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# **The Literature of Bio-political Panic**

**Avishek Parui**

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines selected literary representations of personal and political panic in the period 1899-2005, with a particular focus on the way in which literary languages are able to mediate issues around embodied experience. The main emphasis of this thesis is to demonstrate how nervous conditions, informing embodied phenomenological experience and existentialist insights, can be politically subversive in their un-learning of interpellated knowledge. In its opening section, this work studies a novel published in 1899 that depicts contemporary fears about nervous degeneration and offers an interrogation of the ideology of masculinity corresponding to the expansionist era of European imperialism. The trauma of First World War shell-shock and the nervous anxiety of colonial 'white' masculinist performance feature in the second and third sections respectively. These study literary texts that juxtapose masculinity crisis with the politics of identity and the articulation of the related problematic of agency. The final section studies a novel that depicts neo-Darwinism and genetic determinism in an age of political terrorism and counter-terrorism post-9/11 and before the 2003 Iraq War. It investigates the novel's suggestion that bio-political reifications may be resisted by the exercise of emotional empathy and existentialist ambivalence. The thesis as a whole explores how masculinity and existentialist crisis can produce emotional and epistemic interruptions in ideologies that inform normative bodily and social behaviour. In order to offer deeper analyses of nervous conditions and cultural cognition, this work attempts to incorporate various tenets and experimental findings of modern neuroscience with ideas and theories from philosophy of mind. Through a study of selected literary texts, the thesis is offered as a small contribution to the understanding of the nature of human agency, empathy and identity in the changing political world of the last and the current century.

**THE LITERATURE OF BIO-POLITICAL PANIC**

**EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM, NERVOUS CONDITIONS AND  
MASCULINITIES FROM 1900 TO 9/11**

**AVISHEK PARUI**

**PhD**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES**

**DURHAM UNIVERSITY**

**2013**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to the memory of my grandparents Mr Naren Parui and Mrs Abha Parui, people who gave me my first gifts for my first results in school.

Mammam and Dadu, you continue to live and love in my mind.

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# Introduction

## 1.1 Connecting the 1900-s to Now: Kipling's "If"

If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it  
And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!

Rudyard Kipling's "If"<sup>1</sup> from where the above lines are taken, was used in a promotional video before the men's singles final at Wimbledon in 2007. The video featured the tennis superstars Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal reciting the poem together.<sup>2</sup> Appearing also at the players' entrance to the Centre Court in Wimbledon, "If" has consistently been classified as a British favourite by major public polls.<sup>3</sup> Kipling's 1910 poem – a poetic tribute to the British imperialist politician Leander Starr Jameson<sup>4</sup> and a piece of personal advice to the poet's son John Kipling who was subsequently killed in the Battle of Loos during the First World War<sup>5</sup> – ends on an absolute enunciation of ideal manliness. This appears after the poem has extolled the virtues of undeterred decisive action, unemotional stoicism, strong nerves and indefatigable energy, in ceaseless service to the nation and its imperial 'missions.'

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<sup>1</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *The Works of Rudyard Kipling* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994) 605.

<sup>2</sup> The video may be accessed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEeLh5ItQcY>. Web. 15 Feb. 2013.

<sup>3</sup> "If" was popularly voted as Britain's favourite poem in a 1995 BBC poll. See Griff Rhys Jones, *The Nation's Favourite Poems* (London: BBC Worldwide Limited, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Kipling's poem was historically motivated by the failed British raid in 1896 against the Boers at Transvaal and the subsequent betrayal suffered by its leader Leander Jameson in the hands of the Salisbury-led British government who had supported the raid formerly. See Peter Havholm, *Politics and Awe in Rudyard Kipling's Fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008) 140-42.

<sup>5</sup> The medical and historical analysis of the masculinity crisis during the First World War will feature in the second chapter of this thesis. His son's death in the war had prompted Kipling to write the poem "My Boy Jack".

Variously interpreted as inspirational as well as jingoistic,<sup>6</sup> Kipling's "If" – with its imperious advocacy of being emotionally indifferent to triumph and disaster alike – delineates manly attributes which historically may be seen to have corresponded to an ideal of plucky imperialist masculinity. As the video featuring Federer and Nadal demonstrates, such an ideal continues to connect to the concept of today's masculine sporting character.

A dramatic monologue with carefully constructed attributes of manly courage and productively channelized feelings, Kipling's poem has attained the status of a classic in spite of its critics and detractors.<sup>7</sup> Its political legacy as an imperialist poem and its continuing popularity as a piece of profound advice concerning the normative manly character in the Western world serves as the starting point of this enquiry, which is to examine the normative construction of heroic or idealised masculinity, from late nineteenth-century imperialism to twenty-first century liberal democracy. The Kiplingesque construct of masculinity – historically tied to the tenets of the contemporaneous Boy Scout Movements<sup>8</sup> – emerges as an unequivocally well-knit body of zeal and nerves. Edward Said affirms how Baden Powell, the founder of the Boy Scouts in Britain, was personally influenced in his ideas about 'boyology' by the Kiplingesque character of imperial authority and resourcefulness. As Said puts it, Kipling and Powell appeared to have concurred on two major points: boys in service to the empire ought to conceive life as governed by unbreakable laws and secondly, service to the empire was more functional when thought of less as a story and more like a game.<sup>9</sup> It connects late nineteenth-century imperialist heroes to the sporting superstars of the present day by making a virtue out of 'manly' toughness, indomitable spirit, and self-effacing honour. As a literary text

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<sup>6</sup> George Orwell had described Kipling as "a jingo imperialist" who is "morally insensitive and aesthetically disgusting" while also acknowledging Kipling's lasting legacy as a writer. Orwell, "Rudyard Kipling", *Collected Essays*, ed. Allan Hill (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961) 179.

<sup>7</sup> In his review of Renuka Narayanan's edited book *A Prayer for Everyone*, the Indian writer Khushwant Singh describes Kipling's "If" as containing "the essence of the message of the Gita in English." Singh, "A Prayer for Everyone." Rev. of *The Book of Prayers* by Renuka Narayan (New Delhi: Viking India, 2012). <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?211656>. .n.pag. Web. 15 Feb. 2013.

<sup>8</sup> The enterprising and sporting aspects of masculinity that Kipling promoted in his poetry and fiction make his lines relevant to modern sports heroes. See also J.A.Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal* (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993) 166.

born out of the same political and cultural context that promoted the white man's burden in the colonies for the edification of the "sullen peoples", "Half-devil and half-child"<sup>10</sup>, Kipling's "If" enacts an indoctrination of 'manly values' that continue to be circulated and consumed in the liberal Western world today.

A study of the cultural construction of masculinity, however, must begin with an attempt to grasp the interiorised and affective world that inevitably runs beneath the masculine subject's break from official or interpellated identities that are eulogised in Kipling's "If". The poem is a good example of an empire-text that articulates its political priorities as universal humanitarian concerns. "If" exemplifies Edward Said's analysis of language, history and the production of knowledge<sup>11</sup> in a literary text that occupies a specific historical moment of political invasion while appearing to articulate timeless wisdom. It addresses a subject always-already interpellated into the discourse network that informed imperialism and its necessary machinery of masculinity. The deconstruction of interpellated identities entails interruptions in such seamless narratives of knowledge where such cultural presumptions inform privilege. As this thesis will endeavour to show, the study of such disruptions must also comprise a study of the subjective and collective experience of existentialist panic that may include trauma, ambivalence and personal conflicts. This thesis is an attempt to understand such panic, through the study of the nervous masculine subject in political and emotional crisis, as it is articulated in key literary texts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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<sup>10</sup> Kipling, "The White Man's Burden", *The Works of Rudyard Kipling*, 334.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Said, *Power, Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage, 2002) 262-79.

## 1.2 Key Concerns and the Thesis of this Research

This research investigates the interfaces between masculinity crises, ambivalence and subjective agency, with a study of selected literary texts about the male body in nervous conditions. The chosen texts are situated across chronological political contexts: late nineteenth-century European imperialism, the First World War, mid-twentieth century British colonialism and post-9/11 Western neo-liberalism. The research explores selected literary narratives to reveal how subjective ambivalence<sup>12</sup> can potentially inform existentialist enquiry. Crucially, in the context of this thesis, ambivalence is defined by Zygmunt Bauman as a deconstruction of the dominant discourses that inhabit the private as well as the social realm of the modern citizen. In such deconstruction, informative relevance is relegated in favour of epistemological enquiry. Ambivalence thus emerges in Bauman's analysis as a scandal in the gaze of modernity and is manifested in the political realm at an immediate level in the deporting of non-citizens and de-legalizing unsanctioned law while in the intellectual realm ambivalence is purged by de-legitimizing philosophically uncontrolled knowledge. The literary texts chosen for study in this research are interpreted in relation to their specific contemporary medico-political and cultural epistemes. In particular, this thesis examines the discourses of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century criminology, nervous degeneration, masculine hysteria, shell-shock, colonial mimicry and twenty-first century neuroscientific knowledge. The selected literary texts are studied as textual meditations of and epistemological enquiries into the nature of subjective human agency, enacted and focalized specifically through their nervous male protagonists. In addition, this research investigates how a self-reflective awareness of agency can potentially problematize apparent certitudes in medical and social science.

By looking at literary narratives that foreground imperialist horror, war trauma, colonial confusion, genetic determinism and political terrorism, the research

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<sup>12</sup> Zygmunt Bauman studies ambivalence as linguistic as well as political phenomenon. Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991).



examines the way in which nervous conditions inform phenomenological moments that may potentially extend into existentialist awareness. The term existential is used here as a nineteenth-century European category of knowledge that incorporated the epistemological nihilism of Nietzsche as well as the ‘presuppositionlessness’ of Husserl: modes of thought that saw the rational realm as essentially and discursively insufficient and also dangerously dogmatic in its own ontological exclusivity. One can trace the legacy of nineteenth-century philosophers not only on the ideological and political existentialism of Jean Paul Sartre, but also on the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose inheritance of the Husserlian concept of presuppositionless being is immediately obvious in his affirmation of “the impossibility of a complete reduction.”<sup>13</sup> The existential knowledge for Merleau-Ponty is thus ‘already always there’ and is accessible only through the intentionality of the subjective frame. In his final (and incomplete) work *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), Merleau-Ponty investigated the ‘field of the flesh’ that connects the subject and the object, the seer and the seen in deconstructing the ontological schema of vision. In locating the transcendental insight within the phenomenological frame, Merleau-Ponty dissolves the dualism of the Cartesian cogito and proclaims that consciousness is not a hermetically sealed event but an active process of actualization and embodied cognition whereby the *phenomenon becomes the Being*. In asserting that the phenomena through which the subjectivity of the subject is activated grounds all certainties, Merleau-Ponty brings together the transcendental and the existential realms in a dialogic exchange.<sup>14</sup> Such awareness, if it arises – as the literary texts studied in this research show – can painfully awaken the human subject to the knowledge of its own unique subjectivity. More significantly, existentialist knowledge is read in this research not only as an abstract philosophical category but also as a materially informed insight that constitutes the feeling body in dialogue with the ideological apparatus of the medical, political and social sciences. In such a reading, the subjectively feeling male body emerges as the political and phenomenological site that constitutes a liminal space between the medical gaze and its constituting ‘objective’ or public knowledge, and a subjectively experienced

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<sup>13</sup> *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962) xiii.

<sup>14</sup> See *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 60-76. For Merleau-Ponty’s influence on existentialist thought, see *The Existentialist Reader: An Anthology of Key Texts*, ed. Paul S. MacDonald (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) 184-90.

private ambivalence. Through examining selected literary texts, this thesis presents the textually mediated existentialist male subject as it is brought under the bio-political gaze. The central argument of this thesis is that it is during moments of existentially experienced panic – ultimately constituting a heightened and nervous recognition of the mutability of the feeling body – that the rationale of learnt or official bio-political knowledge is exposed as most adequately interrogated, through an understanding of the specificities of subjective ambivalence.

### **1.3 Established Research Informing this Thesis and its Original Contribution**

There have been several significant works on imperial masculinity and masculine hysteria born out of war trauma and guilt. I draw on the works on colonial and imperial masculinities by Joseph Bristow, J.A.Mangan, Mrinalini Sinha, Revathi Krishnaswamy, Michael Rosenthal, Helen Kanitkar and Nalin Jayasena, among others. What connects the various discourses studied by these researchers is the way the body of the imperial male figure was ideologically manufactured through character-building factories such as schools and scouts. More significantly – and this is especially evident in the works of Mrinalini Sinha and Revathi Krishnaswamy – the manliness of the imperial white male in the colonies was strategically perpetuated and protected by contrasting it with the projected and perceived unmanliness and effeminacy of the colonized man. I also draw heavily on studies in masculine hysteria by Janet Oppenheim and Elaine Showalter and from related studies in the cultural history of late nineteenth to early twentieth-century degeneration by Daniel Pick and William Greenslade. These works have looked at the male body as the ideologically manufactured site where discourses on difference, power and privilege are most explicitly internalized, in social, political and racial realms. The male body so constructed exhibits the enmeshed narratives of medical, political and social sciences that seek to efface epistemological ambivalences, in

order, in the last instance, to promote irrefutable and expansive regimes of power and privilege. Such research also reveals how the male body often historically emerged as the agonistic site where ambivalence about such discourses was most problematically situated, and the attempted liquidation of subjective agency articulated most politically. Masculinity-studies in twentieth and twenty-first century sociological research thus historicize the apparatus – ideological as well as repressive – that went into the making and unmaking of the model man in times of imperialist expansion, World Wars and colonial control. Such research studies the feeling mind and the various emotions – guilt, sorrow and shame – through which the desired performance of the masculine subject is disrupted under the totalizing medical and political gaze to which it is intended to conform. Masculinity crises emerge in such research as various manifestations of behavioural deviance through which the rationale of bio-political hegemony is interrupted and ironized. Regarded as a renegade who requires corrective measures, the melancholic masculine self embodies a nervous condition and perhaps best corroborates Marx’s theory of shame as a revolutionary sentiment, as a kind of anger turned inward that transforms the feeling subject.<sup>15</sup> There is thus an ironically literal self-reflective quality in the disruption of imperial and colonial masculinity as the male subject – previously a producer and perpetuator of the desired discourse – steps out of line due to an inward turn enacted by the feeling mind in the politically predicated space.

There has been an increasing interest in recent years in cognitive and critical neuroscience in the significance of understanding the role of affects in the functioning of the human mind. This is immediately evident in the works on human consciousness and the unmappable agency by neuroscientists such as Antonio Damasio and V.S.Ramachandran, whose works feature frequently in this research. Likewise, there have been attempts on the part of cognitive narratologists such as Andy Clark and literary theorists such as David Lodge and Patricia Waugh to look at the literary narrative as the site where human feelings and cognitions are most ambivalently articulated in all their epistemological complexities. This research will also refer to the works of Catherine Malabou and Susan Sontag about the human body in pain and the ontology of crisis. In particular, this research is interested in the

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<sup>15</sup> Karl Marx, “Letters from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher”, [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43\\_03.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_03.htm). Web. 4 Oct. 2012. I also draw on Martha Nussbaum’s work on shame and legality in the politics of the body.

growing bridge between the medical science of the brain and a philosophical and sociological understanding of the mind. This has evolved into a new genre of research classified as critical neuroscience that seeks to study the anthropological, social and political underpinnings of the workings of the human mind. Critical neuroscience is thus essentially a dialogic discourse and argues how studies in affect and emotion may offer greater depths in scientific inferences on neural behaviour. Such studies of the mind are increasingly interested in the role of emotions in consciousness – as unmappable categories of knowledge – in their analyses of human cognition. In their attempts to weld the discourses of cognitive neuroscience to the politics of social behaviour, psychologists and philosophers such as Shaun Gallagher believe that “the relationship between critical theory and cognitive neuroscience is a two way street” and that “cognitive neuroscience and cognitive science more generally may be able to tell us things about human behaviour that need to be accommodated by critical theory, or that can even support the aims of critical theory.”<sup>16</sup> There is thus an increased interest among researchers of the mind to combine the greater potential for epistemological ambivalence and philosophy of mind with the informative certitudes of medical science. One might argue that this entanglement has contributed to the demise of a strict biological determinism – most immediately and unequivocally voiced in the DNA-centric model of the human system and the theory of the hard-wired brain – that has now given way to a more complex and less deterministic understanding of the biologically grounded human self. Such shifts have helped to expose the ideological biases that have historically informed scientific claims for objectivity. The human being and the human mind emerge in such studies – that combine medical science with phenomenology and philosophy – as not genetically pre-determined or neurally pre-wired but as meaning and goal-driven as well as epistemologically oriented processes capable of subjective altruism, ambivalence and intentionality.

This thesis combines a sociological study of masculinity in various medical and political contexts with a study of the changing representation of the mind in literary texts in order to investigate the experiential moments that challenge assumptions about power, privilege and knowledge. It features a focus on the

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<sup>16</sup> Shaun Gallagher, “Scanning the Lifeworld: Toward a Critical Neuroscience”, *Critical Neuroscience: A Handbook of the Social and Cultural Contexts of Neuroscience*, ed. Suparna Choudhury and Jan Slaby (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2012) 86.

analysis of representations of the male body and masculinity from the late nineteenth century to the twenty first. The male body emerges in my study as the site where political prerogatives and medical tenets are perpetuated as well as problematized. Nervousness is seen to constitute unlearning and an inward turn that enacts the movement from objective certainty to subjective ambivalence. The nervous conditions that inform existentialist enquiry in the selected literary texts demonstrate the historical dialogues between medical science, political knowledge and the feeling mind across the last hundred years. This research is a study of such dialogues and explores – through a selection of self-reflective male protagonists in literary texts – how it feels to be unsure, uncertain and ambivalent about one’s location in historical time.

#### **1.4 Literary Texts Chosen for this Research**

I begin by looking at the last years of the nineteenth century – the high point of European imperialism – and end at three years into the twenty-first century, at the political moment before the beginning of the 2003 Iraq War, albeit in a text published in 2005. The primary literary texts selected for my study are Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1922), George Orwell’s essays on colonial Burma and the novel *Burmese Days* (1934) and Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* (2005). These works offer rich analyses of late nineteenth-century imperialist misadventures and private melancholia, the shock principles in the post-First World War modern metropolis, the claustrophobia of the colonial contact-zone and postmodern postcolonial notions of terrorism, dissidence and discontent. However, what has also factored into my selection of these particular texts is the manner in which these themes cut across and connect all these narratives, despite their different locations in historical time. Thus Conrad’s novella appears curiously pre-Modernist as well as postcolonial in its ambivalence about the notions of race, masculinity, language and empire, issues that connect Conrad to the later works of Orwell on colonial Burma.

Likewise, McEwan's *Saturday* deliberately revisits Modernist modes of writing in its depiction of phenomenological experientiality under totalitarian medical and political surveillance. *Saturday*'s similarities with *Mrs Dalloway* are not limited to the medico-political settings foregrounding the male body in crisis but are also evident in McEwan's stylistic appropriations of the Modernist epiphany and the feeling frame. There are thus discursive dialogues across the literary texts that historicize the politics of masculinity by opening up questions on intentionality, affect and information.<sup>17</sup> The thesis that emerges at the end exhibits how literature and the fictional world of literary narratives can enact the blend of the objective and the subjective, the physical and the phenomenological realms of understanding experienced by the human subject at times of and in political and cognitive crisis.

The texts chosen all depict the male body in nervous negotiations with contemporary masculinist codes and bio-political discourses. More significantly, the texts articulate the ambivalence that ensues after the human subject realizes the constructed quality of hegemonic political and medical knowledge. In each of the texts chosen, the emphasis of the narrative is on the ambivalence experienced by the feeling masculine subject who strives to enact his intentionality through an affirmation of agency. The novels selected are thus about efforts to recover agency in cultures of coercion and control where information is ideologically filtered and formalized. What connects the works of the primary authors chosen – Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, George Orwell and Ian McEwan – is their effort to illustrate what it takes to be painfully human in times of political crisis and medico-scientific materialism. The texts selected are appropriately set in political situations that seek to efface subjectivity as well as bodily mutability, where sovereign violence often operates at the threshold between law and nature, inside and outside.<sup>18</sup> The chosen literary narratives also demonstrate the dangers and difficulties of reaffirming subjective agency and the chastisements – emotional, political and corporeal – that often follow such process.

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<sup>17</sup> The thesis of affect as information is also gaining grounds in the emerging discourses in psychology and brain science as scientists claim that “affective feelings” convey information on value through “bodily experiences”. Carol L. Gohm and Gerald L. Clore, “Affect as Information: An Individual-Differences Approach”, *The Wisdom in Feeling: Psychological Processes in Emotional Intelligence*, ed. Lisa Feldman Barrett and Peter Salovey (New York: The Guilford Press, 2002) 90.

<sup>18</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998) 64.

The male body in its break from the apodictic<sup>19</sup> medical and political norms of its day is revealed as essentially dislocated and disrupted in relation to the discourses of normalcy and respectability. This thesis theorizes such disruption as giving onto a liminal condition that comes to embody new forms of cognition and a new order of agency, bodily felt as well as politically articulated. This supports my primary contention that the disrupted male body is a politically problematic space where subversion is instantiated interstitially, through gaps in learnt ideologies that interpellate the individual. My study heightens awareness of such interstitiality by choosing to focus on male figures in fictional genres that more easily embody dominant forms of masculinity: as imperial agents, war soldiers, colonial officers and medical scientists. The arguments are expounded by tracing how these figures move from their comfortable locations in situations of social and political respectability, to the melancholic discomfiture that emerges after existentialist awakening. The discomfort of the male protagonists in the fictional narratives about real historical events is characterised by various combinations of guilt, trauma, apathy and ambivalence that ironically inform true agency. The fictional frames through which the historical settings are focalized underline both the phenomenological quality of existential awareness and the meta-reflective quality of human subjectivity as it strives to transcend interpellated identities in politics and medical science. In essence my research is a study of how the masculine subject – formerly an insider to the normative narratives – becomes the outsider through the epistemology of the inward turn. I investigate the nature of this inward turn and try to demonstrate how the literary narrative can locate as well as dislocate masculine identities, bio-political entities and the feeling self, in complex stories about the self-reflective human mind and its re-cognitions in time.

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<sup>19</sup> I use this term to convey the unquestionable quality that often informs the arrogance of biopolitical epistemes sanctioned by a massive investment of industry and capital.

## 1.5 The Bio-political Background to this Research

The social situatedness of scientific and political systems of knowledge is of special significance in my study of masculinity crisis and bio-political panic. Bio-politics as analysed in this research derives principally from the Foucauldian notion of biopower as “the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy”.<sup>20</sup> Foucault’s study of late nineteenth-century “State racism”<sup>21</sup> as a vital instrument of bio-political optimization whereby racial purity replaces racial struggle is directly germane to my study of imperial masculinity and its discontents. In addition, Foucault’s analysis of the birth of bio-politics as contemporaneous with the emergence of political liberalisation<sup>22</sup> relates directly to the conclusion of this thesis which connects the bio-political gaze in the twenty-first century Western world of liberal democracy to neo-imperialist politics and its control of terrorism. The hyphenated bio-politics in this study of masculinity crises in literary texts thus suggests the merging of medical and political narratives that historically have informed notional constructions of body, race, imperialism and culture. As Edward Said affirms in his analysis of culture and imperialism, “although there is an irreducible core to human experience, this experience is also historical and secular, it is accessible to analysis and interpretation, and – centrally important – it is not exhausted by totalizing theories, not marked and limited by doctrinal or national lines, not confined once and for all to analytical constructs.”<sup>23</sup> Said’s analysis of the human subject and its contemporary cultural narratives supports the central argument in this thesis: that the feeling mind is informed by the material conditions of its existence while also endowed with an agency essentially unmappable by the material gaze. Such a study exposes the

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<sup>20</sup> Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-78*, ed. Michael Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 1.

<sup>21</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003) 261.

<sup>22</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-79*, ed. Michael Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 319.

<sup>23</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 35.



constructed quality of the boundary between the natural and the political realms which itself emerges as “an effect of political action.”<sup>24</sup>

Along with Foucault – whose work on biocratic control and interpellated identities under the medical gaze will feature throughout my work – the major sociologists, philosophers and literary theorists who study the ethical ambivalences and manipulations of bio-political modernity include Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Zygmunt Bauman, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. Like Foucault, Agamben, Arendt and Bauman see the bio-political system as essentially marked by an anxiety to produce, protect and purify its controlled subjects as citizens. For Agamben, twentieth century bio-political panic historically manifested itself most immediately in eugenics and its project of selective reproduction. Such a project desired a seamless contiguity between the subject and the citizen, nativity and nationality. Such cultural narratives of contiguity – in Agamben’s view – were permanently broken by the First World War that heralded an unprecedented masculinity crisis<sup>25</sup> that is taken up in the second section of this thesis. Likewise, Bauman studies the discourse of artificial genetic selection at the end of the nineteenth century – practised by Ernst Haeckel and the Monist Society – as a direct demonstration of the bio-political strategy of racial purification.<sup>26</sup> The world in Bauman’s analysis emerges as one of production and biological waste characterised by compulsive and addictive designing.<sup>27</sup> In her work, Hannah Arendt studies the macro-narratives of biocratic control that are formalized by the sovereign state in its surveillance of its collective subjects and interpellated identities. Arendt’s work reveals how the birth of every new subject contains the *possibility of the unique body* through subjective intentionality of agency.<sup>28</sup> As Arendt affirms, the most dangerous form of totalitarian control proceeds through a culture of ultra-information that ultimately legitimizes and naturalizes authority by appearing to efface unilateral control in favour of collective accessibility and collateral responsibility.<sup>29</sup> Inherent in these analyses are the medical as well as cultural forms of control that the bio-

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Lemke, *Bio-Politics: An Advanced Introduction*, trans. Eric Frederick Trump (New York & London: New York University Press, 2011) 31-32.

<sup>25</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 131-32.

<sup>26</sup> Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, 31.

<sup>27</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004) 10.

<sup>28</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998) 178.

<sup>29</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Orlando: Harcourt Inc., 1968) 461-62.

political realm assumed, informing the increasing schism between the human condition and human nature.<sup>30</sup> Such a schism emerges as structurally similar to that between masculinity and the male self as analysed in my study.

Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's work on late twentieth-century bio-politics breaks from the realms of research above inasmuch as they do not read modern bio-political coercion merely as forms of corporeal control and military genocides but as a more insidious and sophisticated structure of alliances between capitalism, economics and borderless production. This corresponds to a condition in bio-politics where the human genetic code is perceived as the computer chip containing inscribed information that cannot be re-written<sup>31</sup> and where "the body is conceived of as an informational network rather than a physical substrate or an anatomical machine."<sup>32</sup> In their co-written work entitled *Empire* (2000), Negri and Hardt delineate the forms of *immaterial labour* that replace industrial labour in the last decades of the twentieth century, characterizing global capitalism with its bio-political mode of centreless control. Immaterial labour, as opposed to industrial labour, is geared towards manufacturing immaterial products such as knowledge, information, emotion and affect.<sup>33</sup> In a structure of consumerism with "no external standpoint" and where "nothing escapes money"<sup>34</sup>, bio-political cognitive capitalism as studied by Hardt and Negri creates an empire of limitless mobility, compulsory cooperative ability and affect-absorption. In a later work following on from *Empire*, Negri studies the "narration of global fantasies" in a culture where the "documenting of war becomes a video game."<sup>35</sup> Crucially, in the very same work, Negri reads the Vietnam War as the first phenomenon of political violence that triggered the demystification and dissimulation of political reality. The Vietnam War is significant in this research as the political event of violence that first classified war neurosis as a real medical condition. It was only after the Vietnam War that masculine war trauma was medically classified as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The Vietnam War may also be studied – as Jon Turney does – as the event that bolstered the DNA-debate in the USA with the "much-heralded advent of human genetic engineering and its

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<sup>30</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (London: Penguin, 2000) 117.

