*. 219-238.
- Letvick, Laura. "Following the Ghost of Dickens." *The New York Times on the Web*. Dec. 22, 1991. <<http://partners.nytimes.com/books/00/02/06/specials/ackroyd-ghost.html>>
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Alterity and Transcendence*. Trans. Michael B. Smith. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- . "The Trace of the Other." In: *Deconstruction in Context. Literature and Philosophy*. Ed. Mark C. Taylor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. 345-359.
- Lowry, Malcolm. *Under the Volcano*. Toronto: Penguin, 2000.
- "Luria, Isaac Ben Solomon." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Vol. 11. Jerusalem: Macmillan, 1971. 572-578.
- Macfarlane, David. *Summer Gone*. Toronto: Vintage, 2000.

- McGlashan, Alan. *Gravity and Levity*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976.
- Mailloux, Steven. "Headnote." *The Stanley Fish Reader*. Ed. H. Aram Veerer. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999. 114-116.
- Marshall, Peter. *The Philosopher's Stone. A Quest for the Secrets of Alchemy*. London: Pan Books, 2002.
- Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi*. Toronto: Vintage, 2002.
- Matt, Daniel C. "Introduction." *Zohar. The Book of Enlightenment*. Mahwah, NJ : Paulist Press, 1983. 3-39.
- McGinn, Bernard. *The Foundations of Mysticism*. Vol. 1. The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism. New York: Crossroad, 1991.
- McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. New York: Methuen, 1987.
- Meakin, David. *Hermetic Fictions. Alchemy and Irony in the Novel*. Keele, Staffordshire: Keele UP, 1995.
- Miller, Walter M. *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Toronto: Bantam, 1997.
- Morton, Michael. *The Critical Turn. Studies in Kant, Herder, Wittgenstein, and Contemporary Theory*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1993.
- Mosley, Nicholas. *Hopeful Monsters*. London: Vintage, 2000.
- Muktananda, Swami. *Play of Consciousness*. (Chitshakti Vilas) San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978.
- Munro, Alice. "Conversation with Alice Munro." Reading Group Center. Vintage Books. [www.randomhouse.com/vintage/read/goodwoman/munro.html](http://www.randomhouse.com/vintage/read/goodwoman/munro.html)
- . *Friend of My Youth*. Toronto: Penguin, 1995.
- . *Lives of Girls and Women*. Toronto: Penguin, 1990.
- . *Open Secrets*. Toronto: Penguin, 1995.
- . *Who Do You Think You Are?* New York: Knopf, 1979.
- Mysticism. A Study and an Anthology*. Ed. F. C. Happold. New York: Penguin, 1979.
- Ondaatje, Michael. *Running in the Family*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993.
- Onega, Susana. "Interview with Peter Ackroyd." *Twentieth Century Literature*. 42.2

(1996) : 208-220.

- . *Peter Ackroyd. Writers and Their Work*. Plymouth UK: Northcote House, 1998.
- Orange, John. "Ernest Buckler (1908-84)." In *Canadian Writers and Their Works*. Fiction Series Vol. 5. Ed(s). Robert Lecker, Jack David, and Ellen Quigley. Intro. George Woodcock. Toronto: ECW Press, 1990. 23-75.
- Parker, Patricia. "Anagogic Metaphor: Breaking Down the Wall of Partition." *Centre and Labyrinth. Essays in Honour of Northrop Frye*. Ed. Eleanor Cook, et. al. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985. 38-58.
- Patai, Raphael. *The Hebrew Goddess*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990.
- Peach, Linden. "Shifting Notions of Englishness and Nationhood in the English Novel Since 1950." *6<sup>th</sup> International Literature of Region and Nation Conference*. Saint John, NB: University of New Brunswick in Saint John, 1998. 181-192.
- Peck, John. "The Novels of Peter Ackroyd." *English Studies*. 5 (1994) : 442-452.
- Pellauer, David. "The Symbol Gave Rise to Thought." *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. The Library of Living Philosophers. Vol. XXII. Ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. Chicago: Open Court, 1995.99-122.
- Percy, Walker. *Lost in the Cosmos*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996.
- Peterfreund, Stuart. "The Din of the City in Blake's Prophetic Books." *ELH*. 64 (1997) : 99-130.
- Petroff, Elizabeth Alvilda. *Body & Soul. Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994.
- Plato. *Great Dialogues of Plato*. Trans. W.H.D. Rouse. Ed(s). Eric H. Warmington and Philip G. Rouse. Scarborough, ON: New American Library, 1956.
- . *Phaedrus*. Trans. & Commentary. C. J. Rowe. Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1988.
- Plotinus. *The Essential Plotinus*. Trans. and Intro. Elmer O'Brien. New York: Mentor Books, 1964.
- Poster, Carol. "Silence as a Rhetorical Strategy in Neoplatonic Mysticism." *Mystics Quarterly*. 24.2 (1998) : 48-73.
- Powell, Barbara. *Windows into the Infinite. A Guide to the Hindu Scriptures*. Fremont,