<sup>32</sup> Lemke, *Bio-Politics*, 118.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) 293.

<sup>34</sup> *Empire*, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Antonio Negri, *Empire and Beyond*, trans Ed Emery (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008) 64.

relation with eugenics, about the possible impact of a wider biological revolution on economy and society, and about the growing commercialization of science.”<sup>36</sup> Such demystification is classified as the real viruses that paradoxically contain the antidote to the epidemic of neutralization. In my study, I will try to illustrate how such political demystifications and epistemological disruptions in literary texts are enacted by representations of experiences in feeling that break bio-political control and desired masculinist performances.

## **1.6 An Overview of how the Chosen Literary Texts are Read in this Research**

This research on the literature of panic derives from the varying notions of bio-political control as elucidated above. The first chapter – on Joseph Conrad, masculinity crisis and late nineteenth-century tenets of degeneration – corresponds to the Foucauldian notion of biostatistical control inflected through anthropology, criminology, race and empire. The section on *Heart of Darkness* studies how masculinity was historically manufactured in late nineteenth-century European imperialism and how the manufactured masculinity cracked up in the imperial space. Especial emphasis is placed on Conrad’s use of language and narrative strategy as a means to articulate the epistemology of ambivalence that blurs the borderlines between inside and outside, subjective and objective realms of understanding. This relates to Jonathan Culler’s analysis of the phenomenal field as postulated by Merleau-Ponty, where the feeling self is both an object which is a part of the surrounding world and a subject who articulates the same. Culler’s analysis on the location of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology in relation to structuralism offers interesting readings of literary and cognitive competence.<sup>37</sup> I analyse ambivalence in language and the defamiliarization enacted by the narrative method as vehicles for the articulation of a nervous cognitive condition, by historicizing Conrad’s work in

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<sup>36</sup> Jon Turney, *Frankenstein’s Footsteps: Science, Genetics and Popular Culture* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998) 189.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Culler, “Phenomenology and Structuralism,” *The Human Context* 5.1 (Spring 1973): 35-42.

relation to the discoveries of the neurology of his day. Conrad's narrative in *Heart of Darkness* is studied as a classic example of the cognitive and the linguistic collapse that enacts a break between the borderlines between subject and object, phenomenological and ontic realities.

The second chapter, on First World War masculinity and shell-shock, directly relates to the bio-political control of the male body in crisis. The analysis of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* corresponds to Agamben's and Arendt's notions of totalitarian tyranny and informative control that constituted twentieth-century eugenics and bio-political hegemony. I read Woolf's novel as a literary text that illustrates – again through the use of the nervous language of the unmappable human agency – how the ambivalence experienced by the melancholic masculine subject combines guilt, trauma and existentialist awakening. The shell-shocked First World War soldier in *Mrs Dalloway* – as analysed in this section – embodies the blend of political violence, medical hegemony and phenomenological knowledge that characterised the traumatic masculine subject of post-war modernity.

This condition is extended in the colonial scene where masculinity as imperial performance emerges enmeshed in a discourse network of deception that consumes the human subject by invading its free human agency. The selected essays of Orwell and the novel *Burmese Days* exhibit how the agony of agency in the colonial contact-zone is materially informed by bio-political narratives of racial privilege and difference. I look at how imperial masculinity was historically manufactured and discursively disseminated in Orwell's England through public schools, boys' weeklies and scout movements. The study reveals how the human agency of the masculine colonial controller was eventually overdetermined by imperialism's ideological apparatus that promoted plucky masculinity and chastised the feeling man. Through a study of literary texts about masculinity crises in the colonial contact-zone, this section illustrates how the attempt to articulate agency that is phenomenologically perceived is a painfully subversive act that constitutes existentialist ambivalence, guilt and shame. Shame emerges in my analysis as an embodied awareness that disrupts the seamless structure of expectations in the colonial space bio-politically produced and perpetuated.

My final section draws on Negri's notion of the global biopolitical empire that appears to allow limitless movement and complete cognitive control to its informatively interpellated subject in the twenty-first century Western metropolis. In its analysis of Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, the final section investigates how the medical certainties of neuroscience and the political certainties of Western liberal democracy are both problematized by phenomenological subjectivity that extends into an existentialist awareness of ambivalence. Such ambivalence also contains the knowledge of finitude amidst the seemingly infinite possibilities of medical science and liberal democracy. The analysis theoretically situates itself against the arguments that affirm that biological and biosocial agency in the twenty-first century can be controlled by the individual who changes from being a patient to a consumer in the wealthy Western world of liberal democracy.<sup>38</sup> Classifying what it sees as the post-Foucauldian biopolitics of the twenty-first century, such theories about the capitalist consumption of biology in the wealthy West appear to augment human agency and choice in the process of the self's own biological decisions. My research reveals that just as the political agency that liberalism promises to its subjects is ultimately contained within invisible narratives of surveillance and control, so too, the biological agency that postmodern bioscience promises to its subject emerges problematically interpellated by broader structures of control that govern masculinist, political and medical behaviour.

My study eventually illustrates how the fictional frame of the literary narrative that contains historical events, is especially suited to articulate the ambivalence that underpins the existentialist understanding of the human self. The final section looks back at the opening of the thesis by investigating how issues on masculinity, degeneration and political ambivalence are situated over a hundred years after late nineteenth-century imperialism and Social Darwinism. By looking at the pre-modern fault-lines of Conrad and the post-modern pluralities of McEwan, I aim to bring together Darwinist and neo-Darwinist, imperial and neo-imperial discourses in politics and medicine in an ironic juxtaposition that reveals disturbing similarities despite differences in historical time. The thesis that emerges out of my study of bio-political panic shows how what constitutes the human self contains an

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<sup>38</sup> See Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Subjectivity and Power in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) 9-41.

epistemological complexity that may never be mapped, despite the certainties of discourses of political and medical science. McEwan's *Saturday* – with which this research ends – articulates this ambivalence, which also loops back to the first novel selected for this study – Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* – where the narrator affirmed that “The inner truth is hidden—luckily, luckily.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York & London: W.W.Norton & Company, 1963) 36. Further references to this text will be made parenthetically as *HD*.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Degeneration, Masculinity, and Cognitive Crisis in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

#### 2.1 The Bio-political Background to late Nineteenth-Century England

Genius is a disease of the nerves.

Max Nordau<sup>1</sup>

Degeneration panic emerged in the late nineteenth century as a cultural phenomenon that was informed by anthropological and bio-political constructions of class, body and race. The fear of degeneration has variously been studied as a psychopathological drama unfolding at a time that also witnessed Britain's economic and imperialist expansion. The panic of the possibility over de-evolution – informing the intellectual, medical and literary imagination in the late nineteenth-century Britain – might be read as evidence of what Freud described as the *biological blow* to the universal narcissism of man (the other two being the *cosmological* one of Copernican theory and the *psychological* one rendered by psychoanalysis itself).<sup>2</sup> The Englishman in the post-Darwinian cultural climate was forced to confront the scientific fact that “Man is not a being different from animals or superior to them, he himself is of animal descent, being more closely related to some species and more

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans. George L. Mosse (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) 23. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

<sup>2</sup>Freud, “A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis”, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, ed. James Strachey, Vol. 17 (London: Hogarth Press, 1956) 140-41.

distantly to others.”<sup>3</sup> It is obvious that the problematic proximity to the animal kingdom disturbed the anthropocentric ideology of the European Enlightenment, intellectually underpinned by the legacy of Cartesian dualism.<sup>4</sup> The knowledge of the fundamental biological entanglement with the higher mammals fertilized devolutionary fantasies of the civilized Englishman’s retrogression to an inferior phase of civilization. This fear was voiced in the works of leading late nineteenth-century English zoologists such as Edwin Ray Lankester who suggested the perilous possibility of human beings drifting back “to the condition of intellectual Barnacles or Ascidians” whereby “it is possible for us—just as the Accidian throws away its tail and eye and sinks into a quiescent state of inferiority—to reject the good gift of reason”.<sup>5</sup> The loss of reason threatened to return to an atavistic anarchy, and such fears of retrogression were presented also in late nineteenth-century popular English novels such as Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1885), H.G.Wells’ *The Time Machine* (1895), and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897).

Unsurprisingly, the late nineteenth century in Britain also witnessed an epoch when medicine and medical knowledge began to be inflected with racialized assumptions and the new anthropological studies started to systematize difference by correlating physiognomic attributes and civilizational values. For this was a bio-political culture, as Foucault affirms, marked by a class struggle as well as a “race

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<sup>3</sup> Freud, “A Difficulty”, 141.

<sup>4</sup> Gillian Beer points out how Darwinian theory “renounces a Cartesian clarity, or univocality” and how “Darwin’s method of argument and the generative metaphors of *The Origin*” lead “into profusion and extension”, thus moving away from an ordered and largely binaristic Cartesian world into a polymorphous perversity of permutations and combinations where survival is an accident rather than a willed effort and where degeneration and progress were all but short leaps from one another. *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-century Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983) 6-7.

<sup>5</sup> Edwin Lankester, *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (London: Macmillan, 1880) 60. Cited in William Greenslade, *Degeneration Culture and the Novel 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 33. Lankester’s book was translated into Russian and received profound acclaims. He is an interesting figure to study in relation to late nineteenth-century bio-political panic and was quite possibly the only English scientist to have established a consistent correspondence with Karl Marx. As one of the most acclaimed biologist in the post-Darwinian era, Lankester voiced a medical theory of degeneration that was intellectually “contrary to the tenor of Marxist dialectical optimism.” Lewis S. Feuer, “The Friendship of Edwin Ray Lankester and Karl Marx: The Last Episode in Marx’s Intellectual Evolution”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40.4 (October-December 1979): 633-48; 636-37.



war” that received “biological transcription.”<sup>6</sup> This included the institutionalization of psychiatry as well as a “dynamic racism”<sup>7</sup> which weaved those bio-social discourses through which the human subject would be politically interpellated. The 1890s was the decade when cultural anthropology in Britain – in the works of figures such as Edward Tylor, Louis Henry Morgan and James Frazer – emerged powerfully as a discipline following on from the Darwinian and Spencerian maxims of nineteenth-century evolutionism.<sup>8</sup> Cultural anthropology, as it emerged in the late nineteenth century, was a systematic study of difference among human races and was quick to assume political significance.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the evolutionary theory based on the dichotomy of the civilized and the non-civilized, the developed and the degenerative species, seemed, in particular, to be discursively suited to underpin the legitimization of ideologies of imperialism and territorial control over other races.

The different social and civilizational stages delineated by such ‘scientific’ study “led to a self-congratulatory anthropology that actively promoted belief in the inferiority – indeed, the bestiality – of the African.”<sup>10</sup> Writing in 1890, the American anthropologist D.G.Brinton argued:

The adult who retains the more numerous fetal, infantile or simian traits is unquestionably inferior to him whose development has progressed beyond them [ . . . ] Measured by these criteria, the European or white race stands at the head of the list, the African or the Negro at its foot [ . . . ] All parts of the

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<sup>6</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 60-61.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990) 125. As Thomas Lemke asserts, it is only since late nineteenth century that the term racism acquires its current meaning. See Lemke, *Bio-Politics*, 40-41.

<sup>8</sup> George Stocking’s work on Victorian anthropology throws light on the survey conducted by Tylor on different societies. Interestingly, as Stocking informs, “whereas Spencer published tabular summaries for a series of societies representing different types, along with the ethnographic extracts on which they were based, Tylor attempted a systematic statistical treatment, but without presenting specific ethnographic data.” *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987) 316.

<sup>9</sup> See Serena Nanda and Richard Warms, *Cultural Anthropology* (Belmont, USA: Wadsworth, 2007) 50. Nanda and Warms study the political appropriations of this theory of evolutionism whereby colonial expeditions strategically corroborated the civilizational inferiority of the colonized races. Moreover, as Nanda and Warms point out, evolutionary anthropologists such as Tylor and Morgan were so certain of their theories that they would disregard data to fit their theoretical frames.

<sup>10</sup> Brantlinger, “Victorians and the Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent”, *Critical Enquiry* 12. 1 (Autumn 1985): 166-203; 184.

body have been minutely scanned, measured and weighed in order to erect a science of the comparative anatomy of the races.<sup>11</sup>

Pervasive in Brinton's argument is the systematic assertion of racial difference that was produced through a medical measurement of anatomy. The works of these anthropologists – heavily influenced by the Spencerian maxim of the survival of the fittest<sup>12</sup> – affirmed that human societies, like human selves, progressed at varying paces from savagery to civilization. The panic of degeneration was largely informed by the pseudo-scientific possibility of evolutionary reversal into pre-civilized atavistic states that late nineteenth-century anthropologists ascribed to non-European races.

Anthropology in the late nineteenth century was thus overdetermined by an evolutionism that can be interpreted “as the ideological reflection of economic exploitation and class conflict in an age of rapid capitalist economic development and imperial expansion.”<sup>13</sup> ‘Scientific studies’ on the human race at the end of the nineteenth century were often marked by eugenics and racist divisions that endorsed extermination of the perceived inferior people. Works such as Benjamin Kidd's *Social Evolution* (1894) and Karl Pearson's *National Life from the Standpoint of Science* (1901) – both well-received by their contemporary audiences – were representative of an anthropological culture that offered scientific “justifications for genocide as well as for imperialism.”<sup>14</sup> However, in the wake of the Darwinian evolution which scientifically proved the interconnectedness of all animal species,

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<sup>11</sup> D.G.Brinton, *Races and People* (New York: N.D.C.Hodges, 1890) 48. In the works of E.D.Cope, the premier palaeontologist in America, the four groups of lower humanity were non-white races, women, southern European whites (in opposition to the Northern whites). E.D.Cope, *The Origin of the fittest* (New York: Macmillan, 1887) 291-93. These references are cited in Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1996) 145; 144.

<sup>12</sup> Herbert Spencer's (1820-1903) influence on the medical and intellectual imagination of the late nineteenth century was profound. Spencer's theory of nature was one of compensation whereby what was gained through evolution was dissipated through entropy. The Spencerian maxim of survival of the fittest (often mistakenly attributed to Darwin) immediately fed into the growing discourse of Social Darwinism and was premised on an organism's ability to survive the pulls of nature's contradictory forces. The Spencerian model of evolution was “an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion”. *First Principles* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1861) 376. Cited in Greenslade, *Degeneration*, 289. A clear influence on the medical discourses of Silas Weir Mitchell (whose treatment of female hysteria through confinement and coercion will be looked at in the following chapter), the naturalist legacy of Spencer's theory of evolution had immediate influences on the political ideology of Theodore Roosevelt.

<sup>13</sup> George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 187

<sup>14</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, “Victorians and the Africans”, 186.

the late nineteenth-century notion of racism was characterised by a biological monism whereby the threat to the race came not so much from without but from within. Consequently, late nineteenth-century England, with its fear of degeneration and de-evolution, fostered “the internal racism of permanent purification”, one that also bred “the basic dimensions of social normalization.”<sup>15</sup> For the nineteenth century may be broadly conceived as the moment, as Foucault contends in his study of medical politics, when “the relation between the visible and the invisible—which is necessary to all concrete knowledge—changed its structure, revealing through gaze and language what had previously been below and beyond their domain.”<sup>16</sup>

Darwin’s discoveries and their impact on the culture of the time were tied not only to their contemporary zoological and medical theories but “profoundly unsettled the received relationships between fiction, metaphor, and the material world.”<sup>17</sup> As Stephen Jay Gould argues:

The concept of evolution transformed human thought during the nineteenth century. Nearly every question in the life sciences was reformulated in its light. No idea was ever more widely used, or misused (“social Darwinism” as an evolutionary rationale for the inevitability of poverty, for example). Both creationists (Agassiz and Morton) and evolutionists (Broca and Galton) could exploit the data of brain size to make their invalid and invidious distinctions among groups.<sup>18</sup>

Gould’s statement (as well as the title of his book) points to the way medico-scientific discourses that emerged as ramifications of the Darwinian narrative were essentially aimed at legitimizing and systemizing difference on the basis of physiognomy, culture and race. The evolutionary knowledge of the human condition that is constantly and helplessly mutable undermined the confidence previously enjoyed by the capitalist notion of self-help that was publicised by the Smilesian doctrines in mid-nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Unlike the intentionalist vocabulary of

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<sup>15</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 62.

<sup>16</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, trans. A.M.Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1973) xii.

<sup>17</sup> Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 142.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Smiles published his *Self-Help* originally in 1859. A casebook on Victorian utilitarianism and social progress, *Self-Help* featured a case study of Michael Faraday, the son of a blacksmith of very modest background, who, with his personal enterprise and determination, rose to a zenith of social and scientific success. The Smilesian narrative of self-help was an advocacy of the manner in which progress and success were to be achieved and to this end he negated the need to include stories of failure in his narrative of social growth as “people do not care to know about the general who lost

Lamarckian zoology that had emphasized the importance of the role of will and agency in its evolutionary narrative, the Darwinian plot was darker and pointed more towards biological determinism, conflict and coercion.<sup>20</sup>

## 2.2 Degeneration and Criminology in Popular Cultural and Medical Discourses

Janet Oppenheim's study of British medical panic over degeneration and its anthropological implications points to the broader cultural climate in the late nineteenth century. In popular discourses on public health and medicine, heredity emerged as the subject of the anxious traffic of ideas around bodily and nervous deterioration at a time focussed on racial and ethnographic hygiene and purity. Oppenheim studies the gradual transition from the older hereditary theories of nervous disposition to the new discourses of degeneration that emerged in the latter part of the nineteenth century. While the former did not assume an automatic deterioration of the nervous system, the new discourses were different:

Nervous degeneration was something altogether more frightening and more disgraceful. Once set in motion, virtually everyone assumed that it was an irreversible process, dragging entire families into an inexorable downward spiral of declining physical and mental powers.<sup>21</sup>

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his battles, the engineer whose engines blew up". Smiles, *Self-help with Illustrations of Conduct and Perseverance* (London: John Murray, 1908) vi-vii. The Smilesian doctrine of self-help had already come under attack in contemporary literature for its refusal to attribute any importance to failure and for its dogmatic discourse of success through propriety and perseverance. See Robin Gilmour, "Dickens and the Self-Help Idea", *The Victorians and Social Protest*, ed. J. Butt and I.F. Clarke (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973) 71.

<sup>20</sup> The concept of acquired trait in Lamarckian theory was a subversive idea to the elitist clergy of nineteenth-century England and the idea "that an animal could, through its own exertions, transform itself into a higher being and pass on its gains—all without the aid of a deity—appealed to the insurrectionary working classes." Adrian Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution: Morphology, Medicine, and Reform in Radical London* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 4. It is interesting to note that the Lamarckian concept of intentionality whereby the organism can use its agency to adapt to its surroundings instead of being overdetermined and predetermined by an accidental combination is increasingly important in modern *epigenetics*, which, instead of the unidirectional nature of the DNA-RNA-Protein structure (one that informs the idea of genetic determinism), posits a more mutually interdependent system whereby the DNA, RNA and protein can define and inform each other, thus breaking from the randomness of genetic determinism. See John Dupré, *Processes of Life: Essays in the Philosophy of Biology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Janet Oppenheim, "*Shattered Nerves*": *Doctors, Patients and Depression in Victorian England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 272.

The irreversibility of the process was part of its biological menace and contributed to the popular panic about the same. Late nineteenth-century medical and anthropological discourses were increasingly and anxiously obsessed with the uncontrollability of the human nervous system and the disorder of nervous degeneration. One can see a demonstration of the idea of fatal irreversibility in the popular perception of degeneration evident around the trials and afflictions suffered by Oscar Wilde whose “drastic transformation”, as Joseph Bristow contends, “from a dandified art critic whose plays entertained thousands of theatre-goers to a debased pervert gathered such momentum in the late 1890s that there seemed no way of reversing the process.”<sup>22</sup> I will return and draw heavily on Bristow’s study of masculinity in nineteenth-century England as produced and perpetuated by the Boy Scout Movements and public school discipline, especially in the chapter on George Orwell and the white man’s nerves in the colonies. It is interesting that Wilde himself, in July 1896, petitioned the Home Secretary for his release from prison on grounds that his homoeroticism was a pathological syndrome characteristic of the degenerate artist of a particular literary temperament and ought to be treated by a physician rather than punished by the law.<sup>23</sup> In his persuasive analysis of the richness of the political content of Wilde’s life and works, Christopher Hitchens argues that *The Importance of Being Earnest* is couched in the coded contemporary vocabulary of homosexuality that manifested also in proper names in the play. Thus Cecily was a common code for transvestite rent-boys and Bloxham may have been an allusion to Jack Bloxham, editor of a homosexual magazine who was Wilde’s personal friend.<sup>24</sup> More significantly, such theories of degeneration through de-evolution, as embodied by Wilde in popular medical perception, were also tied to the emerging discourse of criminology in the late nineteenth century where the medical gaze was again increasingly inflected by pseudo-scientific notions of physiognomy, biology and race.

Max Nordau’s *Entartung* (1892), which was translated into English as *Degeneration* and published in 1895, can be seen as fairly representative of the various cultural and pseudo-scientific tracts produced in the last decade of the

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) 18.

<sup>23</sup> See H. Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde: The Aftermath* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, 1963) 70-71.

<sup>24</sup> Hitchens, *Unacknowledged Legislation: Writers in the Public Sphere* (London: Verso, 2000) 11.

nineteenth century that expounded for the common reader the principles of nervous degeneration and entropy. Nervous entropy as Nordau presents it emerges as a ubiquitous condition attributable to a range of factors from the wear and tear of daily lives to thermodynamic theories of solar freezing. Nervousness according to Nordau was essentially the construct of a culture in which “steam and electricity have turned the customs of life of every member upside down, even of the most obtuse and narrow-minded citizens, who is completely inaccessible to the impelling thoughts of the times” (*Degeneration* 37). Nordau’s study includes an analysis of masculine hysteria in the late nineteenth century, a disease that is attributed to excessive emotionalism, morbid imagination, compulsive propensity to imitate and heightened self-love. More importantly, Nordau’s theorizing of hysteria includes interpretations of creative writers and artists as well, and he classifies the writing of Ibsen, Zola, Wilde and Nietzsche as hysterically degenerative. In a similar vein, Nordau connects Charcot’s medical research on visual degeneration to the Impressionist school of painting by Manet which is described as a “diseased constitution” of the “brain and nervous system” (*Degeneration* 31). The hysterical man and artist – as described by Nordau in his medico-cultural analysis – emerges as an inward-looking melancholic with pathological as well as criminal propensities, thus exemplifying the *fin de siècle* fear of the “caesuras within the biological continuum.”<sup>25</sup> A popular guide to the panic of degeneration and the symptoms of degenerative minds, Nordau’s *Entartung* “was one of the most widely read pieces of cultural criticism in western and central Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”<sup>26</sup> Unsurprisingly, Nordau’s scientific and cultural criticism of degeneration and degenerate artists at the end of the nineteenth century drew heavily on contemporary discourses on criminology and anthropology.

One of the most influential of the criminological discourses that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, one that made its presence felt in the popular and literary narratives of the period, was that offered by Césaire Lombroso whose *The Man of Genius* (1893) was a study of degeneration and criminality. Equating homosexuality, moral insanity and morbid criminal degeneration with literary

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<sup>25</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 255.

<sup>26</sup> Mark S. Micale, “Discourses of Hysteria in Fin-de-Siècle France”, *The Mind of Modernism: Medicine, Psychology and the Cultural Arts in Europe and America, 1880-1940*, ed. Mark S. Micale (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004) 78.

propensities to use epigrams, assonance and puns, Lombroso theorized deviance using a set of physiognomic and mental attributes. Thus Lombroso popularized a medical gaze whereby criminals and degenerates would be identified by “exaggerated mutism or verbosity, morbid vanity, excessive originality” as well as by “prominent ears, deficiency of beard, irregularity of teeth [and] excessive asymmetry of face and head”.<sup>27</sup> Emerging as it did in a cultural climate of Social Darwinism and bio-political panic, Lombroso’s criminology “viewed criminals and psychiatric patients as degenerates, evolutionary throwbacks often identifiable by physical stigmata: low brows, jutting jaws and so forth.”<sup>28</sup> The fears of recapitulation to earlier and less developed civilizational states – in a ‘scientific’ culture that studied ‘savages’ as a bridge between the gorilla and the gentleman<sup>29</sup> – were almost always associated with the fear of criminality that the Lombrosian discourse analysed. This was evident in the popular literature of the day, especially crime-literature that dealt with deviancy from civilized behaviour, which frequently appropriated Lombrosian vocabulary.<sup>30</sup>

Lombroso and his physiognomic vocabulary of criminology and degeneration found many supporters in Britain, such as the psychiatrist Henry Maudsley who, in his 1895 work *The Pathology of Mind*, advised prospective husbands to check for ostensible physical signs “which betray the degeneracy of stock [. . .] any malformations of the head, face, mouth, teeth and ears. Outward defects and deformities are the visible signs of inward and invisible faults which will

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<sup>27</sup> Césaire Lombroso, *The Man of Genius* (London: Walter Scott, 1891) 5-6. Cited in William Greenslade, *Degeneration Culture and the Novel 1880-1940*, 94.

<sup>28</sup> Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (London: HarperCollins, 1997) 511.

<sup>29</sup> George John Romanes, *Mental Evolution in Man: Origin of Human Faculty* (New York: 1889) 439. Cited in Brantlinger, “Victorians and the Africans”, 186.

<sup>30</sup> As William Greenslade suggests, Conan Doyle’s Moriarty emerges as a typically Lombrosian criminal with his “higher degenerate” propensities that constitute high intelligence which comes at the cost of moral substance. He thus combines gifted intelligence with “defective inheritance”. *Degeneration* 105. Ironically, Moriarty himself exhibits knowledge of the Lombrosian physiognomy that quantified intelligence with skull-size. Thus in Conan Doyle’s “The Final Problem”, Moriarty asserts on seeing Holmes, “You have less frontal development than I should have expected.” Arthur Conan Doyle, *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Short Stories* (London: John Murray, 1961) 541.

have their influences in breeding.”<sup>31</sup> With his metonymically formulated physiognomic vocabulary, Lombroso pronounced a gaze where intelligence is quantified and measured by the size of skulls. Criminality, genius and degeneration were thus discursively inflected through physiognomic features. Lombroso’s analysis mixed artists of genius and degenerates into one seam of dangerous subversion that was easily translatable into criminality. In effect, Lombroso represented an anthropological analysis that was derived from anthropometric data and classified criminals as evolutionary degenerates.<sup>32</sup> Lombrosian criminology sought to construct a systematic study of deviancy through a structure of physiognomic signifiers. Such a study – as Michel Foucault argued – exemplified the bio-political culture in which dispersed objects could be transformed into a discourse that could “speak.”<sup>33</sup>

As cultural historians such as William Greenslade and Daniel Pick show, the discourse of degeneration – as articulated by cultural historians by Nordau and Social Darwinists such as Francis Galton<sup>34</sup> and Ernst Haeckel<sup>35</sup> – reached its peak in

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<sup>31</sup> Henry Maudsley, *The Pathology of the Mind: a Study of its Distempers, Deformities, and Disorders* (London: Macmillan, 1895) 536. Cited in Greenslade, *Degeneration*, 102.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 153.

<sup>33</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M.Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972) 44.

<sup>34</sup> Late nineteenth-century medicine was supported by the emergence of biostatistics, most immediately evinced in the late nineteenth century in the work of Francis Galton (1822-1911), Darwin’s cousin who combined the nineteenth-century attributes of a polymath, as a geographical explorer, anthropologist, eugenicist and statistician. Galton’s active support of the journal *Biometrika* paved the way for his subsequent interest in Darwinian hereditary model which was readily appropriated for his model of eugenics that sought to improve the condition of human species led to the publication of *The Hereditary Genius* in 1869. In that work, Galton sought to quantify the number of brilliant and stupid men in England in the 1860s using the demographic data available to him through official records. Conducting biostatistical research on the physique of boys in English public schools of the 1870s, Galton sought to systematize a sociological formula that stated that smaller families of intelligent and successful men in cities led to an overabundance of hereditarily weaker populations in the rural areas. See Ruth Cowan, “Francis Galton’s Statistical Ideas: The Influence of Eugenics”, *Isis* 63.4 (December 1972): 509-28. Galton’s biostatistical research was quick to assume anthropological and racial politics and exemplified what Foucault classified as the “enunciative modality” in biopolitics whereby “Qualitative descriptions, biographical accounts, the location, interpretation, cross-checking of signs, reasoning by analogy, deduction, statistical calculations, experimental verifications and many other forms of statement are to be found in the discourse of nineteenth century doctors.” *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 55.

<sup>35</sup> In his work on recapitulation, the German biologist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) affirmed that individual biological features of an organism reiterate that of its species. Haeckel’s phrase *ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny* usually suggests that as an embryo of an advanced organism grows, it will



the late nineteenth-century popular medical and political vocabulary. This dramatized “a deep pessimism about man’s capacity to ameliorate the social and political order, a political conservatism, a disenchantment with man’s ethical capacity, and a scepticism of the claims of rational – particularly scientific – thought.”<sup>36</sup> The fin de siècle notion of hysteria took up medical as well as political ramifications and involved changing analyses of body, race, empire and social hygiene.<sup>37</sup> Analysing the British political context of the panic of degeneration, Alison Hennegan persuasively argues that this was a time when

Fears of invasion, literal and metaphorical, were in the air. The British and the French watched Germany’s growing military power with apprehension [. . .] Britain’s, and especially London’s, rapidly growing immigrant population raised anxieties about cultural ‘invasion’, fears that native-born Britons would become aliens in their own land.<sup>38</sup>

In its literature of degeneration and criminality, and in its anthropological theories on class, stock and race, late nineteenth-century Britain witnessed a bio-political panic that anticipated the apparatus of twentieth-century “State racism” whereby “the

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pass through stages that look very much like the adult phase of less-advanced organisms. For example, at one point each human embryo has gills and resembles a tadpole. Although further research demonstrated that early stage embryos are not representative of our evolutionary ancestors, Haeckel’s general concept that the developmental process reveals some clues about evolutionary history is scientifically true.

<sup>36</sup> William Greenslade, *Degeneration*, 106.

<sup>37</sup> See Mark S. Micale, “Discourses of Hysteria in Fin-de-Siècle France”, *The Mind of Modernism*, 88. Micale studies how the interest in hysteria historically coincided with the rise and growth of the Third Republic in France and also with the rise of Modernism as a complex artistic, scientific and literary movement. Marking the decline of pre-Freudian positivist medicine and heralding the Kuhnian paradigm shift in medical knowledge at the turn of the twentieth century, hysteria broke the notional borderlines between genders. In a moving description, Micale remarks: “Shapeless and ever-changing, unfixed and indefinable, endlessly open to interpretation, a signifier without a signified, hysteria is Modernism” (90).

<sup>38</sup> Alison Hennegan, “Personalities and Principles: Aspects of Literature and Life in *Fin-de-Siècle* England”, *Fin de Siècle and Its Legacy*, ed. Mikuláš Teich and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 189-90. In his analysis of the masculinity crisis at the turn of the twentieth century, Nalin Jayasena argues how Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is couched in the rhetoric of political panic and like the figure of Prospero in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, relies on the threat of degenerative dissemination in order to justify xenophobia at the heart of Eurocentric racial (in the case of *Tempest*) and imperial identity (in the case of *Dracula*). Thus, “the fiction of *Dracula* (as a homicidal beast) offers a moral basis for maintaining xenophobic views against foreigners, but it also proposes the need to eliminate the threat at its source and in its own environment, which, of course, requites eminent representatives of Western civilization (British, Dutch and American) to converge on its Other.” Nalin Jayasena, *Contested Masculinities: Crises in Colonial Male Identity from Joseph Conrad to Satyajit Ray* (New York: Routledge, 2007) 4.

theme of racial purity replaces that of race struggle.”<sup>39</sup> A complex cultural climate that contained economic growth through imperialism as well as the panic of decadence through de-evolution and nervous entropy,<sup>40</sup> this was thus also a time when anxieties about the productive male body, masculinity, and bio-political identities readily emerged in public and popular discourse.

### 2.3 Nineteenth-Century English Masculinity and Its Anxieties

The late nineteenth-century European bio-political discourses on degeneration might also be viewed as marked by anxieties about masculinity. Such masculinist discourses sought to retain and reify hygiene, health and nervous order in a way intimately connected to the production and preservation of empire. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts in her critique of postcolonial reason, “it should not be possible, in principle, to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England’s social mission, was a crucial part of cultural representation to the English.”<sup>41</sup> Thus unsurprisingly, all-pervasive in the dominant medical discourses on nerves and nervous breakdown in the late nineteenth century, were issues of upbringing, stock and class, as medicine and Social Darwinism were closely collaborative in their constructed notions of eugenics and hygiene.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 81.

<sup>40</sup> In England and in the English cultural climate, the fear of entropy as promulgated by the second law of thermodynamics was in close correspondence with the fear of masculine enervation that was anathema to the production principle of imperialist masculinity. See Michael Whitworth, “Inspector Heat Inspected: *The Secret Agent* and the Meanings of Entropy”, *Review of English Studies* 49.193 (February 1998): 40-59.

<sup>41</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) 113.

<sup>42</sup> Along with his work on the shell-shocked soldiers of the First World War, W.H.R.Rivers was one of the first medical anthropologists in England who wrote extensively on the medical and anthropological systems in the Murray Island in Torres Straits in his book published in 1924. In this work, Rivers proceeds through a curious juxtaposition of medical fact and faith, with the latter corresponding consistently to the Western logic of medicine and the latter a part of the collective faith practised in a different anthropological system. Thus Rivers writes how in Murray Island, disease is generically believed to be contracted through certain people who happen to possess objects classified

The idea of masculinity as produced and popularized in late nineteenth-century Britain combined the ability to carry imperial attributes that would inform colonial control while simultaneously constructing its discursive otherness out of the original inhabitants of the sites of imperialism itself. Shannon Sullivan's analysis of the naturalization of hierarchical difference and the politics of 'Other'-formation particularly points towards the ethnographies that informed European imperialism. Thus

The story that Europe told itself and others as it colonized huge parts of the world was that it had discovered wild spaces that needed taming. And not just spaces, but people also, that lacked civilization since the spaces one inhabited determined what sort of person one was. [. . . ] This reciprocal definition of wild and savage spaces was then used to justify the horrific treatment of those such as Native Americans and Africans who were deemed uncivilized.<sup>43</sup>

Sullivan's work is significant inasmuch as it demonstrates the discursive quality of racial supremacy that is most heavily operative precisely at the point which seems to depart from discourse. The ideology of racial supremacy, as Sullivan studies it, worked by strategies of naturalization and a "style of transacting with the world in which the white domination is consciously embraced and affirmed."<sup>44</sup> Thus Sullivan's analysis also emphasizes the cultural and moral economy that historically informed imperialist ideology and its increasing internalization through language, medicine and body.

Linda Martin Alcoff contends in her remarkable study of visible racial identities, the politics of racialization corresponded closely and was almost contemporaneous with the politics of map-making in a cultural climate where:

[t]he expanding geographical areas of the globe "discovered" by Europeans were given order and intelligibility in part through their association with racial types. Thus, the labeling and mapping of conquered terrain, the

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as *zogo* and how each *zogo* uniquely corresponds to a particular form of illness. Rivers, *Medicine, Magic, and Religion* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1924) 29.

<sup>43</sup> Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006) 150-51.

<sup>44</sup> Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness*, 5.

naturalist classifications of life forms of all types, and the typologies of “natural races” were all practices that enjoyed an analogical similarity and emerged in the first period of European conquest, no doubt motivated by Europeans' need to comprehend and manage their suddenly enlarged world.<sup>45</sup>

What is most immediately pervasive in the evolution of European socio-medical discourses from the late nineteenth century to the First World War is an increasing anxiety to produce and perpetuate an ideal masculinist body that would correspond closely to the ideology that informed imperial expansion. This issue ran across cultural as well literary movements and was as pervasive in boy's fiction stories and adventure magazines as in scout movements that fostered a spirit of masculinist adventure. As Joseph Bristow contends, “literary representations of imperial maleness belonged to wider discussions of the moral and physical well-being of boys, especially in relation to schooling, health, and military recruitment.”<sup>46</sup> In a related work on the fear of effeminacy, Bristow studies how the 1885 Amendment of English Criminal Law – classified as the Labouchere Amendment – imposed prohibitive legislation on public as well as private homosexuality. 1885 emerges as a significant date in Bristow's study of English masculinity and the impact of the Amendment was almost immediately palpable in the tribulation and eventual retribution meted out by the state to the most celebrated writer of the day, Oscar Wilde, whose trials demonstrated spectacularly “that effeminacy and empire at this point stood in violent opposition.”<sup>47</sup> The hurried equation of effeminacy and degeneration that was present in public vocabulary and dramatized in the public trials and the eventual doom of Oscar Wilde is also manifested in the homophobic tirade against him that continued well into the twentieth century. Thus Arthur Symons attacked Wilde in a vocabulary that constituted visceral aversion as well as intellectual antagonism:

Wilde's vices were not simply intellectual perversions, they were physiological. [ . . . ] As he grew older the womanish side of him grew more

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<sup>45</sup>Linda Martin Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 179-80.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World* (Hammersmith, London: Harper Collins, 1991) 2. For an interesting study of women's active and political participation in English imperialism through the formation of bodies such as the Victoria League in 1901, see Eliza Riedi, “Women, Gender, and the Promotion of Empire: The Victoria League, 1901-1914”, *The Historical Journal* 45.2 (2002): 569-599.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885*, 11.

and more evident. Lautrec saw him in Paris, and in the appalling portrait of him he shows Wilde, swollen, puffed out, bloated and sinister. The form of the mouth which he gave him is more than any thing exceptional [. . .] it is a woman's that no man who is normal could ever had had. The face is bestial. A man with a ruined body and ravaged mind and a senseless brain does not even survey the horror of this hideous countenance in a mirror: this thing is no more a thing gazes into a void.<sup>48</sup>

The popular perception of Wilde's body, as a disturbing symbol of degeneration and abject indeterminacy, may be interpreted as the masculinist fear of the uncontainable and mutable corporeality of the fleshy frame. At once revolting as well as dangerously seductive, Wilde's body and his intellectual excesses became the major signifier of decadence and degeneration under the dominant bio-political gaze of the day. Such a gaze – informing the ideology of the empire – constituted a positivist medical knowledge which was “the ultimate discourse of the real, seeking to produce an authoritative account of an unproblematically of the real world of the human body and mind.”<sup>49</sup> Under such masculinist and positivistic medical control of the libidinal economy that was directly dialogic with the episteme of the empire, Wilde embodied an effeminacy that constituted the “fear and cross-over between sexual perversion and intellectual and moral subversion.”<sup>50</sup> Wilde's personal background as an Irishman attempting to locate himself in the British intellectual scene also becomes significant in the context of the colonial politics of the British Empire.<sup>51</sup> This background informs a reading of Wilde's subversion of the English language through an efflorescent wit in social satires that were pitched against the patriarchal principles of the day. The dialectic of Wilde's *body of work* and *work of the body* thus deconstructed the discourses that went into the making of masculinity and behavioural propriety in the late nineteenth-century English culture which “was working out the political meanings of these definitions in a colony thousands of miles away.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Arthur Symons, *The Memoirs of Arthur Symons: Life and Art in the 1890s* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977) 146-47.

<sup>49</sup> Mark S. Micale, “Discourses of Hysteria in Fin-de-Siècle France”, *The Mind of Modernism*, 90.

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 240.

<sup>51</sup> As Neil Sammells suggests. “Wilde's consciousness of his foreignness – his otherness and ‘difference’ – informs his stylistic engagements with language.” *Wilde Style: The Plays and Prose of Oscar Wilde* (Harlow: Longman, 2000) 43.

<sup>52</sup> Ashish Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) 44-45.

## 2.4 Conrad in his Cultural Climate: *Heart of Darkness* in its context

As Ian Watt affirms, “Conrad grew up in the heyday of evolutionary theory; Alfred Wallace was one of his favourite authors; and several aspects of evolutionary thought are present in *Heart of Darkness*.”<sup>53</sup> Conrad’s writing betrays an interest in the possibility of ethical altruism in an age overdetermined by bio-political pseudoscience and anthropological speculations on racial characters. More specifically, his writing on empire is characterised by his protagonists’ felt ambivalence about agency. The ambivalence in turn informs the existentialist dilemma that is caught between the need for selfishness and the desire for self-effacement.<sup>54</sup> Degeneration features heavily in Conrad’s narratives, not as a reductionist epidemiological principle or anthropological theory, but as a complex combination of political presuppositions and privately experienced feelings of horror and guilt. “Impressively well-read in contemporary science”,<sup>55</sup> Conrad’s reception of craniology, although dismissive of its stereotypical excesses, reflects the ambivalence of a creative writer who was sensitive to the scientific theses of his times when “the borders between criminality, insanity and genius [. . .] were constantly blurred.”<sup>56</sup> What emerges more immediately from Conrad’s attitudinal reactions to the progress of empirical science in the nineteenth century was that “heartless secrets which are called the Laws of Nature” were unconnected to the “deepest human concerns”, and the belief that the increasing dominance of the natural sciences of his day contributed to the crisis of the human sentient self.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980) 155. Watt goes on to study the scenes in *Heart of Darkness* that seem to be in close correspondence with the theory of evolution as proposed by Darwinian philosophers in late nineteenth century. He specifically refers to Marlow’s voyage up the Congo that is described as a going back in time and reaching the pre-historical point in human evolution.

<sup>54</sup> See Allan Hunter, *Joseph Conrad and the Ethics of Darwinism: The Challenges of Science* (London: Routledge, 1983) 13.

<sup>55</sup> Greenslade, *Degeneration*, 106.

<sup>56</sup> John W. Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 174-75.

<sup>57</sup> See Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, 152-53.

Conrad's personal familiarity with the major and dominant scientific discourses and debates of his day is abundantly evident not only in the content of his prose fiction but also in his letters to contemporary writers and journalists. Thus in his letter to Cunninghame Graham, written in 14 December 1897, Conrad alludes to his knowledge of the second law of thermodynamics while describing Singleton in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (1897) and writes: "Nothing can touch him but the curse of decay—the eternal decree that will extinguish the sun, the stars one by one, and in another instance shall spread a frozen darkness over the whole universe."<sup>58</sup> As Redmond O'Hanlon suggests, Conrad was fascinated by James Clerk Maxwell's 1873 lectures – on the indestructibility of matter and molecules – to the British Association and was intrigued by the invention of radiology during his stay with Dr John McIntyre in Glasgow.<sup>59</sup> As Conrad's biographer Frederick Karl contends, Conrad was personally connected to the anthropological study of his day through his old tutor Izydor Kopernicki, who also happened to be a social scientist and had written a treatise on craniology entitled *Comparative Studies of Human Races, Based on Types of Skulls*.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the vocabulary of nineteenth-century science, with its tenets of Darwinism and its associations with medicine and anthropology had too big an impact on popular culture not to engage creative writers and intellectuals alike. Thus Gillian Beer argues:

In the mid-nineteenth century, scientists still shared a common language with other educated readers and writers of their time. [. . .] Together with other scientific writers such as G.H.Lewes, Claude Bernard, John Tyndall, W.K.Clifford, and even so far as his early work is concerned Clerk Maxwell (writers whose works ranged through psychology, physiology, physics and mathematics), they [Lyell and Darwin] shared a literary, non-mathematical discourse which was readily available to readers without a scientific training.<sup>61</sup>

Conrad's reaction against the increasing overdeterminism of mechanistic science over the will and agency of man is evocatively depicted in his 1897 letter to Cunninghame Graham:

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<sup>58</sup> *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, ed. F.R.Karl and L.Davies, 9 Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 1:423.

<sup>59</sup> Redmond O'Hanlon, *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin: The Influence of Scientific thought on Conrad's fiction* (Edinburgh: The Salamander Press, 1984) 11-25.

<sup>60</sup> Frederick R Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979) 80.

<sup>61</sup> Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, 4.

There is a—let us say—a machine. It evolved itself (I am severely scientific) out of a chaos of scraps of iron and behold!—it knits. I am horrified at the horrible work and stand appalled. [. . .] You cannot by any special lubrication make embroidery with a knitting machine. And the most withering thought is that the infamous things has made itself; made itself without thought, without conscience, without foresight, without eyes, without heart. It is tragic accident—and it has happened. . . . It knits us in and it knits us out. It has knitted time, space, pain, death, corruption, despair and all the illusions—and nothing matters.<sup>62</sup>

The “severely scientific” attitude that Conrad refers to in the letter exists in opposition to individual agency and human will. The automatic knitting machine emerges as a symbol of the seamless narratives of knowledge produced by the late nineteenth-century discourses on natural science.<sup>63</sup> Emerging as it did from a culture that contained the pride of imperialist expansion as well the panic of degeneration, increasing territorialisation as well as the anxiety of entropy and solar death<sup>64</sup>, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is a complex commentary on imperialism, masculinity and Enlightenment logic as those constructs featured at the end of the nineteenth century. As Ian Watt points out, Conrad’s novella was written at a time marked by international political conflicts and contradictory notions of imperialism in Africa, a period that witnessed “the discovery of gold in the Transvaal”, and an “increasing resentment at German imperialism” (one recalls that the very name of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* means “short” in German, ironically resonating with his Lombrosian length and anatomical excesses), “final adoption of an imperialist programme” as “the leadership of the Liberal party passed from Gladstone to Rosebery in 1894”, a

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<sup>62</sup> C. T. Watts ed. *Joseph Conrad’s Letters to R.B.Cunninghame Graham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) 56-57.

<sup>63</sup> It is interesting to read the influences of Schopenhauer’s philosophy on Conrad’s writing, more specifically of the concept of Immanent Will which Schopenhauer describes as the fundamentally irrational phenomenon that inhabits “the innermost essence, the kernel, of every particular thing and also of the whole.” *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 Vols, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966) 1: 110. It is interesting to note the striking similarity between Schopenhauer’s metaphor of the kernel and the intra-diegetic narrator’s description of Marlow’s story as a kernel in *Heart of Darkness*, a similarity that is too discursively connected to be purely accidental. Schopenhauer’s will is real precisely because it exceeds understanding. As an epistemic elsewhere, the will in Schopenhauer exhibits an absolute determinism that consumes the human will and carried interesting resonances with Conrad’s concept of “the warlike conditions of existence.” Preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, 145. For Conrad’s direct and personal engagement with Schopenhauer, see Mark A. Wollaeger, *Joseph Conrad and the Fictions of Skepticism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990) 29-36.

<sup>64</sup> See Cedric Watts, *Conrad’s Heart of Darkness: A Critical and Contextual Discussion* (Milano: Mursia International, 1977) 11-18.



move that was accentuated by the Conservative Lord Salisbury's coming into power next year, the Jameson Raid in 1895 and the Fashoda Incident on 1898.<sup>65</sup> In its ambivalent interpretation of imperialism and its horrors, *Heart of Darkness* illustrates the inadequacies of late nineteenth-century bio-political ideologies, while at the same time being awkwardly embedded in the same. As Edward Said suggests, Conrad's novella contains an "uncompromising Eurocentric vision" which paradoxically also constitutes "the felt tension between what is intolerably there and a symmetrical compulsion to escape from it".<sup>66</sup>

The spectre of soulless science embodied in the image of an automatic knitting machine returns in *Heart of Darkness* in the figures of the symbolic women at the entrance to the office of the Ivory Company in Brussels (a city that reminds the nervous narrator Marlow of a white sepulchre). The female figures knit away in an automaton-like manner as Marlow embarks on the corporate rituals and gets grafted into the imperial enterprise that was "going to run an overseas empire and make no end of coin by trade" (*HD* 13). The section is remarkable in the manner it juxtaposes the mythical realm with that of the menacingly mechanical:

Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs knitting black wool. The slim one got up and walked straight at me—still knitting with downcast eyes—and only just as I began to think of getting out of her way, as you would for a somnambulist, stood still, and looked up. Her dress was as plain as an umbrella cover, and she turned round without a word and preceded me into a waiting-room. I gave my name and looked about. (*HD* 13)

The movements of the woman – who appears initially in Marlow's eyes as a somnambulist – may be interpreted as the *automatic ambulation*<sup>67</sup> that characterised the anti-social hysteric as well as the hyper-social mechanical behaviour of the agency-less subject inside a corporate space. The protocols of being baptised into the imperialist enterprise are depicted selectively and nervously with the image of the Congo on the map appearing to Marlow's panicky cognition as "an immense snake

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<sup>65</sup> Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, 157.

<sup>66</sup> Said, *Freud and the Non-European* (London & New York: Verso, 2003) 26.

<sup>67</sup> The term ambulatory automatism was introduced and associated with hysteria by Jean-Martin Charcot; the premier neurologist at Salpêtrière who mentored Freud during the latter's student days. See Ian Hacking, "Automatism Ambulatoire: Fugue, Hysteria, and Gender at the Turn of the Century", *The Mind of Modernism*, 125-40.

uncoiled” (*HD* 12) thus bringing the biblical scene of seduction and its associated connotation of Fall into a nervous juxtaposition with the imperialist architecture of the unnamed company’s office in Brussels. The strategy of selective communication, one that runs throughout the narrative of *Heart of Darkness* and is perhaps most spectacularly evident in Marlow’s eventual and dramatic lie to Kurtz’s Intended at the end of the novella, is anticipated in Marlow’s succinct account of his signing of contract with the Company that is never named in the narrative:

In about forty-five seconds I found myself again in the waiting-room with the compassionate secretary who full of desolation and sympathy made me sign some document. I believe I undertook amongst other things not to disclose any trade secrets. Well, I am not going to. (*HD* 14)

The precision of clock time belies the emotional intensity and movements that are described in the passage. Marlow’s withholding of the company’s trade secrets (a company that seeks to maximise profit by ivory trade in the Congo) from his European audience that comprises a lawyer and an accountant, is not incompatible with his eventual withholding of the truth about the horror of imperialism from the supposedly naïve European female in the white metropolis.

The nervousness of Marlow at the moment of being baptised into the ceremony of imperialism that emerged with immediately commercial as well as archetypically mythical undertones is spectacularly evident:

I began to feel slightly uneasy. You know I am not used to such ceremonies and there was something ominous in the atmosphere. It was just as though I had been let into some conspiracy—I don’t know—something not quite right, and I was glad to get out. In the outer room the two women knitted back wool feverishly [. . .] She [the older woman] glanced at me over the glasses. The swift and indifferent placidity of that look troubled me. [. . .] An eerie feeling came over me. She seemed uncanny and fateful. Often far away I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, the other scrutinising the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes. ‘Ave! Old knitter of black wool. *Morituri te salutant.*’ Not many of those she looked at ever saw her again—not half—by a long way. (*HD* 14)

The uneasiness of Marlow at the moment of incorporation into the reifying imperial enterprise is compounded by the masculinity crisis he encounters during his shudder under the Medusa-gaze of the automaton-like woman who feverishly knits black wool. As soon as he is framed by the narrative of imperialism, Marlow begins to

discern the decadence associated with its machinery, a decadence that is immediately evident in the pervasive sense of mortality that Marlow's narrative can no longer conceal. Unsurprisingly, on being taken in by the machinery of imperialism, Marlow is subsequently sent to be examined under its medical gaze, one that proceeds by detection and interrogation of hereditary insanity and criminal history. The following scene is delineated through the "simple formality" of seeing the company's doctor who "produced a thing like callipers and got the dimensions back and front and every way, taking notes carefully" (*HD* 15). Keen to measure Marlow's cranium for the sake of medical science, the doctor quizzes him on any familial history of madness, asserting that it would be "interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals on the spot" (*HD* 15). Appearing as he does in Marlow's eyes as "a harmless fool", the facile figure of the doctor confesses that he "always ask[s] leave, in the interest of science, to measure the crania of those going out there" (*HD* 15), and thus subscribes to the Lombrosian tradition of measuring men that derived its data from "a sample of 383 crania from dead criminals, plus general proportions measured for 3,893 among the living."<sup>68</sup>

While in the Congo Marlow tries to comprehend the meaning in the wilderness he sees around him. The passage, in which he describes his equivocal understanding of the silences and sounds around, is evocative in its felt ambivalence:

A great silence around and above. Perhaps on some quiet night the tremor of far-off drums, sinking, swelling, a temer of vast, faint; a sound weird, appealing, suggestive, and wild—and perhaps with as profound a meaning as the sound of bells in a Christian country. (*HD* 23)

Marlow's narrative thus bears signs of an attempted understanding of the cultural signifiers around while also betraying the blankness in comprehension as Africa, with its "stamped-in network of paths spreading over the empty land" (*HD* 23) changes from a geographical landscape to the 'Other' space in Marlow's European imagination. Thus, before long, he too subscribes to the notion that Africa brings out the atavistic nature of the European man and feels he himself "was becoming scientifically interesting" (*HD* 24). He travels along the Congo and enters the heart of what he perceives as the African darkness, where the human voices he knows are replaced by sounds and signs he does not understand and decodes mistakenly. Thus,

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<sup>68</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 160.

later, in the face of real and immediate physical predicament, the Lombrosian vocabulary returns to the mind that had formerly rejected it, as Marlow contemplates the effects that the African wilderness may have had on Kurtz, ostensibly turning him bald. Thus, “it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation”(HD 49). The language of possession operative here, points to an absolute anarchy, which, like the medical context of the novella, appears to appropriate a moral rather than scientific vocabulary.

The dialectic of the psychic and the somatic realms with which the anatomy as well as the character of Kurtz is constructed in the narrative appropriates both the Lombrosian and Nordauian vocabularies, as well as pointing to their inadequacies. Thus Kurtz is described through his “lofty frontal bone” (HD 49) that, in the discursive vocabulary of Nordau, is a pointer to high intelligence as well as degeneration of the other psychic faculties, resulting in a clear and strong propensity towards degeneration.<sup>69</sup> While Marlow clearly explicates how Kurtz’s “nerves went wrong” (HD 50) in Africa, leading him to participate in savage rites, Kurtz’s appearance of being “at least seven feet long” (HD 59) also corresponds to the Lombrosian anatomy of excess. As William Greenslade argues, “Conrad’s deconstruction of the mind here yields a simple but crucial insight, quite outside the limited imaginative scope of degenerationist pathology: the man ‘gone wrong’ is not ‘out there’ to be labelled by positivist science, he is, of course, the man within.”<sup>70</sup> Thus the borderlines between savage and civilized, sane and insane, determined and independent, appear as precariously contingent categories in Conrad’s narratives, manifesting the fault lines in the Victorian structures of faith while also looking nostalgically and somewhat enviously back at the more comfortable notions of nosology and political optimism.<sup>71</sup>

In his study of Conrad’s appropriation as well as deconstruction of the Lombrosian system, C.T. Watts argues that Kurtz, with his gifted musical attributes

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<sup>69</sup>See Nordau, *Degeneration*, 23. For Conrad’s personal reading of Lombroso through the summaries of Nordau, see C.T. Watts, “Nordau and Kurtz: A Footnote to *Heart of Darkness*”, *Notes and Queries* 219(1974): 226-27.

<sup>70</sup>Greenslade, *Degeneration*, 114.