California: Jain Publishing, 1996.

Progoff, Ira. *Depth Psychology & Modern Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973.

Quartermaine, Peter. "‘Living on the Surface’: Versions of Real Life in Alice Munro’s *Lives of Girls and Women*." *Recherches Anglaises et Americaines*. 20 (1987) : 117-126.

Ricoeur, Paul. *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern UP, 1991.

---. "Intellectual Autobiography." *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. The Library of Living Philosophers. Vol. XXII. Ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. Chicago: Open Court, 1995. 3-53.

---. *Oneself As Another*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

---. "Reply to G. B. Madison." *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. Ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. 93-95.

---. *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*. Ed. & Intro. Don Ihde. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern UP, 1974.

---. *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur. An Anthology of His Work*. Eds. Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart. Boston: Beacon Press, 1978.

---. *Time and Narrative*. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin Blamey and David Pellauer. 3 vols. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1984-88.

Roberts, Bernadette. *The Experience of No-Self. A Contemplative Journey*. Boston: Shambala, 1984.

Roitman, Betty. "Sacred Language and Open Text." *Midrash and Literature*. 159-175.

Roth, Henry. *Call It Sleep*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999.

St. Teresa of Avila. *The Interior Castle*. Trans. and Intro. Mirabai Starr. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003.

Sarup, Madan. *Jacques Lacan*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992.

Satprem. *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness*. Trans. Michel Danino. Faridabad, India: Thomson Press, 2000.

Scanlon, Margaret. *Traces of Another Time. History and Politics in Postwar British*

- Fiction*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1990.
- Scholem, Gershom. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Schocken, 1954.
- . *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*. Trans. Ralph Manheim. New York: Schocken, 1969.
- Seaman, A.T. "Visions of Fulfilment in Ernest Buckler and Charles Bruce." *Essays on Canadian Writing*. 31.2 (1985) : 158-174.
- Selected Letters of Margaret Laurence and Adele Wiseman*. Ed. John Lennox and Ruth Panofsky. Toronto: U of T Press, 1997.
- Shaw, Miranda. *Passionate Enlightenment. Women in Tantric Buddhism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1994.
- "*Shekhinah*." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Vol. 14. Jerusalem: MacMillan, 1971. 1349-1354.
- Sheridan, Alan. "Translator's Note." *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. 277-282.
- Sherman, Kenneth. "Crackpot: A Lurianic Myth." *We Who Can Fly. Poems, Essays and Memories in Honour of Adele Wiseman*. Ed. Elizabeth Greene. Dunvegan: Cormorant Books, 1997. 167-173.
- Sherman, William H. *John Dee. The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts Press, 1995.
- Shibayama, Zenkei. *The Gateless Barrier. Zen Comments on the Mumonkan*. Trans. Sumiko Kudo. Boston: Shambhala, 2000.
- Shinn, Thelma. "'What's in a Word? Possessing A.S. Byatt's Meronymic Novel.'" *Papers on Language and Literature*. 31 (1995) : 164-83.
- Siemerling, Winfried. *Discoveries of the Other: Alterity in the Work of Leonard Cohen, Hubert Aquin, Michael Ondaatje, and Nicole Brossard*. Toronto: U of T Press, 1994.
- Silverman, Kaja. *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Simon, Bernard. *The Essence of the Gnostics*. Toronto: Indigo Books, 2004.
- Singer, June. *Boundaries of the Soul. The Practice of Jung's Psychology*. Toronto: Doubleday, 1973.
- . *Love's Energies*. Boston: Sigo Press, 1990.