<sup>71</sup>See Tony Tanner, “Joseph Conrad and the last gentleman”, *Critical Quarterly* 28(1986): 109-42.

and charisma of political potential, represents the “Pied Piper attribute”<sup>72</sup> of the degenerative type: embodying the potential for seduction as well as annihilation with “the power to charm or frighten rudimentary souls into an aggravated witch-dance in his honour” (*HD* 51). Yet Conrad does not characterize Kurtz using any neat discourse of difference that bases itself on contemporary anthropological assumptions. The hysteria at the heart of darkness is as much localized in African otherness as in the finest European attributes, for “all Europe contributed to the *making* of Kurtz” (*HD* 86). Thus making and unmaking, evolutionary progress and regression, are trapped in the same dialectic of nihilism and enlightenment in Conrad’s novella about political and personal panic. The Thames and the Congo ironically emerge as similar symbols in Marlow’s stream of consciousness, both being historical pathways for the traffic of imperialism and places of darkness outside the civilized world, at different points in human history.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Watts, “Nordau and Kurtz”, 227.

<sup>73</sup> Marlow’s narrative, told at the mouth of the late nineteenth-century Thames, begins by affirming how London too “has been one of the dark places of the earth” (*HD* 9).

## 2.5 Conrad's Location as a Pre-Modernist Writer

Erich Auerbach's analysis of the narrative aesthetics developed by Modernist writers such as Woolf and Proust underlines the significance of the sentient self in the construction of the narrative process. Thus, in his study of the characterization in major Modernist narratives, Auerbach argues:

One comes upon the order and the interpretation of life which arise from life itself: that is, those which grow up in individuals themselves, which are to be discerned in their thoughts, their consciousness, and in a more concealed form in their words and actions. For there is always going on within us a process of formulation and interpretation whose subject matter is our own self. We are constantly endeavouring to give meaning and order to our lives in the past, the present, and the future, to our surroundings, the world in which we live.<sup>74</sup>

Auerbach takes as the model text of Modernist mimesis Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) where he states "The world of objective facts has almost completely vanished, almost everything stated appears by way of reflection in the consciousness of the dramatis personae."<sup>75</sup> Similar structures evolve in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as well, which emerges as a meta-fictional narrative about the self-reflexive human consciousness, where the borderlines between subjective background and intersubjective foreground, impression and reality, are constantly questioned and hollowed out. It is also a novel about political scepticism and private doubt where the cognitive crises correspond closely to the masculinity crises in an age of imperialism. In its intellectual essence and narrative complexity, Conrad's novella anticipates the Modernist novels of Woolf and Joyce which grew out of turn-of-the-century scientific and philosophical debates on the epistemology of the self, cognition and mimetic representation.<sup>76</sup> The Modernist worldview as it appears in its

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<sup>74</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Doubleday, 1957) 485.

<sup>75</sup> Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 534.

<sup>76</sup> As Judith Ryan states, consciousness in the twentieth century novel – as depicted in the works of Proust, Musil, Joyce and Woolf – was deeply influenced by the scientific and psychological discourses contemporaneous to it. William James's and Ernst Mach's philosophical underpinnings of psychology gave rise to the discourse of empiricism that "rejected the dualism of the subject and the object [arguing instead that] everything that was, subsisted in consciousness itself." Ryan, *The*

most representative works of fiction, emerges as an ambivalence about “the subjectivity of perception and cognition, a subjectivity that calls into question the unity of the observing subject as well as its relationship with the outside world.”<sup>77</sup> Conrad’s fictional frames and their narrative techniques anticipate such ambivalence.

As a pre-Modernist who is essentially unclassifiable and “floating uncertainly somewhere in between Proust and Robert Louis Stevenson”<sup>78</sup>, Conrad’s writing epitomizes the existential enigmas and epistemological uncertainties of the European mind politically situated in the late nineteenth century. Conrad had evinced his interest in the “regions of memory” in the human mind that “know nothing of time”<sup>79</sup>, thus offering a model of consciousness in his narratives with its epistemological contingency, flux and fluidity. Thus, in a typical Conradian narrative, David Lodge contends:

[t]he gratifications of the conventional adventure story are deliberately frustrated, inverted, problematised, by complex time shifts, shifts of point of view, elaborate framing devices, and a densely written, syntactically complicated, metaphorically rich prose style—all of which together retard and obstruct the delivery of simple narrative excitement.<sup>80</sup>

Lodge’s analysis of the convergence between Modernist literature and the discoveries in modern twenty-first century neuroscience carries special relevance to the argument of this chapter which seeks to situate the narrative method of Conrad

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*Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 2. With such a high premium on consciousness, empiricism as advocated by James had a profound, if understudied impact on Modernist writing and it is unsurprising to find the major Modernists delving into the depths of consciousness in order to corroborate the narrative of the sentient self in modernity and Modernist narratives themselves emerged as negotiations with the epistemology of cognition of the always mutable self, described perhaps most poignantly by Virginia Woolf as “not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged but as a luminous halo surrounding the consciousness from the beginning to the end.” Virginia Woolf, “Modern Fiction”, *The Common Reader* (London: Harcourt Brace, 1925) 212.

<sup>77</sup> Dorothy Ross, “Modernism Reconsidered”, *Modernist Impulses in the Human Sciences 1870-1930*, ed. Ross (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1994) 6.

<sup>78</sup> Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981) 206.

<sup>79</sup> Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”: A Tale of the Sea* (New York: Doubleday, 1935) 149.

<sup>80</sup> David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel: Connected Essays* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2002) 75.

within the broader realms of scientific and philosophical debates on self and cognition.

The political insight articulated in Conrad's stories about imperialist horror emerges out of phenomenological experiences that challenge presuppositions in dominant structures of knowledge. While the crisis of normative European imperial masculinity is most immediately evident in a later text *Lord Jim* (1900) which emerges as "a defining tale of doubt which threatened the project of European expansion"<sup>81</sup> as well as a neo-Gothic narrative about the "threat of engulfment posed by the feminine,"<sup>82</sup> *Heart of Darkness* is possibly Conrad's darkest depiction of the failure of normative imperial masculinity and the consequent crisis in cognition and narration. Conrad's narrative efforts to make the reader hear, feel and see, and the corresponding difficulties faced by his narrators to communicate their crises, correspond closely to the larger epistemological uncertainties in his fictional worlds. As David Lodge argues:

In a world where nothing is certain, in which transcendental belief has been undermined by scientific materialism, and even the objectivity of science is qualified by relativity and uncertainty, the single human voice, telling its own story, can seem the only authentic way of rendering consciousness.<sup>83</sup>

The tension between subjective experience and ontic reality, between private perception and communal communication, and between familiar experiences and defamiliarized expressions runs across the entirety of Conrad's oeuvre. Thus, in Conrad's writing, narration often emerges as a backward process whereby objects are decoded post-perception.<sup>84</sup> Such perspectival positions in the narratives of Conrad rely less on what actually transpires in the physical landscape of change than on how such events impressionistically affect the consciousness of the perceiver. Crucially, the narrative style that Conrad deploys – one that anticipates Modernist

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<sup>81</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 59.

<sup>82</sup> Padmini Mongia, "'Ghosts of the Gothic': Spectral Women and Colonized Spaces in *Lord Jim*", *The Conradian: Conrad and Gender*, ed. Andrew Michael Roberts (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 1993) 1.

<sup>83</sup> David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel*, 87.

<sup>84</sup> Christopher L. Miller, "The Discouring Heart: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*", *Joseph Conrad*, ed. Elaine Jordan (London: Macmillan, 1996) 89-90.



experiments of communicating pure human consciousness in language – appears deliberately destabilized as a way of capturing an altered and altering world.<sup>85</sup>

In one of his autobiographical asides, Conrad himself had spelt out the location of the sentient self that oversees the creative process at work:

In truth every novelist must begin by creating for himself a world, great or little, in which he can honestly believe. This world cannot be made otherwise than in his own image; it is fated to remain individual and a little mysterious, and yet it must resemble something already familiar to the experience, the thoughts and the sensations of his readers.<sup>86</sup>

Conrad's narratives of difference offer not so much the pleasure of masculinist adventure tale along the lines of Henry Rider Haggard's fiction but rather showcase the "dialogic tensions and interpretive indeterminacies incompatible with the uncritical reproduction of Victorian ideologic (and generic) norms and goals."<sup>87</sup> Essentially containing the irresolvable aporia between phenomenological experience and logical knowledge, private ambivalence and political presupposition, Conrad's works problematize the narratives of imperial romance that contained the Social-Darwinist rhetoric of civilizational supremacy used to legitimize imperial territorialisation.<sup>88</sup> More significantly, with its experiments in language that sought to capture the human thought processes, Conrad's writing instantiates "the tensions of a split heritage, divided between the demands of the adventure and the 'literary' novel."<sup>89</sup> The literariness in Conrad's writing emerges as a self-reflexive awareness of its own epistemological process – thus reflecting the ambivalence of the self-reflecting human mind – as well as "the rhetorical strategy of negation by which Western writing conceives of the Other as absence, emptiness, nothingness, or death."<sup>90</sup> But what problematizes the politics of narration furthermore is the manner in which the nothingness and excess that the perceiving mind seeks to project onto

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<sup>85</sup> Padmini Mongia, "Narrative Strategy and Imperialism in Conrad's *Lord Jim*", *Studies in the Novel* 24.2 (Summer 1992): 173-86; 174.

<sup>86</sup> Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* (Middlesex: The Echo Library, 2008) 7.

<sup>87</sup> Lisa Schneider, *Conrad's Narratives of Difference: Not Exactly Tales for Boys* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 4.

<sup>88</sup> See Linda Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000) 16-34.

<sup>89</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, 44.

<sup>90</sup> David Spur, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1993) 92.

the 'Other', comes back to consume itself. Such a reversal is enacted through articulation by unsure and nervous narrators, who flag up their failures to negotiate with their narratives, in inconclusive tales of guilt and unresolved melancholia.

## 2.6 Existentialist and Cognitive crisis in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

### 2.6.1 Conrad and his Contemporary Discourses on Nerves

It needs to be borne in mind that Conrad was writing at a time when neurology was first being scientifically systematized in medical analyses. As the Nobel Prize winning neuroscientist Eric Kandel elucidates in his research on the modes of memory, the 1890s were the time when the notion of the nervous system was first being formulated through empirical medical discourse and most notably in the works of Santiago Raman y Cajal, a Spanish painter turned neuroscientist who was the first to offer a standardized knowledge of the shape of the nerve cell and the nature of neural transmission.<sup>91</sup> Arguably the most influential neuroscientist who ever lived, Cajal elucidated the primary principles of the nervous system that revolutionized neuroscience. His description of the nervous system as an information circuit based on sending and receiving signals in set patterns across neurons was radically novel, replacing the model of anarchic interaction that was previously used to describe the brain.

Cajal delineated three different types of neurons: the Sensory Neurons that connected the stimulus from the outside world to the various sense organs in the human body, the Motor Neurons that connected to muscle and gland cells, and the Interneurons that served as relays between the other neural transmissions. Most importantly, Cajal proved that neural transmissions took place between the axon of one neuron and the dendrite of the next, through a gap which was subsequently named (by the British neurologist Charles Sherrington) *synapse*, from the Greek *synaptein* meaning to bind together. The synapse as taken up by Sherrington was the chief integer in the integrative structure of the nervous system that he subsequently described in medical vocabulary. The synapse was a space between two neurons where signals passed. It might also be read as a symbol for the space of nervous

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<sup>91</sup> Eric R. Kandel, *In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a New Science of Mind* (New York & London: W.W.Norton & Company, 2006) 61.

negotiation that integrated the neural network of the human body. Cajal was actually introduced and made famous in England by Sherrington who, in his memorial to Cajal in 1949 stated that the latter

[s]olved at a stroke the great question of the direction of the nerve-currents in their travel through brain and spinal cord [ . . . ] [by showing] that each nerve-path is always a line of one-way traffic only, and that the direction of that traffic is at all times irreversibly the same.<sup>92</sup>

Sherrington himself in his influential work entitled *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System* analyzed the neural activities determining the human reflex, inferring that the normal functioning of the human nervous system was dependent upon the successful integration of the inhibition and excitation of neurons under stimuli. In a more elegant extension of Cajal's inference, Sherrington discovered the mode of nervous transmission that Cajal himself had not anticipated in his largely anatomical study of the nerves. Rather than theorizing an unconditional flow of neural transmission, Sherrington inferred, after more extensive research, that certain neurons acted as inhibitory sites inasmuch as they stopped the flow of signals from emerging out of their presynaptic terminals. Thus the Sherringtonian synapse was a complex site of nervous negotiation which saw the relay of transmission as well as non-transmission, akin to telegraphic communication where signals are passed or withheld. Sherrington ascribed the power of integration of inhibition and excitation to the motor neuron that "totals up all the excitatory and inhibitory signals it receives from the other neurons that converge upon it and then carries out an appropriate course of action based on that calculation."<sup>93</sup> Sherrington's concept of the synapse as a neurological unit of interaction helped formulate a structure of nervous transmission and an analysis of the neural behaviour associated with nervous perception and action.<sup>94</sup>

Sherrington's synapse immediately suggests parallels with the blank spaces in telegraphic transmissions; the sites where one transmission ended and the next

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<sup>92</sup> J.C.Eccles and W.C.Gibson, *Sherrington: His Life and Thought* (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1979) 203.

<sup>93</sup> Eric Kandel, *In Search of Memory*, 71.

<sup>94</sup> Charles Sherrington, *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948) 15-17. See also Judith P. Swazey, "Sherrington's Concept of Integrative Action", *Journal of the History of Biology* 1.1 (1968): 57-89.

began.<sup>95</sup> The corollaries between the human nervous system and telegraphic transmission were not unnoticed even by the natural scientists of the nineteenth century. Herbert Spencer, an important influence on neurologists such as John Hughlings Jackson, argued in his *Principles of Psychology*, that the evolutionary development of scientific intelligence was structurally and functionally comparable with the traffic of telegraphic transmission.<sup>96</sup> In a similar vein, the American cultural critic George Prescott asserted that the telegraphic system, “in its most common form, communicating intelligence between distant places, performs the function of the sensitive nerves of the human body.”<sup>97</sup> Functioning as a symbol for national integration as well as imperial expansion, the telegraph network was quickly correlated with the neural network of the human body. More significantly, the health and contingencies of both networks emerged as issues that reflected the broader anxieties, merging the *body technologic* and the *body neurologic*, the medical and the political realms of panic. It is therefore hardly surprising that nerves were such a significant site of contention in the late nineteenth century, a bio-political moment obsessed with eugenics and racial hygiene.

Although there is no conclusive evidence for Conrad’s direct knowledge of the discoveries of the new neurology, it may be noted that *Heart of Darkness* was first published in 1899, the same year in which Cajal’s massive treatise *Comparative Study of the Sensory Areas of the Human Cortex*, was published to great critical acclaim. In his work on Conrad’s personal history of nervous illness, his fictional works and his contemporary medical culture, Martin Bock studies how the nervous experiences in Conrad’s fiction problematize nineteenth-century notions of hysteria

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<sup>95</sup> Similar analogies are used in the theories of modern neuroscience as well which states that “Nerve fibres are sort of like telegraphic wires. They allow neurons in one part of the brain to communicate with neurons in another.” Joseph LeDoux, *The Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003) 40. However, in a later passage in the same book, LeDoux asserts that unlike telegraphic transmission through wires, the electric transmission through nerves is not a passive process but is “*biologically propagated*” (44) and entails electrochemical reactions that are far more complex than normal electric transmissions in telegraphic networks.

<sup>96</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology*. 2 Vols. (London: Williams & Norgate, 1870) 1:386-87. Cited in Elizabeth Musselman, *Nervous Conditions: Science and the Body Politic in Early Industrial Britain* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006) 192. For a study on Spencer’s influence on Conrad’s fiction, see Brian W. Shaffer, “‘Rebarbarizing Civilization’: Conrad’s African fiction and Spencerian Sociology”, *PMLA* 108.1 (January 1993): 45-58.

<sup>97</sup> George Prescott, *History, Theory, and Practice of the Electric Telegraph* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860) 242. Cited in Elizabeth Musselman, *Nervous Conditions*, 192.

and its gender constructs. As Bock suggests, “Conrad lived at the moment of the birth of modern psychoanalysis and was also treated by physicians who were proto-Freudian.”<sup>98</sup> Freudian psychoanalysis may be read as the defining moment of hysteria’s transition from a typically female malady to a psychic disturbance that grows out of unresolved fear, shock or guilt. The masculine hysteria so pervasive in Conrad’s fiction corresponds – as Elaine Showalter suggests – to the unreliable narration of his male protagonists, and occupies the same historical moment when “Freud was exploring the unconscious.”<sup>99</sup> In an interesting analysis in the same work, Showalter situates Conrad’s unreliable narration in its contemporary socio-medical context, particularly in relation to Nordau’s definition of the degenerative hysterical subject consumed by emotionalism and excitability. A frequent sufferer of nervous breakdowns, Conrad’s personal familiarity with his contemporary popular discourses on nerves is evident in his letters to friends and colleagues.<sup>100</sup> Connected to this was the issue of masculinity, as Conrad lived and suffered at a time when hysteria was changing from a typical female malady to a masculine condition. His fictional narratives – especially those that correspond to journeys to the ‘Other’ places of European imperialism – frequently depict nervous male protagonists in private and political panic. This panic emerges in Conrad’s writing as a “narrative self-consciousness”<sup>101</sup> that interrogates dominant and standardized bio-political

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<sup>98</sup> Bock, *Joseph Conrad and the Psychological Medicine* (Texas: Tech University Press, 2002) xxi. In his remarkable research on Conrad’s personal nervous illnesses, the inadequate treatment he was often subjected to in the hands of ill-informed physicians and its reflections on his literature, Bock reads *The Arrow of Gold* (1919) as a fictional narrative that “marks a change in Conrad’s understanding of nervous disease, and, like Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1922), questions whether pre-Freudian medical psychology could effectively treat the neuroses of the modern world” (xxiii).

<sup>99</sup> Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 83. For a detailed study of *Heart of Darkness* in terms of its location in the medical and imperial culture of its time, see also Gary Adelman, *Heart of Darkness: Search for the Unconscious* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987).

<sup>100</sup> Written in semi-humorous tone, Conrad’s letter to John Galsworthy in May 1910 refers to his “incipient softening of the brain!” that was theorized as a symptom of degeneration by the leading medical practitioners of his day such as Julius Mickle and Clifford Hackney. *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, 4:329. In a letter to Sir Hugh Clifford in the winter of 1910, Conrad wrote of his illness as “The horrible nervous tension of the last two years (of which even my wife knows nothing)”. Evident in the awareness of his nervous illness is a sense of shame, of compromised masculinity; as Conrad goes on to add, “I am ashamed to show my face to you even from a distance—in writing”. *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, 4:330.

<sup>101</sup> Andrew Michael Roberts, *Conrad and Masculinity* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000) 7. Roberts goes on to suggest how this self-consciousness in Conrad’s writing “is associated with scepticism about the possibility of truth and understanding” (7) and generates an epistemological doubt which makes his narratives “attend closely to processes of communication and exchange” (8). Robert’s

knowledge, while also incorporating the painful perceptions of changing self, body and language.

As a cognitive condition that is re-experienced in the retrospective narrative, delayed decoding takes the reader “directly into the observer’s consciousness at the very moment of perception, before it has been translated into its cause.”<sup>102</sup> Delayed decoding as a narrative strategy thus corresponds to a nervous condition painfully connected to the slowness of the cognitive process, drawing attention not only to the act of perception but also to the very act of narration itself while also defamiliarizing both. It is thus no surprise that Conrad’s narratives have attracted formalist critics who seek to study the politics of *ostranenie*.<sup>103</sup> The aesthetics of defamiliarization in Conrad is most immediately evident in his Preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* where he asserts his aim as an artist was “by the power of the written word to make you [the reader] hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, is to make you *see*.”<sup>104</sup> The evocation of the human senses of percipience and perception that Conrad makes in this part of his *Preface* further corroborates the claim laid out here about the merging of the narratological and the neurological codes of cognition. Such a merging is of course further problematized by Conrad’s interrogations of the cognitive self through a communicative method that proceeds through “the connection between epistemology and narrative technique”.<sup>105</sup>

The unreliability in the narrations of Conrad’s protagonists may also be read as the pointer to the nervous experiences that constitute the characters’ transition

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analysis of masculinity in Conrad’s fiction as a self-reflexive condition that generates fractures in faith supports the claim made in this chapter.

<sup>102</sup> Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, 175.

<sup>103</sup> In their bid to revolutionize the aesthetics of narration, the Russian Formalists, especially by Victor Shklovsky, advocated the use of defamiliarization technique, *ostranenie*. Through *ostranenie*, the Formalists advocated, attention would be brought to the act of writing itself which, far from concealing its constructed qualities through a seeming seamlessness, would play up the fractured zones and fault lines in narration. For a detailed study of the tenets of Russian Formalism as expounded in the works of Victor Shklovsky, Boris Tomashevsky and Boris Eichenbaum, see *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. and trans. Lee Thomas Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965).

<sup>104</sup> Cited *Conrad’s Prefaces to his Works*, ed. David Garnet (London: J.M.Dent & Sons, 1937) 52.

<sup>105</sup> Torsten Pettersson, *Consciousness and Time: A Study in the Philosophy and Narrative Technique of Joseph Conrad* (Abo: Abo Akademi, 1982) 95.

from interpellated identities to ambivalent feeling subjects who recognize their loss of agency in a world of bio-political determinism. Such transitions in Conrad's characters inform their existentialist realm of understanding through the phenomenological experience that also constitutes political scepticism. Nervousness in the Conradian narrative – manifested in deceptive appearances and delayed decoding – thus emerges as the panic that merges privately perceived political ambivalence with sensory instability. Such nervousness connects not only to the masculinity crisis in Conrad – whereupon the imperial masculine identity is deconstructed – but also informs the inward turn that opens the subject to an inconclusive existentialist enigma that may never be fully reported or articulated. The existentialist realm in Conrad's narration is an extension of the embodied narration enacted by his characters, a mode whose “motivation is existential [as] it is directly connected with his [the narrator's] practical experiences, with the joys and sorrows he has experienced, with his moods and needs.”<sup>106</sup> The embodied nature of Marlow's narration in *Heart of Darkness* – a “parabolic text”<sup>107</sup> that incorporates a process of unveiling – is further heightened by a self-reflective quality “firmly constituted by the natural parameter of human consciousness, of experientiality.”<sup>108</sup> This experientiality – a cognitive category of the subject's knowledge of its own unique subjectivity – is thus a phenomenological process as well as a biological one, and Conrad's narrative method combines the two realms through its embodied narrativity. A study of Conrad's narrative technique in *Heart of Darkness* as a decelerated defamiliarized sensory process may be made by locating the text in its contemporary scene in neurology as well as by interpreting it with current theories that seek to bridge phenomenology and cognitive science.

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<sup>106</sup> Franz K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, trans. Charlotte Goedsche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 93.

<sup>107</sup> J. Hillis Miller, “*Heart of Darkness* Revisited”, *Conrad Revisited: Essays for the Eighties* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1985) 31.

<sup>108</sup> Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996) 20. Fludernik seeks to deconstruct the divide between teller and reflector that Stanzel upholds in his view of narrative and instead proposes the holistic schemata of experientiality that constitutes telling, viewing and thinking all together. In situating her notion of experientiality against the Heideggerian notion of being in time, Fludernik argues that experientiality incorporates temporal experience as well as an evaluative category of recognizing the same (21).



## 2.6.2 Conrad's Delayed Decoding as the Narration of Nervous Experience

In a letter to H.G.Wells on 30 November 1903, Conrad commented on his view of writing thus: “[F]or me, writing—the *only possible writing*—is just simply the conversion of nervous forces into phrases.”<sup>109</sup> Pervasive throughout Conrad's narratives – especially in *Heart of Darkness* – is the manner in which the nervous experience and the traumatic encounter of the human subject are translated into language. As Richard Ambrosini argues, “*Heart of Darkness* is the furthest point in Conrad's attempt to communicate his intended effect through a suggestive language paralleled by an extra-fictional communication.”<sup>110</sup> Part of the difficulty and density of expressions in Conrad's writing can thus be attributed to the efforts on the part of his narrators to communicate what Virginia Woolf classified as the language of illness which is “more primitive, more sensual, more obscene”, a form of expression in which “things are said, truths are blurted out”.<sup>111</sup> In its effort to articulate embodied experientiality, Conrad's writing curiously connects also to the “*nerve language*”<sup>112</sup> described in the memoirs of Daniel Paul Schreber, the German judge who suffered from dementia and was posthumously (and textually) interpreted by Freud.<sup>113</sup> Conrad's writing thus corresponds to the embodied expression whereby the

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<sup>109</sup> *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, 3:45. As Martin Bock suggests in his research, “Conrad was known, by his friends, to write hysterical persona letters.” *Joseph Conrad and Psychological Medicine*, 77.

<sup>110</sup> Ambrosini, *Conrad's Fiction as Critical Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 84.

<sup>111</sup> Virginia Woolf, “On Being Ill”, *The Moment and Other Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1948) 11; 13.

<sup>112</sup> Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, trans. and ed. Ida McAlpine and Richard A. Hunter (New York: New York Review Books, 2000) 54-55. Schreber describes the nerve language as different from normal language of everyday expression inasmuch as the former depends purely on the will of the individual. Thus the nerve language, in Schreber's analysis, emerges as a more authentic form of expression in correspondence to the experientiality of the inwardly-turned agency that is purely unique to the human subject.

<sup>113</sup> Schreber's account of his nervous illness and Freud's analysis of the same constitute a crisis of masculine identity and the fear of un-gendering that contributes towards the trauma. As John E. Towes suggests, Schreber's delusion includes the forbidden fantasy of becoming a woman as well as

knowledge of the self can only arise from a heightened awareness of the self's unique subjective presence that resists symbolic realms. More importantly, the delayed nature of his protagonists' decoding supports the idea that increasingly interests researchers in cognitive phenomenology, one that states that "time comes into being as a function of our embodied interaction with the world."<sup>114</sup>

First used by Ian Watt and described as the "forward temporal progression of the mind, as it receives messages from the outside world, with the much slower reflexive process of making out their meaning"<sup>115</sup>, Conrad's delayed decoding has received ample attention from literary critics who have seen it as a strategy of narrative apprehension, of a deliberate frustration of linear temporality and politics of perception.<sup>116</sup> But few have drawn attention to the neurological dimension suggested in Conrad's use of this narrative technique. As the "gap between impression and understanding"<sup>117</sup>, delayed decoding may be interpreted as much through neurological theories as narrative ones. It entails the representation of a nervous and incomplete interpretation of the immediate source of stimuli. The feeling and speaking subject thus attempts to negotiate between the perception of the sent stimulus and its articulation. The delayed decoding in Conrad and the strategy of seeking to speak to the senses, are both premised on the failed attempt to communicate subjective experience in language, in the complex framework of narratives within narratives.

Points of view emerge as pivotal in an understanding of the stream of consciousness within *Heart of Darkness*. The novel depicts complex confluences and

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the perceived threat that he is the victim of strategic unmaking, perpetrated by external agencies of control and coercion. Towes, "Refashioning the Masculine Subject in Early Modernism: Narratives of Self-Dissolution and Self-Construction in Psychoanalysis and Literature, 1900-1914", *The Mind of Modernism*, 309. Such interpretations support the claim made in this chapter that language and nerves were related to broader notions of masculinity and masculine identity at the turn of the twentieth century.

<sup>114</sup> Raymond W. Gibbs, *Embodiment and Cognitive Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 17.

<sup>115</sup> Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, 175.

<sup>116</sup> For analyses of Conrad's use of the delayed decoding technique, see Cedric Watts, *A Preface to Conrad*, 114-16 and *The Deceptive Text: An Introduction to Covert Plots* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1984) 43-46.

<sup>117</sup> Watt, 176-77.

super-impositions of several points of view: Marlow's on Kurtz's, Marlow's on the various reporters on Kurtz, the inset narrator's on Marlow, the inset narrator's on Marlow's point of view on his immediate audience which also includes the inset-narrator. There is thus a self-reflexive circuit of points of view within the narrative that is a story of repression, entropy and loss. Such traffic of perspectives brings into play various varieties of reference within the narrative which disturbingly depicts how the subject's objective conception of its environment also constitutes a detached notion of itself as an object in the same perceptual field.<sup>118</sup> *Heart of Darkness* is unique in the manner in which the subjective experience of shock is brought into being through language and how language therefore informs experience rather than simply describing it.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, as Bruce Johnson contends, Conrad's delayed decoding "resembles the attempt of Hemingway and before him of Mark Twain to recognize that there is no such thing as an isolated and meaningful fact or event or object. Meaning [. . .] is a function of connectedness."<sup>120</sup> The cognitive complexities of Conrad's narrators correspond closely to their emotional crises that collectively point to the panic of agency. The linguistic crisis – manifested in clumsy expressions and self-conscious unreliability – suffered by Conrad's nervous male protagonists ironically underline the existentialist insight they eventually and painfully attain out of their subjective experiences in panic and doubt.

An obvious pointer to the existentialist crisis faced by the masculine subject in a defamiliarized space time, the *delayed decoding* so characteristic of the Conradian narrative emerges as a nervous condition that showcases a slowing down of the cognitive process. This is evinced in *Heart of Darkness* in Marlow's travel up the Congo where the forests around appear as effects even before their objectivity is cognized by the perceiving mind. A narrative as well as a cognitive principle of perception, delayed decoding can offer rich analogical responses to readings in neuroscience as a deliberation on the neural flow in the human machinery of cognition. This also expounds the close correspondences between the nervous and the narrative economy that characterize *Heart of Darkness* as Marlow travels

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<sup>118</sup> See Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) 222-23.

<sup>119</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988) 369.

<sup>120</sup> Bruce Johnson, "Conrad's Impressionism and Watt's Delayed Decoding", *Conrad Revisited: Essays for the Eighties*, ed. Ross C. Murfin (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1983) 60.

through the Congo between various telegraphic stations and famously sees the effect of the shower of arrows on his senses before decoding their materiality. The passage deserves to be quoted in full in order to depict the deferral in the cognitive process involved in the act:

Then I had to look at the river mighty quick because there was a snag in the fairway. Sticks, little sticks, were flying about, thick; they were whizzing before my nose, dropping below me, striking behind me against my pilot-house. All this time the river, the shore, the woods were very quiet—perfectly quiet. I could only hear the heavy splashing thump of the stern-wheel and the patter of these things. We cleared the snag clumsily. Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at! (*HD* 45-46)

The representation of the cognitive process in operation here moves from the effect to the cause, from the unsettled impression of the object to the solid materiality of the same. As the phenomenological break between seeing and understanding, the delayed decoding in *Heart of Darkness* emerges as miscognition as well as a deliberate narrative misrepresentation that retrospectively attempts to transform a subjective moment of cognitive crisis into an intersubjective experience through language. The politics of narration in *Heart of Darkness* is premised on the effect that is conveyed through “juxtaposition between a *story* of ‘what happened’ to Marlow and a *tale* of the effect that those events had on him.”<sup>121</sup> Marlow seeks to secure his original moment of confusion by retaining its real sensation within his narrative frames. His narration thus problematizes the classic hermeneutic reading of the subject’s use of retention as a form of intentionality where content is no longer real sensation but an intentional presence.<sup>122</sup> The deliberate misrepresentation of objects by retaining the original moment of confusion recurs in *Heart of Darkness* in Marlow’s report of his mistaken analysis of the shrunken heads on poles in Kurtz’s island, heads that had initially appeared through his binoculars as decorative or totemic balls. As he remedies his earlier misrepresentation, Marlow reports:

These round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing—food for thought and also for vultures if there had been any looking down from the sky [. . .] They would have been

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<sup>121</sup> Ambrosini, *Conrad’s Fiction as Critical Discourse*, 85.

<sup>122</sup> See Shaun Gallagher, *The Inordinance of Time* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998) 131.

even more impressive, those heads on the stakes, if their faces had not been turned to the house. (*HD* 57)

Marlow's misinterpretation at a point in the past is thus reported in its original temporal structure in the present time to his listeners. In his analysis of Conrad's narrative mode and its delayed decoding, Edward Said suggests that the "details of reality" in Conrad, "are realized by the recollecting mind" which retraces "the designs of experience."<sup>123</sup> The double-helical narrative and the repetition of the same event with different interpretations articulate the panic perceived in the past that lingers into the present. This narrative strategy of communicating nervousness through repetitions thus connects to the broader masculinity panic that Marlow is subjected to in the heart of darkness. Patricia Waugh analyses the shrunken-heads episode in *Heart of Darkness* and argues how it exemplifies the convergence of cognitive and narrative planes in the novel at a temporal level, a convergence that informs the epistemological enigma in Conrad's story about negative enlightenment and existentialist crisis:

The narrating Marlow, of course, has known all along the identity of the round balls, but has chosen to inhabit the perspective of the experiential character. Reader and listener share his slow approach, with some trepidation and much anticipation, to Kurtz's station, awaiting the first signs of the embodiment of that Voice heard through Marlow's narrative. [. . .] Because the reader experiences Marlow's original sensory confusion, his current interpretative problems appear to be simply one more layer of epistemological uncertainty.<sup>124</sup>

Delayed decoding as a narrative strategy appears also in *The Shadow Line* (1916), "an elaborately-structured text involving various forms of distance and mediation."<sup>125</sup> This features most immediately in the novella where the narrator describes the rain, first by its effects on his senses, and then by its material and real presence. The passage from the novel (where the word 'delayed' itself emerges with

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<sup>123</sup> Edward Said, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966) 88.

<sup>124</sup> Patricia Waugh, *Practising postmodernism, reading modernism* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992) 97.

<sup>125</sup> Jakob Lothe, *Conrad's Narrative Method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 117.

its palpable effect on the cognitive brain) depicts the difficulties of description as well as the self-reflective process of cognition:

I became bothered by curious, irregular sounds of faint tapping on the deck. They could be heard single, in pairs, in groups. While I wondered at this mysterious devilry, I received a slight blow under the left eye and felt an enormous tear run down my cheek. Raindrops. Enormous. Forerunners of something. Tap. Tap. Tap. . . . [ . . . ] Suddenly—how am I to convey it? Well, suddenly the darkness turned into water. This is the only suitable figure.<sup>126</sup>

The passage problematizes the normal process of cognition in which conscious experience is integrated in the brain through the process of decoding allowed through a nervous system which also works as “an information network [ . . . ] [that] generates and transmits information in accordance with definite natural codes.”<sup>127</sup> This problematization is done by a deliberate defamiliarization of the cognitive process as well as by situating the sentient self in the drama of its own delayed decoding. Thus the difficulty of communication becomes the core content of the passage as the tap sounds turn into rain and the darkness turns into water. More significantly, the moment of cognition merges with the moment of embodiment in this passage, whereby the raindrops are recognized only when those touch the subject’s body. The embodied cognition triggers the meaningful experiential process through which the subject becomes its self through an integration of information and awareness.<sup>128</sup> The emergence of the corporeal fleshy frame as the site of cognitive certainty in this description by Conrad connects to the phenomenological view of the body’s “double-belongingness to the order of the ‘object’ and to the order of the ‘subject.’”<sup>129</sup> This passage is remarkable in the manner in which the awareness of the object emerges as subordinate to the awareness of the process of awareness itself. Secondly, its phrase – “How am I to convey it?” – illustrates how the crisis of

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<sup>126</sup> Conrad, *The Shadow Line: A Confession*, ed. Jeremy Hawthorn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) 113.

<sup>127</sup> Mario Bunge, *The Mind-Body Problem: A Psychobiological Approach* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1980) 49-50.

<sup>128</sup> Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 7.

<sup>129</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, ed. Claude Lefort (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968) 137.

intentionality is mapped onto the crisis of language as the subject struggles to find the appropriate metaphor that would connect to the irreducible cognitive process.<sup>130</sup>

Perhaps the darkest passage containing delayed decoding in Conrad occurs in *The Secret Agent* (1907) in the scene where Winnie Verloc stares at the corpse of her husband whom she has hysterically murdered to avenge the death of her brother Stevie. After the murder and standing in the stillness of her drawing room that looks perfectly respectable and domestic, Winnie perceives the increasing presence of a ticking sound in the room that cannot possibly have emerged from the wall clock that has no audible ticking mechanism. The passage tracks the flicking eye that seeks to trace the sound and decode it through a series of cinematic close-ups that represent the characteristic process of cognition:

By the position of the body the face of Mr Verloc was not visible to Mrs Verloc, his widow. Her fine, sleepy eyes, travelling downward on the track of the sound, became contemplative on meeting a flat object which protruded a little beyond the edge of the sofa. It was the handle of the domestic carving knife with nothing strange about it but its position at right angles to Mr Verloc's waistcoat and the fact that something dripped from it. Dark drops fell on the floorcloth one after another, with a sound of ticking growing fast and furious like the pulse of an insane clock. At its highest speed this ticking changed into a continuous sound of trickling. Mrs Verloc watched that transformation with shadows of anxiety coming and going on her face. It was a trickle, dark, swift, thin . . . Blood!<sup>131</sup>

The passage, with its delayed decoding, enacts a double defamiliarization. Firstly, the deadness of Mr Verloc is almost effaced with images of domesticity and respectability such as the carving knife and Mr Verloc's waistcoat. Secondly, the depiction of the dripping sound of blood (that is decoded after much delay) is first correlated with the sound of the ticking clock, again a perfectly domestic drawing room device. What modern neuroscientists classify as the distinction between *simple awareness* and *reflexive awareness* is amply evident in Conrad's depiction here, where the immediate cognitive function of language is compromised by a painfully heightened attention of the mind to its own process of cognition.<sup>132</sup> As a novel with

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<sup>130</sup> Mark Johnson, "Metaphor and Cognition", *Handbook of Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, ed. Shaun Gallagher and Daniel Schmicking (London: Springer, 2010) 402-05.

<sup>131</sup> Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale* (London: Penguin Books, 1963) 236.

<sup>132</sup> See Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World: An Introduction to the Neuroscience of Subjective Experience* (London: Carnac, 2002) 82. Solms and Turnbull go on to

an overt and a covert plot where “there are troubling resemblances between the world of the authorities and the world of subversion” and where the two realms “blend, part and blend again”<sup>133</sup>, Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* is about the panic of human agency in a world of bio-political terrorism.<sup>134</sup>

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analyse how the units of consciousness (qualia) proceed by forging links between the self and objects, a link that emerges as compromised due to exposure to defamiliarized paradigms of experience that Conrad’s narrators undergo. Alluding to the work of Damasio on the cognitive role of emotions, Solms and Turnbull argue that “consciousness consists of awareness of what is happening around us, grounded in a background medium of self-awareness” (93). In Conrad, this background medium of self-awareness is painfully heightened to such a degree through the characters’ inward turn, that the awareness of what is happening around is compromised. Thus it may be argued that the epistemology of narration in Conrad is synchronic with the slippage between the narrative self and its awareness of its own emerging consciousness.

<sup>133</sup> Watts, *The Deceptive Text*, 111.

<sup>134</sup> As Alex Houen informs in his study of political panic and terrorism out of which Conrad’s novel grew, *The Secret Agent* alludes to “‘Extradition Act’ (1870) and then the ‘Aliens Act’ (1905), both of which helped to support the relatively nascent legal category of political crime. As far as many European nations were concerned, Britain’s asylum policy simply helped terrorists, and undermined the stricter European legislative measures—it was not until 1914 that Britain followed most of Europe in registering, and retaining records on, resident ‘aliens’.” Alex Houen, *Terrorism and Modern Literature from Joseph Conrad to Ciaran Carson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 35.



### 2.6.3 Reading the delayed decoding in *Heart of Darkness* with current theories in Cognitive Neuroscience

It is interesting to interpret the human experience depicted in *Heart of Darkness* with some current theories of cognitive neuroscience that investigate what makes or un-makes the human subject's awareness of its own self. In particular, it is intriguing to see how Marlow's *autobiographical self* – the form of “extended consciousness” that constitutes complex concepts and language – is both compromised and informed by the unresolved experiences embedded in his *proto self*, normally characterised by “interconnected and temporarily coherent collection of neural patterns which represent the state of the organism.”<sup>135</sup> The unresolved nervous experiences embodied by Marlow manifest not only in his physical state of “shuddering wonder, like a passage through some inconceivable world that had no hope in it and no desire” (*HD* 70) but also in the traumatic repetition of nervousness in failing language. Conrad's novella actually situates language as the space that self-reflexively foregrounds subjective proprioception that the neurologist Charles Sherrington had classified in 1906 as the “sixth sense.”<sup>136</sup> The epistemology of the feeling and speaking self in *Heart of Darkness* exhibits how the crises of embodied experientiality and temporality are connected and disconnected through failures in cognition, narration and articulation. Such failures in Conrad's narrative emerge in connection to broader structures of private ambivalence and political panic.

The anthropological debates prevalent in modern neuroscience offer interesting interpretations of the truly complex phenomena of delayed decoding evidenced in Conrad's fiction. Stephen Levinson argues that “linguistic patterns point to some systematic differences in the cognitive style with which individuals of different cultures deal with space.” This idea offers the context-specific attributes

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<sup>135</sup> Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotions in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1999) 154.

<sup>136</sup> Raymond Gibbs, *Embodiment and Cognitive Science*, 29. Gibbs defines proprioception as the embodied system of perception – coming from nerve endings – which operates automatically and unconsciously when “the brain is disconnected from the nervous system” (29).

that can be neuroscientifically taken up in order to arrive at an integrative analysis of various material and aesthetics cultures and creating a condition whereby “cognition is the intermediate variable that promises to explain cultural propensities in spatial behaviour, and language may offer us more than privileged access to it.”<sup>137</sup> Language itself emerges in Conrad’s narratives less as a signifier of stable communicative ontology than as an epistemological process that attempts to articulate meanings that lie not embedded inside but perpetually extended outside the narrative, “enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out the haze, in the likeness of one of those misty halos that, sometimes, are made visible by the spectral illuminations of moonshine” (*HD* 9).

In his analysis of the contexts in *Heart of Darkness*, Cedric Watts delineates four principal strategies of narration in Conrad apart from delayed decoding: empirical hyperbole, reductive reification, dwarfing perspective and the frustrating context. These strategies play up the experientiality of the sentient subject over and above the purely functional frame of language.<sup>138</sup> The impact of the spoken word on the senses of the hearer is frequently described by Conrad as a complex cognitive process in the brain. The narrator of *The Shadow Line* thus insists:

The word ‘Delay’ entered the secret chamber of my brain, resounded there like a tolling bell which maddens the ear, affected all my senses, took on a black colouring, a bitter taste, a deadly meaning.<sup>139</sup>

The passage depicts Conrad’s attempts at connecting cognition with narrative technique, showing the effect of a spoken word on the sensory signals across the brain. Through the slowness of sensory reception that draws attention to the process of perception itself, this passage reveals “the complex cascade of [neural] processes [that] underlie our capacity for understanding.”<sup>140</sup> More significantly, the passage

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<sup>137</sup> Stephen C. Levinson, “Language and Space”, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25 (1996): 353-82; 356.

<sup>138</sup> Cedric Watts, *Conrad’s Heart of Darkness: A Critical and Contextual Discussion* (Milano: Mursia International, 1977) 69-73.

<sup>139</sup> Conrad, *The Shadow Line*, 64.

<sup>140</sup> Peter Hagoort, “The fractionation of spoken language understanding by measuring electrical and magnetic brain signals”, *Philosophical Transactions, Biological Sciences* 363.1493 (March 2008): 1055-69; 1055. Hagoort’s article demonstrates how understanding of speech sounds is lexically itemized as well as being context-dependent and how a full understanding of speech sounds entails an integration of the two facets.

demonstrates how the normal brain processes through which the familiar spoken word is perceived are compromised during heightened feelings and nervousness. Remarkable in Conrad's description here is the manner in which the aural register is informed by the visual as well as the gustatory registers as the sound of the word "delay" takes on a black colour and a bitter taste. The confusing convergence of the different realms of sense in this passage – the word "delay" is reported to have affected all senses – may be analysed as a disturbance of what modern neuroscientists describe as the "telepathic activity" involved in speaking and hearing, whereby the sense of hearing carries also a "mental image."<sup>141</sup> Such disturbance and cognitive confusion in Conrad's narratives emerge as a nervous condition that underpins the existentialist crisis of the feeling subject. Delayed decoding in Conrad emerges as a unique language of deferral and as a metonymy of (mis)-cognition, reversing the normative model of perception located at the site of nervousness and nervous masculinity. This is amply evinced in *Heart of Darkness* in Marlow's admission of his own failure to narrate the complete effect of one of his "inconclusive experiences" (*HD* 11) to a group of Londoners reposing at the heart of the Thames, enacting a process where "the telling, rather than the event itself, generates meaning."<sup>142</sup>

Many twenty-first century theories in neuroscience – especially those that study synaptic plasticity – place extra emphasis on the effect of the surroundings and social impact of the nature of cognition and the epistemology of the cognitive self. According to such research:

The self can be understood in terms of brain systems involved in learning and storing information, in explicit and implicit systems, about things that are significant in people's lives. The processing by these systems always occurs in a physical and social context (a situation) and is performed by networks that function the way they do because of both genetic inheritance and past experience.<sup>143</sup>

Cognition is thus a function of inherited ideologies as well as social situations and the difficulty and delay in decoding the immediate environs around him puts Marlow in the crossroads between cognitive inheritance and acculturation. In a section

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<sup>141</sup> Jan Schnupp, Israel Nelken and Andrew King, *Auditory Neuroscience: Making Sense of Sound* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011) 2.

<sup>142</sup> Ambrosini, *Conrad's Fiction as Critical Discourse*, 90.

<sup>143</sup> Joseph LeDoux, *The Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are* (New York: Penguin, 2002) 31-32.

entitled “Synaptic Trace and Psychic Trace”, the neuroscientists Ansermet and Magistretti study the manner in which images from memory are re-coded through a “synchronous synaptic activity” through which perception is registered through linguistic signifiers pre-known to memory and the social self. The authors offer the example of a skyscraper at night that is gradually and incrementally lit up by hundreds of little lights that eventually form a huge Christmas tree. It is interesting to compare this image with that of Marlow’s vision of showers around him in the ship along Congo before decoding those as arrows. In the case of the scene in the skyscraper, a “synchronous synaptic activity is activated when the memory of a Christmas tree materializes: there is a synaptic coding of the representation”.<sup>144</sup> Conversely, Marlow’s experiences in the Congo involve an exposure to an unfamiliar symbolic system that re-situates his synaptic structure, thus problematizing his erstwhile synaptic coding and resulting in his delayed decoding of the external referent. The indeterminacy of sensory interpretation that Marlow experiences in his voyage up the Congo, seems to support the modern neuroscientific theory which suggests that learning and unlearning are both processes of “emotional associations [that] are formed by synaptic changes in the brain system involved in processing the stimuli.”<sup>145</sup> Conrad’s narrative thus highlights the context-sensitive nature of the neural cognitive process and conflates the crisis of cognition with that of the existentialist self. The narrative process in *Heart of Darkness* is further complicated by the non-linear temporal movements between the lived disturbance and its articulation. The narrative of defamiliarization and delayed decoding in Conrad’s novella thus corresponds closely to the true idiom of a life which is a “permanent shuttling back and forth between the moment (when the primary sensory systems are in action) and the recall of representations (when the memory systems are active).”<sup>146</sup>

Modern neuroscientists have come to classify the cognitive process involved in recollection as constituting an *explicit memory system* (one that encodes information and later integrates the same into memory), an *imagery system*, a *language system* and a *narrative reasoning system* (one that is instrumental to the

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<sup>144</sup> Francois Ansermet and Pierre Magistretti, *Biology of Freedom: Neural Plasticity, Experience and the Unconscious*, trans. Susan Fairfield (New York: Other Press, 2007) 80-81.

<sup>145</sup> Joseph LeDoux, *The Synaptic Self*, 303.

<sup>146</sup> *Biology of Freedom*, 99.

production of narrative from events in memory).<sup>147</sup> Thus the cognitive psychologist William Brewer defines narrative discourse as a system that “attempts to embody in linguistic form a series of events that occur in time [. . .] the cognitive structure underlying narrative is the mental representation of a series of temporally occurring events that are perceived as having causal or thematic coherence.”<sup>148</sup> What is emphasized in Brewer’s analysis is the link between language and cognitive ability and how narrative reasoning reflects the cognitive processes whereby the narratological politics extends the constructions of cognitive processes. Likewise, the cognitive theorist Jerome Bruner asserts the importance of narrative as a mode of thought in itself, one that attempts to “locate the [cognitive] experience in time and space.”<sup>149</sup> Delayed decoding in Conrad emerges as a phenomenological convergence of the cognitive and the narrative realms of reasoning that is extended into an existentialist awareness of the limitations of the constructed self. Conrad’s narrative, in showcasing “the workings of the human mind attempting to come to terms with the flux of experience”<sup>150</sup>, reveals the fractures in time and space in a narrative consciousness that attempts to inscribe an awareness of its own incompleteness. The complex communication that emerges in the narrative of *Heart of Darkness* seems to borrow mechanisms of nervous as well as telegraphic circuits, creating in turn nervous communities of whisperers and over-hearers in a novel about the failure in communication, one that famously flags up Conrad’s private belief that “realism in art will never approach reality.”<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> David C. Rubin and Daniel L. Greenberg, “The Role of Narrative in Recollection: A View from Cognitive Psychology and Neuropsychology”, *Narrative and Consciousness: Literature, Psychology and the Brain*, eds. Gary D. Fireman, Ted E. McVay and Owen J. Flanagan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 54-55.

<sup>148</sup> W.F.Brewer, “Literary Theory, rhetoric, stylistics: Implications for Psychology”, *Theoretical Issues in Reading Comprehension*, ed R.J.Spiro, B.C.Bruce and W.F.Brewer (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1980) 223.

<sup>149</sup> Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986) 13.

<sup>150</sup> Torsten Pettersson, *Consciousness and Time: A Study in the Philosophy and Narrative Technique of Joseph Conrad* (Abo: Abo Akademi, 1982) 93.

<sup>151</sup> *Joseph Conrad, Life and Letters*, ed. G. Jean-Aubry, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1927) 1:302-03.

#### 2.6.4 *Heart of Darkness* and the Crisis of Representation

Attempting to narrate his nervousness to a European audience “moored with two good addresses like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another” (*HD* 48), Marlow realizes the futility of the process. Along with the more ostensible themes of degeneration panic and imperialist territorialisation, *Heart of Darkness*, with its aporetic apperceptions and delayed decoding, holds up a mirror to Conrad’s own theorizing on the nature of writing. It is most abundantly explicated in his Preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* — a passage that “remains by default the most reliable and the most voluntary, single statement of Conrad’s general approach to writing”<sup>152</sup>— where he states that the appeal of art to be effective

[m]ust be an impression conveyed through the senses [. . .] All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the senses, if its highest desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions. It must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music, which is the art of arts.<sup>153</sup>

The sensory quality of art advocated here by Conrad appears similar to the works on embodied emotions by psychologists in late nineteenth century who emphasized the cognitive role associated with in the affective sensory process.<sup>154</sup> Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* emerges as an unreliable and nervous narrator who, with “the stammerings of his conscience and [. . .] the outspoken consciousness of the difficulties of his work”<sup>155</sup> points to the phenomenological break between inadequacies of normative narratives and cognitive codes of his day.

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<sup>152</sup> Ian Watt, “Conrad’s Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*”, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 7.2 (Winter 1974): 101-115: 103.

<sup>153</sup> *Conrad’s Prefaces to His Works*, 51.

<sup>154</sup> This was particularly evident in the works of the American philosopher and psychologist William James (1842-1910) whose notion of embodied emotions and the stream of consciousness was appropriated in the high-Modernist writing in its depictions of the human mind in its phenomenal and *affective state*, most readily exemplified in the Modernist epiphany. James’ works will be referred to frequently in this chapter and in other parts of this thesis.

<sup>155</sup> *Conrad’s Prefaces*, 53.

More significantly, the difficulty and delay in decoding the signs around, also points towards the broader issue of the location of the sentient subject in modernity. This is strongly suggested by Michael Levenson who argues:

[a] condition that persists all through Conrad's work, a radical disorientation that obliterates any stable relation between the self and the world, and that raises the question of whether there is a world to go to which the self belongs. The fragility of identity, the barriers to knowledge, the groundlessness of value—these great Conradian (and modern) motifs appear most often in terms of sensory derangement that casts the individual into unarticulated space, a space with no markers and no boundaries, with nothing behind, nothing above, nothing below.<sup>156</sup>

Among the several points of interest in Levenson's analysis is the manner in which language (with its epistemology of lack) in Conrad emerges simultaneously with the politics of space and its absence in *Heart of Darkness*, a novel about the loss of agency, whose narrative "seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river" (*HD* 30).

As Judith Ryan argues, "interior monologue, developed towards the end of the nineteenth century as another mode of expressing subjectivity, was increasingly infiltrated by non-vocal particles as the influence of empiricist psychology made itself felt."<sup>157</sup> Conrad's interest in the physics of his day is well-known,<sup>158</sup> but what emerges as fundamental in *Heart of Darkness* is the speaker's "seemingly endless pursuit of the quality of solidity in things"<sup>159</sup> in a world where a white fog "very warm and clammy, and more blinding than the night", stands all around the feeling subject "like something solid" (*HD* 41). It is this enquiry into the ontology of solidity that invests Conrad's novella with the futility that fascinates even as it frustrates, as

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<sup>156</sup> Michael Levenson, *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality: Character and Novelists from Conrad to Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 6. While enunciating the general signifiers of the crisis of modernity in Conrad's narratives, Levenson's analysis also draws attention to the spatial annihilation that accompanies the process, thus arguing how collapse of linguistic systems in Conrad is indissolubly interwoven with the collapse of spatial systems while the speaking subject is subjectivized by a defamiliarized world.

<sup>157</sup> Ryan, *The Vanishing Subject*, 229.

<sup>158</sup> For Conrad's interest in Maxwell's theories, see Redmond O'Hanlon, *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin*, 11-15.

<sup>159</sup> Bernard C. Meyer, *Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytic Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967) 32.

evinced by Marlow's exclamation of narrative anguish at the terror of his narrative's translucence in *Heart of Darkness*:

Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is the very essence of dreams [. . .] It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone . . . (HD 30)

Marlow's agony over his inability to narrativize his experience corresponds to the sense of loss and lack that the sentient self experiences in its arrival in the realm of the symbolic. What emerges self-evident from the passage is Conrad's strategy of undermining the narrative structure of imperialist adventure romance with Marlow's interruptions which "are meant to question the very possibility of investing the words with concrete details."<sup>160</sup> Situated as it is in a complex bio-political culture of anxiety and panic, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* articulates "the restiveness about representation in the later nineteenth century – a restiveness shared, and crossing to and from, between physicists, philosophers, and poets."<sup>161</sup> More significantly, the crisis in representation here points also to the crisis of intentionality – the "directness upon an object, the hallmark of intuitive mental states"<sup>162</sup> – that characterises Marlow's struggle in articulation.

The crisis of the object in his story – one that relates directly to the masculinity crisis in the real political space<sup>163</sup> – does not allow Marlow to translate his subjective experientiality into an intersubjective narrative. The lack of *solid objects* in his story – a lack that Marlow is increasingly and painfully aware of – emerges as a failure to trigger "meaningful construals" that proceed by interpreting

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<sup>160</sup> Ambrosini, *Conrad's Fiction as Critical Discourse*, 85.

<sup>161</sup> Gillian Beer, "Wave Theory and the Rise of Literary Modernism", *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 296-97.

<sup>162</sup> Raymond Gibbs, *Embodiment and Cognitive Science*, 266.