- Spettigue, D. O. "The Way it Was." *Canadian Literature*. 32.2 (1967) : 40-56.
- Steiner, George. *Language and Silence. Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman*. New York: Atheneum, 1967.
- . *Real Presences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Sullivan, Andrew. "Public Man, Public Faith." *New York Times on the Web*. October 25, 1998. <[http://partners.nytimes.com/books/98/10/25/reviews/981025.25\\_sulliv.html](http://partners.nytimes.com/books/98/10/25/reviews/981025.25_sulliv.html)>
- Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Heaven and Hell*. London: The Swedenborg Society, 1966.
- Taylor, Mark C. *Altarity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Terdiman, Richard. "The Response of the Other." *Diacritics*. 22.2 (1992) : 2-10.
- The Cell of Self-Knowledge: Seven Early English Mystical Treatises printed by Henry Pepwell in 1521*. Ed. Edmund G. Gardner. New York: Cooper, 1966.
- The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*. Trans. and Intro. Clifton Wolters. London: Penguin, 1978.
- The Essential Kabbalah. The Heart of Jewish Mysticism*. Ed. Daniel C. Matt. Edison NJ: Castle Books, 1997.
- The Essential Mystics*. Ed. and Intro. Andrew Harvey. New York: Castle Books, 1998.
- The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*. Trans. and Comm. Jean-Yves Leloup. English Trans. Joseph Rowe. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2002.
- The Judge and the Spectator. Hannah Arendt's Political Philosophy*. Ed. Joke T. Hermsen and Dana R. Villa. *Morality and the Meaning of Life 8*, Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1999.
- The Lost Princess and Other Kabbalistic Tales of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov*. Trans. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan. Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights, 2005.
- The Ten Principle Upanishads*. Trans. Sri Purobit Swami and W.B. Yeats. London: Faber and Faber, 1937.
- The Upanishads*. Trans. and Intro. Juan Mascaro. New York: Penguin, 1965. 83-84.
- Trungpa, Chögyam. *Orderly Chaos. The Mandala Principle*. Ed. Sherah Chödzin.

- Boston: Shambhala, 1991.
- Valdes, Mario J. *World-Making. The Literary Truth-Claim and the Interpretation of Texts*. Toronto: U of T Press, 1992.
- Van Rys, John C. "Diminishing Voice in Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*." *Studies in Canadian Literature*. 20.1 (1995) : 65-79.
- Veeseer, H. Aram. Ed. "Introduction." *The Stanley Fish Reader*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999. 1-9.
- Von Rad, Gerhard. *Wisdom in Israel*. London: SCM Press, 1972.
- Wainwright, William J. *Mysticism: A Study of its Nature, Cognitive Value and Moral Implications*. Madison, WIS.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981.
- Weil, Simone. *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God*. Ed. and Trans. Richard Rees. London: Oxford UP, 1968.
- Weiner, Herbert. *9 ½ Mystics. The Kabbala Today*. New York: Collier, 1969.
- White, James Boyd. *Acts of Hope. Creating Authority in Literature, Law, and Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Whitehouse, J. C. "Concepts and Pictures: Ways of Seeing the Human Person in the Catholic Thought and Literature of Mid-Twentieth-Century Europe." *Journal Of European Studies*. 16 (1986) : 1-27.
- Wilber, Ken. *Eye to Eye. The Quest for the New Paradigm*. Boston: Shambhala, 1990.
- Willard, Thomas. "Alchemy and the Bible." *Centre and Labyrinth. Essays in Honour of Northrop Frye*. 115-127.
- William Blake*. Videotape. Dir. David Thomas. Narr. Peter Ackroyd. Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1995.
- Williams, David. *Confessional Fictions. A Portrait of the Artist in the Canadian Novel*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.
- Winchell, James. "Semantics of the Unspeakable: Six Sentences by Simone Weil." *Trajectories of Mysticism*. 72-93.
- Wiseman, Adele. *Crackpot*. New Canadian Library. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989.
- . "Spaces." *Room of One's Own*. 16.3 (1993) : 89.

---. *The Sacrifice*. Toronto: Stoddart, 1995.

Yates, Frances. *The Art of Memory*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1966.

---. *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Young, Alan. *Ernest Buckler*. Canadian Writers No. 15. New Canadian Library. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976.

Zohar. *The Book of Enlightenment*. Trans., Intro. and Notes. Daniel C. Matt. Mahwah, NJ : Paulist Press, 1983.