<sup>163</sup> See Sarah Ahmed, "Happy Objects", *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010) 29-51. In her analysis, Ahmad describes alienation as a feeling that locates the subject "out of line with an affective community" whereby the sentient subject does not "experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are already attributed as being good" (37). Marlow's alienation in *Heart of Darkness* as the speaking subject who fails to articulate his felt experiences can be attributed to his painful dislocation from the familiar objects that characterize his community of listeners.



“how the objects and actions depicted in language relate to embodied possibilities.”<sup>164</sup> As modern medical scientists and practitioners increasingly affirm:

The symbolic/story-making process is not an abstract one that goes on somewhere in the intellect, or solely in the white and grey matter of the cortex. Rather, that in relay with the brain, narratives are processed and programmed into the rest of the body: the musculature and autonomic nervous system; that whole domain of feelings: of rage, of pain, of joy, the felt responses to information that we ceaselessly call emotions.<sup>165</sup>

Marlow’s narrative crisis corresponds to the distinction that Arthur Frank makes between lived chaos and its retrospective narration. While Marlow’s story notionally occupies the retrospective frame recounting events from the past, he does not gain the introspective distance that is required to organize the chaos into a verbally meaningful shape. What emerges in Marlow’s tale is thus “an anti-narrative of time without sequence, telling without mediation, and speaking about oneself without being fully able to reflect on oneself.”<sup>166</sup> The attempt to make the story seen corresponds to Conrad’s own stated project in the Preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* but in the case of Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, it emerges as the slippage between narrative and epistemic experience. Such slippage informs the absurd quality that Marlow discerns as characterising his own narrative, a quality that emerges out of the subject’s self-reflexive encounters with otherness as Marlow returns from the heart of darkness to the European metropolis. He thus carries with him and invests into his narrative “the shock waves of his encounter with Kurtz in the wilderness.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Raymond Gibbs, *Embodiment and Cognitive Sciences*, 200.

<sup>165</sup> Anna Donald, “The Words We Live In”, *Narrative Based Medicine: Dialogue and Discourse in Clinical Practice*, ed. Trisha Greenhalgh and Brian Hurwitz (London: BMJ Books, 1998) 19. For a fascinating analysis of the way the medical interpreter can appropriate the vocabulary of the reader of the text and how the suffering body and the text that is analysed both operate along a multiplicity of perspectives that cannot be reified under one dominant gaze, see Byron J. Good, *Medicine, Rationality, and Experience: An Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 169-74. Good refers to the works of the reader-response theorist Wolfgang Iser in terms of looking at the medical subject as a text with multiple and mutable interpretations and the medical practitioner as the interpretative reader whose readings are subject to and contingent upon the conditions of the body/text.

<sup>166</sup> Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995) 98.

<sup>167</sup> Ambrosini, *Conrad’s Fiction as Critical Discourse*, 91.

In his study of emotional experiences, William James takes up the irremediable sense of the absurdity of life and connects the same to the responses of the subject who undergoes psychological conversion. James's theory of emotional change can offer interesting parallels with the existential crisis that characterises Marlow and his narration in *Heart of Darkness*. Thus, James argues:

The mind is a system of ideas, each with the excitement it arouses, and with tendencies impulsive and inhibitive [similar to the Sherringtonian excitation/inhibition transmission paradigm], which mutually check or reinforce one another. The collection of ideas alters by subtraction or by addition in the course of experience, and the tendencies alter as the organism gets more aged. A mental system may be undermined or weakened by this interstitial alteration just as a building is, and yet for a time keep upright by dead habit. But a new perception, a sudden emotional shock, or an occasion which lays bare the organic alteration, will make the fabric fall together; and then the centre of gravity sinks into an attitude more stable, for the new ideas that reach the centre in the rearrangement seem now to be locked there, and the new structure remains permanent.<sup>168</sup>

Marlow's initiation into the horrors of imperialism in *Heart of Darkness* is akin to what James classifies as a conversion that comes with the existentialist knowledge of the uselessness of rituals that had previously served the subject. It thus appears as an aporia in the process through which the subject situates itself in relation to its surrounding world. Marlow's continuous reference to "hearing" the voice of Kurtz appears to resonate with what James classifies as that emotional experience that changes previous structures of sentience that had characterised the subject. Thus Kurtz appears to Marlow as

A voice. He was very little than a voice. And I heard—him—it—this voice—other voices—all of them were so little more than voices—and the memory

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<sup>168</sup> William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902) 156. James's notion of changed mental systems arising out of emotional shock resonates with the discoveries of modern neuroscience that study the emotional brain and classify emotions as resulting "from the cognitive interpretation of situations." Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998) 48. In this work, LeDoux also credits James as the first psychologist to have made the conclusive distinction between short-term and long-term memory (185) and also describes James as "the father of the feedback theory" one which studies the informative circuit between bodily behaviour and emotional reaction (291-92). James is thus a crucial figure in the eyes of modern neuroscience that breaks the Cartesian dualism of the mind and the body and instead looks as the human being as a monistic neural system of embodied emotions. A feeling emerges in the eyes of modern neuroscience as "an idea of the body when it is perturbed by the emotional process." Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 2003) 88. Damasio's work, however, is also crucial in terms of looking at how feelings and the feeling self cannot entirely be mapped as neural processes within the body.

of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean without any kind of sense. (*HD* 48-49)

The impalpability of Kurtz is personal and sensory, as well as political and ideological, and Marlow's voice-hearing in *Heart of Darkness* is characteristic of what Conrad himself had classified as a condition where the subject loses "all sense of reality in a kind of nightmare effect produced by existence."<sup>169</sup>

In his analysis of Conrad's use of space and spatial politics in the narrative of *The Secret Agent*, Con Coroneos offers the term *Enuncleation* to suggest both the medical sense implying the removal of the core from a substance as well as a process of enunciation.<sup>170</sup> This is most immediately evident in the description of Marlow's narrative in *Heart of Darkness* as a scooped outside of a kernel, enveloping the tale which brought it out. The metonymic construct of Kurtz – he had been "educated partly in England [. . .] His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (*HD* 50) – if characteristic of the product perfected and manufactured by the industries and ideologies of European civilization, is also in itself a pointer to the impalpability that Marlow experiences as a narrator attempting to describe Kurtz's presence. The indeterminacy that characterized the construct of Kurtz is rendered more explicit in the end when Marlow receives varying reports on Kurtz's political and personal abilities from his various acquaintances and relatives. Marlow's confusion about Kurtz, who remains more a voice and a spectral presence, is evident as he confesses:

[t]o this day I am unable to say what was Kurtz's profession, whether he ever had any—which was the greatest of his talents. I had taken him for a painter who wrote for papers, or else a journalist who could paint—but even the cousin (who took snuff during the interview) could not tell me what he had been—exactly. (*HD* 71)

As an indeterminable quasi-physical presence that affects his existence, Kurtz emerges as a phantom limb in Marlow's imagination, an amputated part of the past

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<sup>169</sup> *Joseph Conrad's Letters to R.B. Cunningham Graham*, ed. C.T. Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) 114-15.

<sup>170</sup> Con Coroneos, *Space, Conrad and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 42.

that haunts the lived present.<sup>171</sup> In his permanent condition of incompleteness and mystery, Kurtz remains for Marlow what Derrida had classified as an *inaccessible articulation* that instantiates the interstitial play between the spirit and the revenant, between disappearance and repetition. For Derrida, analysing the *apparition of the inapparent*:

For there to be a ghost, there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever. The spectrogenic process corresponds therefore to a paradoxical *incorporation*. Once ideas or thoughts (*Gedanke*) are detached from their substratum, one engenders some ghost by giving them a body. [. . .] a more acute specificity belongs to what could be called the “second” ghost, as incorporation of autonomized spirit, as objectivizing expulsion of interior idea or thought.<sup>172</sup>

Derrida’s analysis of hauntology and the Freudian *Unheimlich* as a political as well as a bodily presence – a phenomenological construct that is reconfigured through an abstraction that is also a reification – is particularly pertinent to the figure of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* that emerges as an incomplete exorcism of the spectres of imperialist horrors. With his dialectic of the *apparition of the body* (appearing more as a voice than a living body that is always described through abstractions) and the *body of the apparition* (the posthumous voice that constructs its unique body against time), Kurtz appears to embody Derrida’s “second ghost” that is impossible to exorcise but must be mourned forever in a manner that rehearses a process of fetishisation.<sup>173</sup> It is interesting to analyse how this process of fetishisation operates at a level of abstraction in *Heart of Darkness*. Thus Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* embodies what Marlow at the beginning of the narrative had classified as an “idea”, “something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to” (*HD* 10), that desperate clinging on to an abstraction in an attempt to redeem the vulgar materiality of the machinery of imperialism. The almost mystic-religious

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<sup>171</sup> See V.S.Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain: Human Nature and the Architecture of the Mind* (London: Fourth Estate, 1998).

<sup>172</sup> Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning & the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York & London: Routledge, 1994) 126.

<sup>173</sup> The analogy between Kurtz’s spectral presence in Marlow’s mind and the phantom limb may be extended by Derrida’s description of the hauntology of disabled spectralized figures. Such characters are described by Derrida as a state between permanent situatedness and absence whereby “this non-object, this non-present present, this being there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge” (*Spectres of Marx* 5).

vocabulary of Marlow is important inasmuch as it relates to the contingency and crisis of cognition that appear subsequently in the narrative. It also juxtaposes the notional masculinity and cultural cognition while revealing the constructed qualities and inadequacies of both. Thus the abstraction that Marlow had classified at the beginning of the narrative as the sole redeeming quality of imperial territorialisation emerges through *Heart of Darkness* as the nemesis that is impossible to exorcise. Such abstraction can also be classified only through a vocabulary of violence and an ideology that is painfully preserved through a system of lies. A symptom born out of the strategy of abstraction that European imperialism required in order to reify its operative system, Kurtz becomes a renegade as well as a revenant at a political as well as an abstract level, ironically through an “over-identification” with the epistemic (and political) system and by thus turning into an “excess that the system has to eliminate.”<sup>174</sup>

Marlow’s knowledge of the futility of his own narrative appears as an aporia as well as a privilege born out of an existentialist awareness of lack. The lack is informed through real material conditions as well as through an emotional imbalance through which Marlow feels “himself separate from the world he is physically part of”.<sup>175</sup> The otherness of the real physical space appears dialogic with the crisis of cognition that the European imperialist experiences. The crisis is constructed as well as exacerbated by the defamiliarized co-ordinates that inform Marlow’s mis-cognition:

We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings, we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember because we were travelling in the night of the first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories. [. . .] The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. (*HD* 37-38)

Marlow’s dislocation from his familiar cognitive culture underpins the defamiliarization that is a prelude to his final existential awakening.<sup>176</sup> The passage

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<sup>174</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London & New York: Verso, 2002) 27.

<sup>175</sup> Otto Bohlmann, *Conrad’s Existentialism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991) 32.

<sup>176</sup> As Zygmunt Bauman affirms, “Territorial and functional separation is a reflection of existing hermeneutic problems; it is, however, also a most powerful factor in their perpetuation and reproduction.” *Modernity and Ambivalence*, 57.

is remarkable in the manner in which it articulates the technique of defamiliarization, as an epistemological device that problematizes cultural narratives in relation to subjective experientiality. Conrad describes Marlow's sensory experience as a journey into oblivion and loss as he glides down the Congo like a phantom, sensing his learnt memories disappear and struggling to perceive his sense of self. Marlow thus suffers a loss of intentionality as the self-organizing ability of his consciousness is compromised in an uncanny landscape where his familiar cognitive coordinates change.

As the narrator of *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow is evidently aware of the inconclusive quality of his narration that borders on the absurd, and, appropriately enough, juxtaposes his nervousness and his narration in an attempt to account for his imperfect and frustrated articulation:

“Absurd!” he cried. “This is the worst trying to tell. . . . Here you all are each moored with two addresses like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperatures normal—hear you—normal from year’s end to year’s end. And you say, Absurd! Absurd be—exploded! Absurd! My dear boys, what can you expect from a man who out of sheer nervousness had just flung overboard a pair of new shoes? (*HD* 48)

The passage is peremptory as well as loaded with anxiety in its fear of losing the attention of the audience, a fear that accentuates the loss<sup>177</sup> that Marlow is forced to embody through his narrative. As Robert Ambrosini suggests, Marlow's narrative indeterminacy and loss of control “undermines the white man's language – and consequently, many of the ideological presuppositions which ground his audience's

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<sup>177</sup> It is useful to look at the Derridean sense of *hauntology* here, in order to signify a play between presence and non-presence that informs the revenant that Kurtz comes to embody in Marlow's hysteric imagination. *Hauntology* is a bridge between haunting and ontology and Derrida uses it to signify the repetition of the revenant that stages the end of history through the logic of haunting. *Hauntology* as Derrida describes it transcends the ontology of Being and paradoxically contains the comprehension of teleology and eschatology through its incomprehensibility. Referring explicitly to Hamlet (a figure who in his nervous knowledge of the uncertainty of epistemology can be connected to a number of fictional figures in Modernism, most immediately to Eliot's Prufrock), Derrida states that the *hauntology* of Marx's Europe has immediate parallels with the ghost in Shakespeare's play who does not answer. *Hauntology* is thus to be as well as not to be and thus constitutes the end as well as the return of the ghost. It is interesting to extend this idea into Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in seeing Kurtz as the dead order that appears again in its affirmation of a knowledge that Marlow, like Hamlet is unable to articulate or enact except in its incompleteness. As a spectralized substance, *hauntology* emerges as an irreducible category of knowledge that determines the dangerous “phenomenality of the political.” Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 51.

response.”<sup>178</sup> The absurd quality in Marlow’s narration of delayed decoding and cognitive collapse is almost apologetically attributed to the nervousness of the narrator himself while confronting experiential shifts in subjectivity. The “excellent appetites” and “temperature normal” that characterize his listeners are in sharp contrast to the narrator’s “lean appeared face [that] appeared worn, hollow, with withdrawn folds and drooped eyelids with an aspect of concentrated attention” (*HD* 48) that emerge as obvious pointers to the hysteric knowledge of the horror that he cannot completely communicate.

In effect, Marlow’s failure of narration in *Heart of Darkness* – a text that may be read as a “melancholic response to crisis”<sup>179</sup> – enacts the epistemological enquiry into representation of the lost subject. The horror that Marlow cannot communicate in his narrative is as much mimetic as emotional and constitutes “a psychological confusion between self and other(s) which, in turn, deprives subjects of their full rational presence to selfhood”.<sup>180</sup> Conrad’s novel is a graphic account of such failure of selfhood and its representation, one that converges with a political crisis in a real historical setting. More importantly, the uneasiness that Marlow’s tale contains and communicates “is precisely the effect of the tale’s reality which must linger on after the tale is over.”<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Ambrosini, *Conrad’s Fiction and Critical Discourse*, 93.

<sup>179</sup> Beth S. Ash, “The horror of trauma: Mourning or Melancholia in Heart of Darkness?”, *Conrad’s Heart of Darkness and Contemporary Thought: Revisiting the Horror with Lacoue-Labarthe*, ed. Nidesh Lawtoo (London: Bloomsbury, 2012) 196.

<sup>180</sup> Nidesh Lawtoo, “The horror of mimesis: Echoing Lacoue-Labarthe”, *Conrad’s Heart of Darkness and Contemporary Thought*, 240. Lawtoo goes on to suggest that Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is marked by an “outbreak of mimetic phenomena” including somnambulism, hypnosis and depersonalization that “haunt the Conradian conception of the subject.” Such analysis supports the claim made here that *Heart of Darkness* is a narrative where language, nerves and feelings enmesh to enact the crisis of being in nothingness.

<sup>181</sup> Ambrosini, *Conrad’s Fiction as Critical Discourse*, 115.

## 2.7 *Heart of Darkness*, Masculinity Panic and the Crisis of Agency

In his work on the presentation of masculinity in Conrad's fiction, Andrew Roberts studies how confession and overhearing feature as the two most prominent characteristics in Conrad's narrative techniques. Added to this is the element of lying that emerges as a compulsive condition in Conrad's tales of repression and guilt, highlighting the "complex interaction of the impulse to reveal and the impulse to conceal".<sup>182</sup> *Heart of Darkness* is a narrative of loss that is unreliably told by a speaker whose human will and agency are systematically consumed by the machinery of imperialism. The novel depicts the changes undergone by two masculine agents of the empire at the heart of darkness that is disturbingly discovered as a construct not of the commonly classified African atavism but rather of European imperialism itself. It is a narrative that leaves the borderlines between human will and human bondage, assertion and ambivalence, painfully unresolved.

Thus the unreliability of Marlow as a narrator is simultaneously a pointer to the agony he cannot fully articulate as well as to the uniqueness he still preserves as a human subject, one whose subjective experientiality cannot be communicated in purely functional language. Likewise, the supposed degeneration of Kurtz from being a symbolic emissary of Enlightenment to an individual anarchic ruler who is a threat to European imperialism, may also be interpreted as an ironic and extreme assertion of agency in the face of totalitarian bio-political control. Indeed, Marlow recognizes Kurtz's cry of horror as "an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions" (*HD* 70). The masculinity panic perceived by both Marlow and Kurtz – who come to be connected as hysterical men failing in their service to the empire – emerges as a complex combination of insight and guilt. The horror of imperialism and the death of agency in *Heart of Darkness* both constitute a hollowness that emerges from inauthentic existence. Such existence can only be resisted by an existentialist knowledge that can never be articulated except through a narrative of loss.

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<sup>182</sup> Andrew Michael Roberts, *Conrad and Masculinity* (London: Macmillan, 2000) 124.



Perceived in a more cultural context, especially in relation to Marlow's experiences inside the dark underbelly of European imperialism, the nervousness of his narrative is also a pointer to the disintegration that ensues "when an individual confronts traumatic events that shatter the coherence of his or her assumptive world, undermining taken-for-granted beliefs in life's predictability, fairness, and essential benevolence."<sup>183</sup> The panic that comes to consume Marlow in his voyage up the Congo thus provides a perspectival shift in perception and cognition, altering his neural as well as narrative systems, as manifested by Conrad through the technique of delayed decoding. The shifts come with the erasure of previously learned and inherited cognitive patterns (hence objects appear increasingly dreamy and misty) as well as an initiation into new forms of meaning:

You lost your way on that river as you would in a desert and butted all day long against shoals trying to find the channel till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once—somewhere—far away—in another existence perhaps. There were moments when one's past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare to yourself; but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants and water and silence. (*HD* 36)

*Heart of Darkness* depicts panic at two levels. First, there is the immediate bodily and neural degeneration in line with the masculinity panic as embodied by Kurtz, who, despite being the perfect construct of the entirety of Europe, comes to be consumed by his failing nerves in the landscape of otherness that sees him perform and "preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites" (*HD* 50). The second level of crisis emerges in the articulation of degeneration through techniques of defamiliarization, affecting the normal patterns of narrative adopted in

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<sup>183</sup> Robert A. Neimeyer and Finn Tschudi, "Community and Coherence: Narrative Contributions to the Psychology of Conflict and Loss", *Narrative and Consciousness*, 168. Although Neimeyer and Tschudi in the passage above allude to the Holocaust narratives, their theory of narrative disintegration corresponds also the horror of the knowledge that Marlow gains and that Kurtz articulates in his dying words. In their article, Neimeyer and Tschudi also argue that one of the fundamental conditions of narrative formations is the desire for continuity and community that would invest some meaning to the lived experience. This argument is particularly relevant for Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, who shows clear signs of nervous anxiety at the prospect of losing his listeners' attention and at the increasing knowledge of his own unreliability as a narrator of his tale of loss. Indeed, all but one of Marlow's listeners fall asleep in the course of his narration and the entire novel is marked by the dialectic of inattention and intentionality.

contemporary adventure narratives about the empire. This is characterized not only by delayed decoding but also by a fractured system of signs that frustrates all attempts at cognitive completion.

The crisis of the cognitive self that Marlow experiences, emerges as a mode of deterritorialization that undermines narrative authority. This may be interpreted as the loss of what Mikhail Bakhtin classifies as “lateral transgradience”, the dialogic imagination in the process of meaning-making. Analysing the dialectics of Dostoevsky’s poetics, Bakhtin contends:

The most important acts, constitutive of self-consciousness, are determined by their relation to another consciousness (a ‘thou’). Cutting oneself off, isolating oneself, closing oneself off, those are the basic reasons for the loss of self [ . . . ] To be means to communicate [ . . . ] Man has no internal sovereign territory; he is all and always on the boundary; looking within himself he looks in the eyes of the other or through the other.<sup>184</sup>

Bakhtin’s analysis serves to enunciate the necessity of intentionality that the narrative self must obtain ontologically by situating itself through other selves. Being is communicating in Bakhtin’s reading and the loss of understanding points to a bigger loss in the epistemology of the self. Conrad’s novella highlights such loss in its attempted explication of “the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention” (*HD* 36). The inscrutability of intention – in an uncanny landscape where a combat warship fires away into a forest ceaselessly and meaninglessly with “a touch of insanity” (*HD* 17) – ironically informs the loss of intentionality in Marlow’s narrative. Thus instead of an intersubjective experience which may be dialogically imagined and communicated, Marlow is left only with an “epistemological solipsism”<sup>185</sup> that extends into the existential enigma in the novel.

The dialectic of masculinity panic and the crisis of agency that pervades *Heart of Darkness*, its depictions of delayed decoding and its politics of containment, emerges perhaps most powerfully at the end of the novel, in the much interpreted section where Marlow lies to Kurtz’s Intended about his dying words.

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<sup>184</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 311-12. Bakhtin’s notion of transgradience bears resemblance with the notion of intersubjectivity as theorized by cognitive phenomenology which constitutes a mimetic act when “the agent observes another person performing the same action.” Gibbs, *Embodiment and Cognitive Science*, 271.

<sup>185</sup> Daphna Erdinast Vulcan, *Joseph Conrad and the Modern Temper* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) 95.

Analysing how the politics of retention is operative not just in the manner in which Kurtz's Intended is lied to by Marlow but also in the way the reader is never actually given her real name beneath the statutory statement of pseudo-romance, Garrett Stewart states how the lie serves to situate the self-circulating circuit of deception, degeneration and deadness that creates a "spiritual negation zeroing in on a void."<sup>186</sup> Read more politically, Marlow's lie to Kurtz's Intended, like the final exclamation of the horror of hollowness in Kurtz's dying words, depicts the "full space in which the hollow of language assumes volume and size"<sup>187</sup> and exposes the system of slippages that must be produced and perpetuated for the imperial elsewhere not to affect the 'centre' of civilization. However, the episode is also interesting in the way it is similar to the machinery of telegraphic transmission as well as the way it resonates with the mode of nervous communication as theorized by Conrad's contemporary neurology.

*Heart of Darkness* ends with a moment of deception as Kurtz's intended is lied to by Marlowe who strategically withholds the horror of Kurtz's final epiphany of loss and instead sends a spurious consolation to the European woman (and to the docile domestic space she occupies) by asserting that Kurtz ended his life with her name on his lips. This episode can be read as a complex politics of (mis)transmission as Marlow enacts as a Sherringtonian *synapse*, a site of nervous negotiation between one neuron and the next. Acting as an agency of the empire, Marlow withholds the uncomfortable information from the European female and thus transforms the potential hysteric into an elegant mourner through a symbolic and strategic conversion therapy. As Robert Ambrosini suggests, the scene is marked by repression and nervousness whereby "the ambiguity of language creates an unbearable tension."<sup>188</sup> At a time when the neural network that preserved the strong European body and the telegraphic network that preserved the strong European empire were seen as structurally and functionally parallel, Marlowe's misinformation takes up a political as well as a medical significance. It resists the horror of the empire as well as the hysteria of the naïve female body by consuming the truth between two points of sentience and acting as a telegraphic blank as well as a neural

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<sup>186</sup> Garrett Stewart, "Lying as Dying in Heart of Darkness", *PMLA* 95.3 (May 1980): 319-31; 331.

<sup>187</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, xi.

<sup>188</sup> Ambrosini, *Conrad's Fiction as Critical Discourse*, 114.

synapse where communication signals go astray. It is interesting to note that Kurtz's dying words "The horror! The horror" had appeared to Marlow in the form of a "whispered cry" (*HD* 72), bearing a striking similarity to the mode of synaptic transmission that is described by the neuroscientist Eric Kandel as a mode that operates "like lips whispering very close to an ear"<sup>189</sup>. Whispering as a mode of communication recurs throughout *Heart of Darkness* – appropriately enough – in Marlow's description of Kurtz's (nervous) degeneration from being the model European to an atavistic avatar at the heart of anarchy:

But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know [. . .] and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. (*HD* 57-58)

The voice of Kurtz and his dying words that never disappear, keep consuming Marlow with their hauntological presence – he hears the whispered cry "The horror! The horror!" as he stands to wait for Kurtz's Intended by a mahogany door.<sup>190</sup> The passage where Marlow lies to Kurtz's Intended deserves to be quoted fully in order to understand the drama of deception that operates like a nervous transfer as well as a strategic telegraphic transmission:

"His last word – to live with,' she insisted. 'Don't you understand loved him – I loved him – I loved him – I loved him.'  
"I pulled myself together and spoke slowly.  
"The last word he pronounced was – your name.'  
"I heard a light sigh and then my heart stood still, stopped dead short by an exulting and terrible cry, by the cry of inconceivable triumph and of unspeakable pain.. 'I knew it—I was sure!' . . . She knew. She was sure."  
(*HD* 75-76)

The moment of deception is also the moment of containment and consolation as the agent who returns from the heart of the colonial space strategically withholds information from the one who must perpetuate her location in logic and its strategic

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<sup>189</sup> Eric Kandel, *In Search of Memory*, 65.

<sup>190</sup>It is interesting to compare Marlow's narration through delayed decoding and interrupting guilt with the trauma of seeing the human body in *Heart of Darkness*. Thus Kurtz appears for the first time in Marlow's eyes as a white skeletal presence in a scene that anticipates the traumatophilic epiphany in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* where Hans Castorp sees an X-Ray image of his own corpse. See Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochere, "Sounding the hollow heart of the West: X-Rays and the technique de la mort", *Conrad's Heart of Darkness and Contemporary Thought*, 221-38. Garrett Stewart, "Lying as Dying in Heart of Darkness", 320.

structures of faith. The appeal to know the dying word of Kurtz informs the attempt to re-construct him through the logos that underpinned the ideology of logic and proportions characterizing nineteenth-century European Christianity as well as imperialism. In the beginning there was the word and at the end the word must be preserved into perpetuity for the logos to continue.

Read more carefully, however, the passage depicts a double deception, as Marlow's lie emerges as a compulsive act constructed out of coercion, as an annihilation of agency with the statement of non-truth forced out of him by the ritual of romance, in order that the ritual might continue. The vocabulary of the ritual is enacted not only in the dramatic repetition of "I loved him" but also sealed beyond interrogation by the statement of certainty ("I knew it—I was sure!"). In this reading, Kurtz's intended emerges as the perfect performer in the play of mourning, with her mourner's dress and elegant articulation of loss. Through his inability to utter the truth about Kurtz and in his compulsion to play the game by its rules, Marlow paradoxically comes to embody and perpetuate his own melancholia with an ever diminishing self-esteem.<sup>191</sup> Marlow's role as the imperial agent is thus most fully functional at the precise moment of the death of his human agency. Protecting the naive female in her mourner's role, Marlow embodies the masculine hysteria that may never be explained or articulated in its combination of guilt and shame. This paradoxically informs the existentialist insight that he attains through his knowledge of loss as his nervous narrative ends at the "heart of an immense darkness" (*HD* 76).

In his analysis of the epistemology of modernity and masculinity in *Heart of Darkness*, Andrew Roberts points at "the linguistic, symbolic and emotional excess of the passage which includes the lie, the near-hysteria with which Marlow overloads his description of the meeting."<sup>192</sup> *Heart of Darkness* thus ends with a repressed

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<sup>191</sup> The terms mourning and melancholia are used here in the Freudian sense. Thus while mourning attached itself onto an object (that can be subsequently turned to a fetish), melancholia is characterised by a contingency that entails an inward looking turn, whereby the melancholic's subjectivity and self-esteem is dangerously diminished, leading onto suicidal propensities as well as dark abstractions that eschew objectivity. See Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia", *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W.W.Norton, 1989) 584-88. It is interesting to look at melancholia (in the wake of Freud's analysis) as a medical condition which can lend itself to an existentialist awakening that is essentially solipsistic as well as self-annihilating.

<sup>192</sup> Roberts, *Conrad and Masculinity*, 127-28.

masculine hysteria and a continued culture of consolation and romance that cannot, nevertheless, contain its crisis despite its project to preserve normative imperial identity. The degeneration of Kurtz and the hysteria of Marlow both emerge as signifiers of a colonial trauma about which the European insider must continue to be misinformed. The politics of misinformation operates through a compulsive consumption of the truth enacted by the agency of colonial enterprise or through strategic coercion whereupon the accepted ritual of romance ensures its own perpetuation. The entirety of Europe constructs its fittest agent who becomes a degenerate in the African space through a pathological pleasure principle that manifests its decadence through a system of lies. In effect, Conrad's novella is about the agony of the human agency at the heart of imperialism, which is described in all its degeneration and discontent. The horror that Kurtz utters and Marlow must not explain contains fin de siècle masculinity's gaze into its own decadence, enacted through an epistemology of loss that informs the melancholia of existentialist awakening.

The knowledge that Marlow gains from his journey into the heart of darkness, one that he cannot communicate or disclose (like the trade secret of the unnamed Belgian company he had worked for in the Congo), comes to enclose him with its hysteric formations. Thus, back in the sepulchral city of Brussels that sees little men run with their little business at the heart of the supposed centre of the world, Marlow confesses his impotent rage at the sight of such triviality:

They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew. Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of a danger it was unable to comprehend. (*HD* 70)

As he "tottered about the streets" (70), the scene of urban life appears to Marlow as essentially one of ignorance and inanity and in his sense of his own superiority, Marlow exhibits Nordau's analysis of the degenerate who "believes himself to be possessed by a peculiar insight lacking in other mortals" (*Degeneration* 19). Appearing as he does as a survivor of a war that had consumed the best of Europe, Marlow emerges as essentially incompatible with the seamless of the city and its

urban rituals. The privilege that Marlow ascribes to himself is thus also a loss, one that comes with the existentialist knowledge of the almost absolute inadequacy of the centres of civilization that run across the European metropolis and its mental life.

Patrick Brantlinger classifies *Heart of Darkness* as a schizophrenic text “undercut both by its racism and its impressionism,”<sup>193</sup> and the allusion to the latter is culturally significant given that the late nineteenth-century Impressionism in painting was categorized as a manifestation of degenerate impulse by Nordau.<sup>194</sup> Brantlinger’s reading is supported by the works of clinical psychologists who describe schizophrenia as an *ipseity disturbance* (a crisis in which the self struggles to see itself as one holistic entity) that is a curious combination of hyper-reflexivity (an exaggerated self-consciousness) and a diminution of the affective self’s awareness of itself.<sup>195</sup> This is also supported by the theories of modern neuroscience which argues:

When thoughts are radically dissociated from emotions and motivations, as in schizophrenia, personality can, in fact, change drastically. When emotions run wild, as in anxiety disorders or depression, a person is no longer the person he or she once was.<sup>196</sup>

As he emerges after his experience of horror in Africa, and totters about the European metropolis nervously irritated, restlessly feverish and struggling to hold on to the respectable notion of the social self, Marlow exhibits an increased awareness of his self as well as a melancholic diminution in self-regard.<sup>197</sup> Unsurprisingly, Marlow describes himself at this phase as “not very well” (*HD* 70), “grinning bitterly

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<sup>193</sup> Brantlinger, “*Heart of Darkness: Anti-Imperialism, Racism, or Impressionism?*”, *Criticism* 27.4 (1985): 363-85; 383.

<sup>194</sup> For a direct analysis of *Heart of Darkness* as a degeneration-novel in relation to Nordau’s treatise, see Jonathan Dollimore, “Civilization and its Darkness”, *Conrad’s Heart of Darkness and Contemporary Thought*, 67-88.

<sup>195</sup> Louis A. Sass, “Phenomenology as Description and as Explanation: The Case of Schizophrenia”, *Handbook of Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, 639.

<sup>196</sup> Joseph LeDoux, *The Synaptic Self*, 323-24. See also Shaun Gallagher, “Self-Narrative in Schizophrenia”, *The Self in Neuroscience and Psychiatry*, ed A.S. David and T.Kircher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 336-57.

<sup>197</sup> See also Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia”, *The Freud Reader*, 584.

at perfectly respectable persons”(HD 70) with a temperature that “was seldom normal in these days” (HD 70) thus establishing a close correspondence to the state of the Turgenevian Superfluous Man who embodies an “egoistic (albeit intelligent) sensibility, rather decadent or neurotic in its oscillations of mood; a cynical or ironic quality; and, above all, that sense of being superfluous, without role or function; isolated from society.”<sup>198</sup> Moreover, Marlow’s uncontrollable gesture of grinning at strangers also corresponds to his loss of self-organization, a complex neural mechanism that is studied by modern cognitive neuroscience thus:

Self-organization reduces the degrees of freedom for action until a human face becomes a context-appropriate “special device”, a smiling device, a frowning device, or whatever will suit the singular set of circumstances in which the action is situated. This capacity is creative and exquisitely context-sensitive, in the sense that it produces a singular action tailored to a particular context.<sup>199</sup>

Marlow’s detachment from context disturbs his nervous behaviour and compromises the innate creative ability to align one’s neural gestures into appropriate social situations. The loss that he embodies compromises Marlow’s conative self<sup>200</sup> whereby “extreme grief” bypasses violence and “takes the form of

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<sup>198</sup> Cedric Watts, *A Preface to Conrad*, 66. In his analysis of the Turgenevian Superfluous Man and the figures in which such attributes are replicated, Watts includes Eliot’s Prufrock, Sartre’s Roquentin, Camus’s Clamence and Beckett’s tramps. Watts’ choice of figures is interesting inasmuch as they are connected by a cynical irreverence towards the normative functional social and cultural systems, an irreverence that borders on the comic by the time one gets to Beckett. The Superfluous Man is a significant category to look at especially in an analysis of degeneration and masculinity crisis at the turn of the twentieth century. In their knowledge of the hollowness of the social and cultural rituals around them, the superfluous men in the literature of the twentieth century flagged up their uselessness in such systems of signification, often using metaphors of bodily and performative crises that is juxtaposed with their superior insight into the inanity of the social systems of signification.

<sup>199</sup> Gibbs, *Embodiment and Cognitive Science*, 259.

<sup>200</sup> The conative self refers to Spinoza’s notion of the *conatus*, the tendency to self-preservation that characterises all human beings and is innately related to their ability to feel and be emotional. A compromised conative self is thus accompanied by a loss of emotions as the subject feels herself less and less connected to her world. Spinoza’s notion of the *conatus* has been taken up by several modern neuroscientists such as Antonio Damasio who study emotions as informing man’s cognitive and conative ability. The loss of the conative self is thus related to emotional apathy and indifference as the subject perceives herself as detached from her world. Damasio states how medical study of alienation and depression relates to an emptiness whereby the subject is “cut off from his or her *conatus*, from the tendency for self-preservation.” Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain* (London: Heinemann, 2003) 139. In the same work, Damasio shows how Spinoza’s notion of the *conatus* influenced Freud’s idea of self-preservation (260). A similar view of self-preservation is also suggested by the neuroscientist V.S.Ramachandran who states that “The brain is biologically programmed to value itself” and when this mechanism is compromised the subject



apathy” (*HD* 44). The uselessness that Marlow perceives as characterizing himself is situated in a society that is myopically and strategically oblivious to the horrors that must be consummated elsewhere for its functioning structures to be produced and perpetuated. The dialectic of privileged insight and loss that Marlow experiences is not unlike the impotent knowledge of hollowness that characterizes the masculinity crisis of the speakers in Eliot’s early poetry who flag up their nervous narratives and their incompletions.<sup>201</sup> Ending as he does “in the pose of a meditating Buddha” (76) Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* becomes less a signifier of spiritual fecundity than a parody of the impotent seer who can pose like a prophet but is unable to articulate his knowledge of loss for “that would have been too dark—too dark altogether” (*HD* 76).

Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is a tale of terror that inverts the pleasure principle of imperial romance and instead offers a nervous narration of panic and crisis. A story told by an imperial agent, *Heart of Darkness* is about the death of agency in a landscape of greed and indeterminacy that is “a wanton smash-up” (*HD* 20), where somebody had dug artificial holes that “might have been connected with the philanthropic desire of giving the criminals something to do” (*HD* 20). In its self-reflexive epistemology of un-learning and un-certainty, Conrad’s novel situates a feeling and changing mind against a civilization that must pathologically perpetuate its ideologies through a “painful entanglement of falsehood and self-contradiction.”<sup>202</sup> In its articulation of failure and its failure of articulation, *Heart of Darkness* undercuts the imperialist arrogance of its times and offers a complex

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suffers “feelings of uselessness and futility (depression) culminating in suicide.” Ramachandran, “Introduction”, *Consciousness and the Physical World*, ed. B.D. Josephson and V.S. Ramachandran (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980) 13.

<sup>201</sup> One can analyse Eliot’s Prufrock as a fallen flâneur who wanders about the metropolis acutely and nervously conscious of the inadequacies of his social and sexual self, thus embodying a masculinity crisis in a drama of decadence. Like Conrad’s Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, Prufrock admits to his inability to say just what he means, and follows the admission with the image of a magic lantern that throws – crucially enough in the context of this chapter’s analysis of language and nervous breakdown – the nerves in patterns on a screen. The theme of nervous breakdown and its corresponding collapse of communication are also manifested in Eliot’s *The Waste Land* that, with its backdrop of the First World War combines metropolitan violence with masculinity crisis.

<sup>202</sup> David Joravsky, “Between Science and Act: Freud versus Schnitzler, Kafka, and Musil”, *The Mind of Modernism*, 294. Joravsky interestingly contrasts Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* with Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden”, published in the same year, as suggests how Conrad’s depiction of uncertainty and alienation – as opposed to Kipling’s arrogance of assertion – has “won generations of readers beyond the author’s life” (294).

political and epistemological ambivalence that is increasingly relevant amidst the bio-political certainties in the global capitalist world today.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Masculinity, Bio-politics and Nervous Conditions in the literature of the First World War**

#### **3.1 The First World War and the changing ontology of combat**

The First World War revealed the destructive potential of machinic modernity and communicated the knowledge of his own commodified anonymity to early twentieth-century European man. The scale of casualties wrought by the First World War was unprecedented in human history, and the automatism of violence underlined the new grammar of combat whereby perfect strangers could kill each other while miles apart.<sup>1</sup> Alongside the trauma and ceaseless shock on witnessing bodily mutilation, the methods of warfare also generated long periods of anxious inertia. The bodily immobility at the trenches gave rise to nervous conditions by which the individual seldom could give vent to his emotion of fear, grief or anger. Such condition created a traumatic repression that exacerbated the loss of human will and agency in the battlefield, as soldiers saw bodies of comrades turn to waste in stench and muck. Among other elements, experiences in the trench constituted insomnia, shock,

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<sup>1</sup>In a letter written to his son, Robert Michaels, an Austrian cavalry captain, asserted: “Modern combat is played out almost entirely invisibly; the new way of fighting demands of the soldier that he [. . .] withdraw from the sight of his opponent. He cannot fight upright on the earth but must crawl into and under it; at sea he fights most securely when he is concealed under the surface of the water, and in the air when he flies so high that he no longer offers a target.” Quoted in Eric J. Leed, *No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 19.

survivor's guilt and the "fear of showing fear"<sup>2</sup>. The neurosis in the trench was thus a combination of anxious stillness and frenzied movements, and informed "an experience of radical discontinuity on every level of consciousness."<sup>3</sup> The consciousness of the war-survivor was most characteristically marked by trauma, guilt and shame, at the knowledge of its association with the violence on human lives.

The perfect anonymity of the enemy, the consequent absurdity of killing perfect strangers, and disillusion with the jingoistic ideology of 'manly heroism' that had sent them to the war, often gave rise to feelings of existentialist ambivalence and self-doubt in soldiers' minds. Such conditions were anathema to the execution of combat and awakened the mind to the hollowness of the horror rather than the heroism of military glory. This was perhaps most poignantly portrayed in the war-lyrics of soldier-poets such as Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and Wilfred Owen. The poetry born out of their experiences in the trenches eschewed the "militarism of a Kipling" and instead offered "the unvarnished and unpopular truth of military action that has heretofore been hidden from civilian experience."<sup>4</sup> Such poetry was often characterised by an impossibility of interpretation and – within its lyrical frame<sup>5</sup> – contained the chaotic articulation of the mind under emotional trauma. In its

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<sup>2</sup> Ted Bogacz, "War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock'", *Journal of Contemporary History* 24.2 (April 1989): 227-56; 233.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Leed, *No Man's Land*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> James Campbell, "Interpreting the War", *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 265. The reference to Kiplingesque militarism is important in Campbell's analysis, as that suggests not only a transition in the poetic mode but also in that of masculinity, from that of jingoistic heroism to a more ambivalent and vulnerable sensibility. The correspondence between embodied feelings and masculinity in the wake of war trauma is the central point in this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> As Edna Longley suggests, the lyric of Owen and Sassoon ironically revisited the Romantic manifesto, only to impel its politically radical fervour and rescue it from "the emptiness of post-Romantic poeticalities". Longley, "The Great War, History and the English Lyric", *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, 65. It is interesting to look at the lyric of loss as depicted by the War poets, particularly in relation to the current works in neuroscience done on the qualia of human consciousness. As David Lodge suggests in his analysis of literature's ability to contain and communicate consciousness, the lyric, among all literary genres, is the most suited in its linguistic complexity, to articulate the qualia of human consciousness. The lyric enables this, as Lodge argues, by using language "in such a way that the description of qualia does not seem partial, imprecise, and only comprehensible when put in the context of the poet's personal life." Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel*, 11.

attempt to articulate an epistemology of shock, the war poetry voiced an embodied and cognitive panic that extended the “metaphoric possibilities of a factually presented situation”.<sup>6</sup> This transcended the ontic reality of the object and instead offered a phenomenological insight into the horror of human loss. With its mechanically engineered pogroms of destruction, the war heralded the era of shock in the European imagination whereby “the daily slaughter in the trenches of the Western front seemed to many to have exceeded the capacity of words to describe.”<sup>7</sup>

The machinery that went into the making of the First World War found its corollary in the nervous unmaking of the soldiers in the trenches as well as of the citizens of the twentieth-century metropolis. Peter Leese’s historical study of shell-shock traces the phenomena from the railway accidents of the nineteenth century which have been analysed as the first instances of industrialized trauma in the Western cultural imaginary. Studying the spatial similarities of the railway locomotive and the trench, Leese argues: “Both the trench and the locomotive carriage were confined spaces in which the occupant was at the mercy of external events; the surrounding environment could be only passively observed as sight and sound were severely obstructed; the impact of collision could not be anticipated or avoided, only experienced.”<sup>8</sup> The suddenness of the railway accident and that of the shell burst in trenches was a manifestation of the way in which technology increasingly invaded the private space of the twentieth-century European citizen. The British neurologist M.D.Eder stated in 1916: “From the combatant’s point of view this has been described as industrial warfare; from the medical point of view it might be described as nerve warfare.”<sup>9</sup> What connected the machinery of the war and that of the metropolis, were the principles of compulsory anonymity and immobility, along with the increasing consumption of human agency by automatized movements. The rhythms of the metropolis and the waves of the war were both premised on

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur E. Lane, *An Adequate Response: The War Poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972) 103.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2004) 22. As Sontag goes on to mention in the same page, on July 1 1914, the first day of the Battle of Somme; thirty thousand British soldiers were killed within the first half an hour.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) 15.

<sup>9</sup> M.D.Eder, “Psychopathology of the War Neurosis”, *Lancet* (August 12, 1916) 2. Quoted in Eric Leed, *No Man’s Land*, 164.

shared principles of production, transmission and replication of life-extending and life-annihilating machines.

The trauma caused by the war and the technologized shocks that invaded civilian life in the city both reduced the human being to nervous inertia. While at the warfronts this was immediately evident in the trauma of the trenches, in civilian life this experience found its paler resonance in the metropolitan rituals of human immobility in trains and tubes.<sup>10</sup> The machinery of the metropolis – like the industrial landscape of the warfronts – constituted technologically induced shocks that “subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training.”<sup>11</sup> As Sandra Gilbert argues in her essay about the war in relation to the literary sensibility of early twentieth century:

The first modern war to employ now familiar techniques of conscription and classification in order to create gigantic armies on both sides, World War I [. . .] virtually completed the Industrial Revolution's construction of anonymous dehumanized man, that impotent cipher who is frequently thought to be the twentieth century's most characteristic citizen [. . .] Fearfully assaulted by a deadly bureaucracy on the one side, and a deadly technocracy on the other, he was No Man, an inhabitant of the inhumane new era and a citizen of the un-promising new land into which this war of wars had led him.<sup>12</sup>

The anonymity of the soldier in trench warfare may be seen as the more vivid extension of that of the unknown citizen of the modern metropolis driven by the dictates of clock time. The impersonality in the trench and the anonymity in the moving machines of the metropolis both induced nervous conditions invoking emotional repression, numbness and loss of agency.<sup>13</sup> This was manifested in the

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<sup>10</sup> See Nicholas Daly, “Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernization of the Senses”, *ELH* 66(1999): 461-87 and Laura Marcus, “Oedipus Express: Trains, Trauma and Detective Fiction”, *New Formations* 41(2000): 173-88.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Pimlico, 1999) 171.

<sup>12</sup> Sandra Gilbert, “Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women and the Great War”, *Signs* 8.3 (1983): 422-450; 423.

<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the most direct analysis of modernity as a nervous condition was made by the social theorist Georg Simmel. In his “The Metropolis and Mental Life” Simmel argued that the conditions of metropolitan life at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century desiderated an instinct not to expose one’s ‘inner-self’ to what was fast becoming the totalizing eye of the modern metropolis. In his study of metropolitan restlessness and its associated boredom, Simmel defined the blasé attitude as

automatized movements of human beings in the metropolis as well as in the battlefield, as both demanded perfect synchronicity and anonymity, in blending with the machines of movement, production and annihilation.

The dehumanization of the shell-shocked victim was dramatized in much of the contemporary medical vocabulary of the day that sought to situate the sick men through a derogatory discourse of difference. Thus Frederick Mott, the British biochemist and neuropathologist, at the height of action during the First World War, asserted that the shell shocked soldier

[h]as little or no idea of time and place, and his powers of recognition and comprehension are greatly impaired. He may be deaf or mute or a deaf-mute [. . .] The condition of his mind is reflected, however, in his face, for he has a dazed, stupid, mask-like, mindless expression. He probably assumes as anergic, crouched-up posture, but he may wander about in an automaton-like way.<sup>14</sup>

In this analysis, the reduction in intelligence and cognitive capacities is compounded by the automatism of the self-less movement of the machine. The description offered by Mott may be interpreted as connecting the shell-shocked victim to the condition of *automatisme ambulatorie* subsequently analysed by Ian Hacking in his study of fugue as a cultural signifier of masculine hysteria.<sup>15</sup> The experience of violence in the First World War, like the experience of transport and transmission in the twentieth-century metropolis, produced an overarching state of immobility,

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“unconditionally reserved to the metropolis [. . .] [resulting] from the rapidly changing and closely compressed stimulation of the nerves.” Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life”, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: The Free Press, 1950) 414.

<sup>14</sup> F.W.Mott, *War Neuroses and Shell Shock* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919) 80-81.

<sup>15</sup> See Ian Hacking, “*Automatisme Ambulatory*: Fugue, Hysteria and Gender at the turn of the century”, *The Mind of Modernism*, 125-40. It is interesting to observe, as Hacking does, how the symptom of fugue was essentially gendered masculine, just as hysteria had been received as a female malady. Fugue might be seen as the masculine equivalent of feminine hysteria. This is clearly demonstrated in the way the military doctors of fin de siècle France used fugue as a convenient classification to describe those dissenting soldiers who refused to be conscripted during peacetime in the same manner in which shell-shocked British soldiers during the First World War were often classified as malingerers who feigned sickness in order to avoid being court-martialled. Fugue thus provided an interesting watershed in the medical discourse of the late nineteenth century at a time when neurosis and hysteria were increasingly affecting the male medical body. Fugue was a subversive phenomenon in nineteenth-century France and threatened bourgeoisie assumptions of identity and cultural constructs emerging, as Hacking puts it, as “the body language of male powerlessness [. . .] at the cutting edge of clinical and theoretical thinking about hysteria” (129).

anonymity and invisibility. Such a state, like the hysteria born out of it, was essentially indeterminable and yet spectacular; as troops of men, without any ostensible physical injury, returned from warfronts with traumatic conditions.



### 3.2 Shell-Shock and Its Contemporary Debates in British Medical Politics

Medical discourses on hysteria and nervous conditions before the First World War often looked at lifestyles and their impact on the nervous system. Neurasthenia, as studied by George Beard, was classified as an American disease that was associated with urban prestige as well as being regarded as pathological. In essence, Beard's classification corresponded to an industrial city culture where the mode of capitalist production was accompanied by an anxiety over the sustainability of the productive energy-economy. The history of neurasthenia was thus bound up with the architecture of the urban condition:

The restless energy bottled up in the urban centres and constantly excited by noises, jars and the rushing crowds tended more and more to make nervousness the national disease that medical writers were prone to call it. Beard's "neurasthenia" (to use Dr. Beard's term) and insanity were characteristically city phenomena as feeble-mindedness and impaired physical vigour were rural complaints.<sup>16</sup>

Essentially denoting a disease caused due to the accelerated lifestyle in a city, neurasthenia (as a medical term) quickly entered the fashionable vocabulary of cultural modernity, but began to lose ground with the advent of the First World War, displaced by new studies in hysteria and trauma that arose with the experience of shell shock.

Historically, this transition in medical practice occupied the same moment when Freudian psychoanalysis was in its ascendancy in the medical imagination. So Freud's analysis of Beard's neurasthenia can be seen as a critique of its meta-nosological character as Freud himself sought to study the aetiology of hysteria.<sup>17</sup> This disillusion with neurasthenia is interestingly evinced in an account by Leonard Woolf, whose wife Virginia Woolf was quite possibly the most famous neurasthenic patient in Britain after the First World War. Embittered by his wife's painful experiences at the hands of various neurologists such as George Savage, Leonard

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<sup>16</sup>Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Rise of the City 1878-1898* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1938) 433.

<sup>17</sup>For Freud's assessment of neurasthenia and of the way Beard promoted the concept, see Philip P. Wiener, "G.M. Beard and Freud on 'American Nervousness'", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17.2 (April, 1956): 269-74.

came to describe neurasthenia as “a name, a label, like neuralgia or rheumatism, which covered a multitude of sins, symptoms and miseries.”<sup>18</sup> Interestingly enough, the very same George Savage who treated Virginia Woolf, refused to consider neurasthenia as anything more than a euphemism for insanity, not “a definite and easily recognized disease with a certain pathology [but] a condition of the nervous system manifesting fatigue or partial exhaustion of the nerve centres and exhibiting different symptoms according to the inherited or acquired peculiarities of the individual.”<sup>19</sup>

The advent of modern psychiatry after the First World War, with its emphasis on psychic disclosure and its narratives of trauma, brought a decisive end to the culture of neurasthenia in Britain. The First World War might thus be regarded as an epistemic fault-line in the history of medicine and psychiatry, for thereafter medical discourses about nervousness underwent a paradigmatic shift. British neurology, which had hitherto been “brutally materialistic,”<sup>20</sup> faced its evident inadequacy in explaining a medical condition that could not simply be reduced to a physical disorder. In Britain, in particular, the treatment of neurosis after the First World War came under the control of psychiatrists rather than neurologists. In this changing medical culture, neurasthenia was seen as an inadequate term to cover a wide array of nervous diseases.<sup>21</sup> Thus the poet Siegfried Sassoon, treated by W. H. R. Rivers

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<sup>18</sup>Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911-1918* (London: Hogarth Press, 1964) 76. See also Stephen Trombley, *Virginia Woolf and Her Doctors* (London: Junction Books, 1981).

<sup>19</sup>George Savage, “A Lecture on Neurasthenia and Mental Disorders”, *The Medical Magazine* 20.1 (1911): 520-30; 520. Cited in Chandak Sengoopta, “‘A Mob of Incoherent Symptoms?’ Neurasthenia in British Medical Discourse 1860-1920”, *Cultures of Neurasthenia: From Beard to the First World War*, ed. Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra and Roy Porter (Amsterdam & New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2001) 107. Savage practised tooth-extraction as a mode of therapy for nervous breakdown, a mode that was not dissimilar to the ones adopted in the private sector psychiatric practices during early nineteenth century, a fact evinced by the following statement by John Haslam, the physician of the Bethlem in Norwich, one of the leading public asylums of the day: “It is a painful recollection to recur to the number of interesting females I have seen, who, after having suffered a temporary disarrangement of mind, and undergone the brutal operation of spouting in private receptacles for the insane, have been restored to their friends without a front tooth in either jaw.” John Haslam, *Observations on Madness and Melancholy* (London: Callow, 1809) 317. Cited in Lisa Appignanesi, *Mad, bad and sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present* (London: Virago, 2009) 46.

<sup>20</sup>L.Hearnshaw, *A Short History of British Psychology* (London: Methuen, 1964) 71.

<sup>21</sup>For an historical study of the culture of neurasthenia in Britain from Victorian period to the end of the First World War, see Chandak Sengoopta, “‘A Mob of Incoherent Symptoms?’ Neurasthenia in

in Craiglockhart, described the hospital as an “underworld of dreams haunted by submerged memories of warfare”.<sup>22</sup> The Freudian vocabulary evident in Sassoon’s description points to the medical politics advocated by Rivers in Craiglockhart. This sought to move away from the somatic materialism of earlier notions of brain shock towards a more psychoanalytic orientation.<sup>23</sup> The neurasthenic notions of nervous exhaustion and energy depletion went out of vogue with the more complex and immediately visible phenomenon of war trauma that struggled to find a classified medical description until the end of the Vietnam War.<sup>24</sup>

An article entitled “Neurasthenia and Shell-Shock”, published in the editorial in the *Lancet* on 18 March 1916, articulated the ambivalence about shell-shock, using a metaphor from the vocabulary of the war itself, describing the phenomenon in the medical scene as a No Man’s Land that defied definition: “This nebulous zone shelters many among the sad examples of nervous trouble sent home from the front.”<sup>25</sup> Introduced in 1915 by the British psychiatrist Charles Meyers, the term ‘shell-shock’ was quickly discovered to be thoroughly inappropriate for precise classification and came to suggest a wide range of symptoms, from compulsive hysteria to strategic malingering. As Jessica Meyer argues:

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British Medical Discourse, 1860-1920”, *Cultures of Neurasthenia from Beard to the First World War*, 97-116.

<sup>22</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Sherston’s Progress* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936) 51.

<sup>23</sup> W.H.R Rivers emerges as a seminal figure in the historical analysis of the neurosis of the First World War, especially in the medical vocabulary of shell-shock. As depicted in the semi-fictional *Regeneration* by Pat Barker, Rivers’ own location on the map of post-War neurosis throws much light in the diachronic understanding of the disorder of nerves, especially in relation to his treatment of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen in the Army Hospital at Craiglockhart in Scotland. The physical space of Craiglockhart might be interpreted as an exemplum of the Foucauldian birth of the clinic at a time of political and medical contingency when medicine and politics together were constructing a category of knowledge that sought to redress the proliferation of war neurosis into public debates. Unlike the easy mixing of diseases that characterise the civilian clinic, Craiglockhart, with its specialized and homogenous military/medical space of war neurosis, constitutes a “structure in which space, language, and death are articulated.” Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*, 243.

<sup>24</sup> In the wake of more recent works such as Judith Lewis Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), the state of Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (the medical name for shell-shock that emerged in 1980 after the Vietnam War) has been revealed to be as applicable to females in civilian lives as to male soldiers in the war front. Thus the masculinist essentialism of the term shell-shock requires significant revision.

<sup>25</sup> *The Lancet*, 18 March, 1916. Cited in Jacques Lezra, *Wild Materialism: The Ethic of Terror and the Modern Republic* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010) 24.

Throughout the First World War, and well into the interwar period, the range of physical and psychological symptoms that came collectively to be known as ‘shell shock’ were the subject of intense debate because they fell uncomfortably between the care of medicine and the strictures of military discipline.<sup>26</sup>

The introduction of shell shock into the vocabulary of early twentieth-century medical discourse was accompanied by a series of misappropriations and misapprehensions that revolved around a sudden and spectacular shift in the construction of masculine identity. The occurrence of shell shock has been analysed as the threshold moment in British medical history that introduced Freudian psychoanalysis into the hitherto materialistic body of British neurology.<sup>27</sup>

Shell shock was increasingly perceived as a non-somatic condition that could not be attributed alone to a wound to the material body. Thus, Charles Meyers, who coined the term, came to admit subsequently that: “A shell, then, may play no part whatever in the causation of ‘shell shock’: excessive emotion, e.g. sudden horror or fear – indeed any ‘psychical trauma’ or ‘inadjustable experience’ – is sufficient.”<sup>28</sup> As many case studies soon revealed, the shell-shocked victims had often never been exposed to the front lines that faced shrapnel blasts. The attempts by British physicians such as Sir Frederick Mott to demonstrate an organic and somatic foundation for shell-shock were premised on an idea that the syndrome was caused by “the commotional effects of exploding shells [that] caused physical damage to the central nervous system – either through micropuncture and haemorrhage in the cerebral tissues or by inducing tears in the spinal pathways.”<sup>29</sup> However, it was increasingly evident that the shell-shock syndrome was not attributable to symptoms

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<sup>26</sup> Jessica Meyer, “Shell Shock as a Self-Inflicted Wound, 1915-1921”, *Neurology and Modernity: A Cultural History of Nervous Systems, 1800-1950*, ed. Laura Salisbury and Andrew Shail (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 232.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Stone, “Shellshock and the psychologists”, *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry*, ed. W.F.Bynum, Roy Porter and Michael Shepherd, 3 Vols. (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1985) 2:265-66.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Meyers, *Shell Shock in France 1914-18* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940) 26.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Stone, “Shellshock and the psychologists”, 251. For Mott’s autopsy analysis of his own experiments based on his background as a pathologist in the Claybury asylum, see F.W.Mott, “A Microscopic Examination of the Brains of Two Dead Men of Commotio-Cerebri (Shellshock)”, *The British Medical Journal* 2.2967 (November 10 1917): 612-15. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20308662>. Web. 4 Oct. 2012.

of hereditary degeneration or to somatic disturbance. The somatic overdetermination of British psychiatry came under critique during the First World War by a different school of medicine that sought to incorporate psychoanalytic models in its treatments of shell-shocked soldiers.

Freud's own position as healer in the nervous narratives and negotiations of medical modernity was increasingly problematized by his growing awareness of the borderlines between physical conditions open to empirical science and more intangible moments of subjective experience. This realization led to his interest in language, symbolic expression and therefore, literary modes of narration:

I have not always been a psychotherapist but was trained, like other neuropathologists, to use local diagnosis and electro-prognosis, and I myself find it strange that the case histories that I write read like novellas and lack, so to speak, the serious stamp of science. I have to console myself with the thought that the nature of the object rather than my own preference is clearly responsible for this; local diagnosis and electrical reactions are simply not effective in the study of hysteria, whereas an in-depth portrayal of the workings of the inner life, such as one expects to be given by novelists and poets, together with the application of a few psychological formulas, does allow me to gain a kind of insight into the course of a hysteria.<sup>30</sup>

The narrative mode assumed and adopted in the psychoanalytic process might be read as a significant break from the materialist models of pre-Freudian psychiatry that drew on concepts of force and corporeal control. As Tim Armstrong asserts in his analysis of the epistemology of shock in early twentieth-century modernity, Freud can be credited for redeeming the

[n]otion of trauma from the materialistic and historically specific neurasthenic paradigm, with its attachment to the 'actual', the quotidian. Like the good doctor he insists, as Beard and Page did not, that there is a wound attached to the traumatic situation; a wound which is at first neurological, then fantastic, and then finally located somewhere between the two.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Freud and Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, trans. Nicola Luckhurst (London: Penguin Books, 2004) 164-65.

<sup>31</sup>Tim Armstrong, "Two Types of Shock in Modernity", *Critical Quarterly* 42.1 (January 2003): 60-73; 64.

Trauma thus came to be granted a non-somatic autonomy in Freudian psychoanalysis, located somewhere between empirically determinable symptoms and psychically indeterminable states. The use of free-association narratives as advocated by Freud<sup>32</sup> began to replace the medical methods that included shock therapy as well as confinement. Thus as Cathy Caruth argues in her analysis of trauma and the narratives of history,

If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience; it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. It is at this specific point where knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet.<sup>33</sup>

Like the literary text that contains the dialectic of truth and fiction in its depiction of imagined human characters in real (and often historical) situations, Freudian psychoanalysis as a study of the mind relied less on empirical evidence than on intersubjective interpretation of subjective experience. The psychoanalytic theory of hysteria was particularly helpful at a time when the scientific and medical notions of nerves, based on materialistic epistemologies, seemed increasingly inadequate in the treatment of the new nervous diseases that came in the wake of the twentieth century. Shell-shock – which “initiated the era of psychiatric modernism”<sup>34</sup> – relocated hysteria as a non-gendered phenomenon, refashioning the masculine subject in modernity.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The nature of free-association and speech therapy as advocated by Freud can be understood by his advice to his hysteric patient using the image of the moving train: “So say whatever goes through your mind. Act as though, for instance, you were a traveller sitting next to the window of a railway carriage and describing to someone inside the carriage the changing views which you see outside.” Freud, “On the Beginning of Treatment”, *The Freud Reader*, 372. The image of the moving train window as corollary to the moving human mind takes up interesting resonances, in relation to psychoanalysis’s location in cultural modernity. As John Brenkman suggests in his study of Freud as a Modernist, psychoanalysis incorporated a rich range of literary texts, from *Oedipus Rex* to *Faust*, and the interpretations carried out by Freud were often literary in character. In essence, Freud therapy was “corollary to significant strands of modernist art and literature” and emerges as a “response to the *unprecedentedness* of modern life itself, its continual transformations and dislocations.” Brenkman, “Freud the Modernist”, *The Mind of Modernism*, 173.

<sup>33</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996) 3.

<sup>34</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virgo Press, 1988) 164.

<sup>35</sup> For a study of Freudian psychoanalysis and how that was historically contemporaneous to the changing masculine subject, see John E. Toews, “Refashioning the Masculine Subject in Early

### 3.3 British Masculinity and Bio-political Identity before the First World War

In his work on the cultural anxieties around nervous exhaustion at the turn of the twentieth century, Anson Rabinbach suggests how fatigue and neurasthenia might be seen as bodily correlates to the second law of thermodynamics and how the fear of energy-loss gripped an increasingly capitalist and imperial economy.<sup>36</sup> Rabinbach particularly emphasizes the panic about enervation and fatigue affecting the male body as the direct vehicle of the imperial economy.<sup>37</sup> In analysing the correspondence of the nervous economy and the productive economy of the period immediately preceding the First World War, Rabinbach underlines the significance of the fear of exhaustion. Thus he argues:

[I]n the late nineteenth century energeticism provided a general framework for translating the physiologists and physicians' obsessions with fatigue into a coherent social doctrine. Yet these ideas also had a practical impact in the emergence of a distinctly European science of work in the two decades before the First World War.<sup>38</sup>

Energeticism as a systematic discourse of production and preservation was characterised by its close scrutiny of the male body. Tiredness or nervous fatigue connoted loss of production. The male body, with its systems of nervous control and energy economy, was increasingly viewed as a site that needed to be preserved in order to attain the highest productive potential. Thus a Harley Street physician,

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Modernism: Narratives of Self-Dissolution and Self-Construction in Psychoanalysis and Literature", *The Mind of Modernism*, 298-338.

<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to take up and analyse the analogy that was most often used to indicate the expanses of the English Empire: that of the constant appearance of the sun in at least some parts of the entire empire. In boasting with the slogan that the "Sun Never Sets in the English Empire", the advocates and admirers of imperialism were also alluding to the desire for constant and inexhaustible energy. The close connection of the imperial economy and its energy economy emerge as particularly relevant in the context of the popular panic about the cosmos cooling down.

<sup>37</sup> As the Scottish neurologist T.A.Ross states in his case studies of neurasthenia, there were instances where the patient imagined herself as an electric battery which was never sufficiently charged. Ross equated the phenomenon of neurasthenia to that of excessive electric discharge using the analogy of the battery to denote the exhaustion of the body. T.A.Ross, *An Enquiry into Prognosis in the Neuroses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936) 38-39.

<sup>38</sup> Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1992) 182.

commenting on anxieties about the experience of ennui and its negative effects on the economy of energy, argued:

Money now is almost exclusively made at the expense of the wear and tear of nerve [. . .] and it is a matter of ever-increasing economical importance to keep the money-making machine, the brain and the mind, at the highest productive pitch—in short, in a state of perfect health.<sup>39</sup>

The epistemology of medicine and medical discourses at the turn of the twentieth century must be understood by analysing these as practices that involve sociological values as much as biological facts as nervous disease after 1900 began to “be understood statistically, sociologically, psychologically – even politically.”<sup>40</sup>

Crucially, turn-of-the-century British medical narratives corresponded with economic and political anxieties pervading a range of political discourses from philanthropic liberalism to fascistic xenophobia.<sup>41</sup> The anxiety about preserving the ideal male body was exacerbated during the First World War, effectively exposing the constructed nature of gender identity in public discourse. Thus Janet Oppenheim contends in her work on the politics of nerves and nervous disorders in late Victorian Britain:

The great problem with nervous breakdown, as medical men fully realized, was that it made a mockery of these [the conventional gender] very distinctions, reducing its male victims to passivity, removing them from business activities and public affairs, rendering them utterly indecisive. In

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<sup>39</sup> Alfred T. Schofield, *Nerves in Disorder: A Plea for Rational Treatment* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1903) 4. Cited in Roy Porter, “Nervousness, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Style: From Luxury to Labour”, *Cultures of Neurasthenia*, 38.

<sup>40</sup> Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (London: HarperCollins, 1997) 634.

<sup>41</sup> Ted Bogacz’s historical study of the War Committee created in England during the First World War is significant here as that demonstrates how medicine, especially as it entered the military space, was almost always racialized and premised on eugenics. See Bogacz, “War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into ‘Shell-Shock’”, 231. The increasing racialization of medicine and medical politics found its darkest manifestation with the rise of Fascism and Nazism before the Second World War, where the human body under the medical gaze was essentially qualified on the basis of racial and ethnic attributes. See Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).



short, nervous exhaustion brought men perilously close to the feminine condition.<sup>42</sup>

Oppenheim's analysis throws light on the anxious masculinity that was constructed in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain in order to produce and perpetuate imperial and industrial control in the public space. Nerves emerged as a vital material as well as metaphor in this cultural climate and, as was the case with First World War shell shock, increasingly problematized the stability of normative gender identities.

A direct analogy between shell-shocked male soldiers and the hysteria of the widows of the German soldiers of the First World War is given in Robert Whalen's study which includes an interesting report made by the Bavarian police in Munich in July 1918. Classifying the shell-shocked victims disparagingly as 'shiverers', the police report states: "The scene this morning could have been avoided had not a group of disabled veterans, including two so-called 'shiverers', repeatedly simulated the nervous attacks, and thereby excited the women."<sup>43</sup> The hysteric widows and the shell-shocked men thus appeared to occupy the same nervous and mimetic economy under the military-medical gaze. Indeed, the female malady that informed hysteria had been classified by the British surgeon James Paget as *neuromimesis*, a condition that entailed a compulsive and nervous propensity to mimic and simulate. Neuromimesis corresponded to the performative quality that was commonly and conventionally associated with the hysteric body and the emphasis on mimetic propensity tied the term closely to theatrical performance.<sup>44</sup> For Paget, the central

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<sup>42</sup> Janet Oppenheim, 'Shattered Nerves', 141. It is interesting, at this point, to connect to the threat of feminization that was most immediately embodied by the shell-shocked soldier of the First World War who was a living testimony to the inadequacies of gender configurations with his inability to assimilate into the masculinist code of behaviour in civilian space. Similar threats of emasculation through hysteria also pervade Eliot's early poetry, most notably in the figure of Prufrock who with his procrastinations and deferrals, performs masculine hysteria in the speculum of social space. *The Waste Land* of course dramatizes this further in its direct depictions of nervous breakdown and the appropriation of what Wayne Koestenbaum classifies as a "female language" that resembled "the hysterical discourse" as operative in the case histories of Freud. Koestenbaum, "The Waste Land: T.S.Eliot's and Ezra Pound's Collaboration on Hysteria", *T.S.Eliot's The Waste Land*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2007) 169. Hysteria is of course most explicitly demonstrated in Eliot in the short poem entitled "Hysteria" which depicts a complex counter-transference of masculine hysteria in the social space of a café.

<sup>43</sup> Robert W. Whalen, *Bitter Wounds: German Victims of the Great War, 1914-1939* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1984) 116.

<sup>44</sup> James Paget, *Clinical Lecture and Essays*, ed. Howards Marsh (London: Longmans, Green, 1879) 172-73. Cited in Athena Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* (Stanford,

issue was one of will-power and he clearly stated that it required a power of the will, “to avoid these imitations, and to disbelieve or disregard sensations imitative of those endured by others.”<sup>45</sup>

Pre-First-World-War Britain, with its obsession with cultural and bodily hygiene, was also the moment when the body of the boy was of crucial significance and was often viewed as a corollary to the body of the empire. The male body in the bio-political discourse of the day was a crucial site of construction and preservation, as evinced by the increasing popularity of Boy Scouts’ Movements in Britain and the rituals of Boys’ public schools and “young boys and adolescents, in whom the Empire had staked a large investment of racial capital, were the obvious targets of self-appointed guardians of ‘healthy’ attitudes.”<sup>46</sup> As the Clarendon Commission declared in 1864, the British public schools were character-factories that sought to situate and produce the desirable discourses of masculinity, corresponding closely to the necessity of manly control, unemotional constitution and muscular body in selfless service to the society and the empire. The Report, published during the

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California: Stanford University Press, 1995) 52. As the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde reported, a famously sensational incident at Moscow during the 1881 Russian tour of Sarah Bernhardt caught the attention of several Russian alienists. The report described how during a performance of *La Dame aux camellias*, the legendary Bernhardt playing Madame Gautier coughed to communicate the consumptive state of the character. In the pin-drop silence inside the Moscow theatre, the audience sat riveted at the performance and the still silence before the act of coughing accentuated the nervous tension in the theatre space. But as soon as the actress coughed on the stage, the audience seemed to have been suddenly caught in a state of convulsive and compulsive coughing that cut across the silence and created a hysteric atmosphere of coughing where nobody could actually hear the next lines of the actress. Gabriel Tarde, “Foules et sects au point vue criminal”, *Revue des deux mondes*, November 15, 1893: 349-87. Cited in Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions*, 81. Paget’s emphasis on nervous mimicry, performance and power of the will was subsequently taken up and appropriated by Silas Weir Mitchell who in his 1885 *Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System, Especially in Women* clearly played up the potential of the physician to appear as a manipulator of wills before the patient while also underlining the gendered binary of the doctor-patient relationship. The emphasis on virtual disease and virtual cure is asserted by Silas Weir Mitchell thus: “If you can cause such hysteric women as these to believe that you can cure them, you enlist on your side their own troops, for as you can create symptoms, so can you also create absence of symptoms. There is in all this something like the so-called magnetizing of which we used to hear and see so much.” Silas Weir Mitchell, *Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System, Especially in Women* (Philadelphia: Lea Brothers, 1885) 66. Cited in Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions*, 87. Mitchell’s use of metaphors from war here is interesting. Growing especially out of a climate of war and imperialism (Mitchell himself was a doctor of nerves at the Turner’s Lane Hospital in Philadelphia during the American Civil War), early twentieth-century medical knowledge wielded a discursive as well as direct power over the male body which was seen as a mutable frame that required reification.

<sup>45</sup> Paget, *Clinical Lectures*, 182. Cited in Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions*, 86.

<sup>46</sup> Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel*, 212.

height of British imperialism, was absolutely unequivocal about the social significance of public schools. Indeed, as the Commission asserted:

The English people were indebted to these schools for the qualities on which they pique themselves most – for their capacity to govern others and control themselves, their aptitude for combining freedom with order, their public spirit, their vigour and manliness of character, their strong but not slavish respect for public opinion, their love of healthy sports and exercise.<sup>47</sup>

The ideal boy was expected to be pious as well as plucky, muscular as well as missionary. The discursive zeal with which turn-of-the-century masculinity was constructed often incorporated ideologies from Social Darwinism. The selflessness of the boy and his subordination of private priorities in the face of collective and corporate duties was inculcated early on through the role of the public school that emerged as *the* character manufacturer of the late nineteenth century. The financial economy of empire and the nervous economy of the masculine body were closely related in the discourse networks before the First World War. The panic about male nervous breakdown or “cracking up” was linked also to the fear of failure of the imperial economy. Masculinity before the First World War was premised on a self-effacing ideal that demanded perfect bodily and spiritual health, as well as a strict avoidance of what were considered polluting influences such as masturbation and the melancholia born out of excessive introspection.<sup>48</sup>

The taboo against masturbation and the associated rhetoric of bodily loss emerge in a fascinating exchange between the shell-shocked First World War soldier Bill Prior and W.H.R.Rivers in the fictionalized account of Pat Barker’s 1994 novel *The Eye in the Door* (whose very title evokes the medical culture of containment and constant surveillance adopted by most hospitals and practitioners in their treatment of the soldiers). The exchange begins with Rivers interrogating Prior on his habit of masturbation:

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<sup>47</sup> Cited in Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos* (London: Hamledon Continuum, 1987) 41.

<sup>48</sup> Thus one can see how the existentialist awareness that necessitated the inward turn was an anathema to the conditions preached by the masculinist factory in late nineteenth century Britain. The melancholic schoolboy, like his masturbatory counterpart, was seen as dangerously and subversively degenerate.

‘I used to,’ Prior said.

‘When was that?’

‘When I was twelve. Where we lived there was a young man who used to be wheeled around on a trolley. I don’t know what was wrong with him, tuberculosis of the spine, something like that, something terrible. And the trolley creaked, so you could always hear it coming. And he was pointed out to us as an illustration of what happened if you indulged in self-abuse.’

‘Who told you that?’

‘Scoutmaster. Mr Hailes. He actually said what came out was spinal fluid. And of course you’ve only got a limited supply of that, and mine was going down pretty fast. I used to lie awake and try not to do it, and I’d get more and more frightened. Unfortunately, there was only one thing that took my mind off the fear. So I did it again. And all the time this creaking trolley was getting nearer and nearer.’<sup>49</sup>

The location of the scoutmaster as the overseer of ideal masculinity and the symbol of the creaking trolley as a signifier of approaching enervation and entropy both occupy the oneiric landscape of the hysteric soldier. In his analysis of the male body under the medical gaze, Foucault also studies the close correspondence between masturbation and bourgeois morality in a culture of control, surveillance and sexual repression. He states how “[t]he onanistic child was not the child of the people, the future worker who had to be taught the disciplines of the body, but rather the schoolboy, the child surrounded by domestic servants, tutors, governesses.”<sup>50</sup> Framed in his formative phase, the onanistic boy was kept under close control and supervision by the figures of authority in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain.<sup>51</sup>

In his study of the masturbation panic and moral regulation during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, Alan Hunt asserts that the anti-masturbation response was primarily targeted at adolescent boys of middle and upper class status attending British public schools. Analysing how masturbation anxiety slipped between idealised masculinities and moral panic, Hunt states that “the distinctive shape of the British antimasturbation campaign was formed by a conjunction between the tradition of antisexual feminism and social imperialist anxieties about

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<sup>49</sup> Pat Barker, *The Eye in the Door* (London: Penguin Books, 1994) 73.

<sup>50</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990) 121.

<sup>51</sup> A vivid account of which is offered in George Orwell’s essay “Such, Such were the Joys”, which is a remarkable, if shocking, rendition of public school masculinity in Edwardian England. Orwell’s essay will be studied in detail in the following chapter on colonial masculinity.

the fate of the empire.”<sup>52</sup> Thus the panic of masturbation was voiced by scoutmasters and physicians alike. Onanism was equated with the expenditure of vital masculine energy that ought to have been preserved for production and procreation. These were themes that connected the body of the boy to the body of the British empire. Sir James Paget, the neurologist who coined the term neuromimesis to describe hysteria, was unequivocal in his condemnation of masculine masturbation. In a paper entitled “Sexual Hypochondriasis” written in 1870, Paget describes masturbation as: “[a]n uncleanliness, a filthiness forbidden by God, an unmanliness despised by men.”<sup>53</sup> The location of onanism between bodily and religious domains of prohibition created unique structures of guilt in the formative masculine imagination in Edwardian Britain. This complex economy of repression and guilt was in the service of a system of “everyday moral regulation that can fruitfully be understood as a project of the governance of the self, that, in particular, promoted the goal of self-control.”<sup>54</sup>

The strict policing of masturbation pointed to an order of masculinity that was premised on rational virtuosity and effacement of emotional excess. The indeterminacy of hysteria in Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* trilogy (1992-95) may be read as the source of the masculinity crisis exemplified by the soldiers from war and is embodied most poignantly by the stammering neurologist W. H .R. Rivers himself in a narrative space where stutter

[s]tands for the speaking body, and points to an incongruous and inseparable relationship between spirit and matter, discourse and act, the linguistic and the physical. The stutter is a symptom or diagnostic, an act that cannot know what it is doing, a vivid instantiation of a knowledge that cannot know itself.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Alan Hunt, “The Great Masturbation Panic and the Discourses of Moral Regulation in Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Century Britain”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8.4 (April 1998): 575-615; 582.

<sup>53</sup> Paget, “Sexual Hypochondriasis”, *Clinical Lectures and Essays*, 292. Cited in Jane Wood, *Passion and Pathology in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 84.

<sup>54</sup> Alan Hunt, “The Great Masturbation Panic”, 582.

<sup>55</sup> Ankhi Mukherjee, *Aesthetic Hysteria: The Great Neurosis in Victorian Melodrama and Contemporary Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011) 79.

The stuttering neurologist in Barker's *Regeneration* (1992), who articulates his ambivalence concerning the discourses of neurology of his day, stands in stark contrast to the medical figures in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1922), who express the crudely formulated closures advocated by contemporary medical science. The doctors Holmes and Bradshaw emerge as fully subscribed to the masculinist medical discourses that advocate proportion, coercion and bodily hygiene (issues that were also augmented by scoutmasters and headmasters in the early decades of the twentieth century). The construction of masculinity (through Scout movement and the Public Schools) in the late nineteenth century was evidently in close correspondence with the politics of imperial expansion. It was also tied to the panic around entropy as supported by pseudo-scientific belief in the finitude of the vital spinal fluid that was supposed to be permanently lost every time a boy masturbated.<sup>56</sup> Prior's sense of shame and guilt in responding to his masturbatory instincts was a direct result of a medicalized view of sexual morality that insisted that "young men of the middle classes of a great imperial power were enjoined to engage in an acquisition of self-discipline."<sup>57</sup>

As Foucault contends in his study of medicine and masculinity, the biopolitical culture that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century was quick to realize that

Medicine must no longer be confined to a body of techniques for curing ills and of the knowledge that they require; it will also embrace a knowledge of *healthy man*, that is, a study of *non-sick man* and a definition of the *model man*.<sup>58</sup>

In her analysis of masculinity crisis in the early twentieth century, Sandra Gilbert argues that the structural similarities between the narrow domestic space and the closed trenches of the First World War brought the hysterical and repressed Victorian female into problematic proximity with the male soldier of the First World War.<sup>59</sup> In a similar vein, Eric Leed also suggests that the doctors of the combatants realized that the "symptoms of shell shock were precisely the same as those of the

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<sup>56</sup> See David H. M. Woollam, "The Historical Significance of the Cerebrospinal Fluid", *Medical History* 1.2 (1957): 96-114.

<sup>57</sup> Alan Hunt, "The Great Masturbation Panic", 589.

<sup>58</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 39-40.

<sup>59</sup> Sandra Gilbert, "Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women and the Great War", 422-450.

most common hysterical disorders of the peacetime, though they often acquired new and more dramatic names in war [. . .] what had been predominantly a disease of women before the war became a disease of men in combat.”<sup>60</sup> The medical treatment of male hysteria, especially when it was associated with essentialized ‘feminine’ symptoms, often relied on the forceful denial of its existence under the bio-political gaze.

Both female hysteria and shell shock disclosed the inadequacy of the medical materialism when faced with symptoms that did not appear to have any real somatic origin. More significantly, both exposed the anxieties in the medical discourses themselves as they sought to address the resistance to medical classification. Hysteria, as well as shell-shock, revealed the constructed quality of pre-First World War medical science that, like the doctor-husband in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper*, “scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.”<sup>61</sup> The treatment meted out to the narrator in *The Yellow Wallpaper* was in close alliance with the modes of therapy on female hysterics which constituted, as Mark Micale put argues:

[t]he condescending authoritarianism of male doctors towards their female patients; the tacit collusion of doctors, husbands and fathers in controlling unmanageable womenfolk; the combination of male sexual fear, desire and

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<sup>60</sup>Eric Leed, *No Man's Land*, 163.

<sup>61</sup>Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, ed. Dale M. Bauer (Boston & New York: Bedford Books, 1998) 41. Gilman’s text is remarkable in the way it connects the female anxieties with the medical mappings of its day and illustrates the alliance between the medical discourses with the status quo of patriarchal hegemonic control. The doctor-husband in Gilman’s novel embodies the coercive tyranny of the Mitchell-method of treating female hysteria. The husband in *The Yellow Wallpaper* is adamant in his refusal to see his wife as ‘really’ ill, the reality of her illness being effaced by the lack of any ostensible physical manifestation or bodily centre, a theme that suggests the connection between the female hysteric and the male shell-shocked soldier. The compulsory rest that the female protagonist is subjected to in Gilman’s story can be read as symptomatic of the male/medical misunderstanding of hysteria in the nineteenth century. Indeed, Gilman’s story is not dissimilar to the experience of Eleanor Marx – the daughter of Karl Marx – who went through a similar agony of rest cure and indifference from the males around her, an experience that contributed to her eventual suicide. The vocabulary of pain in the account of Eleanor Marx is remarkably resonant with the fictional narrative of *The Yellow Wallpaper*. In a letter written to her sister Jenny in January 1882 from her confinement in the Isle of Wight, Eleanor stated: “What neither papa nor the doctors nor anyone will understand is that chiefly mental worry that affects me. Papa talks about my having “rest” and “getting strong” before I try anything and won’t see that “rest” is the last thing I need—and that I should be more likely to “get strong” if I have some definite plan and work than to go on waiting and waiting . . . what I most dread is the consulting of doctors. They cannot and will not see that mental worry is as much an illness as any physical ailment could be.” Cited in Jenny Marx Lonquet, *The Daughters of Karl Marx: Family Correspondence 1896-1898*, ed. Olga Meier, trans. Faith Evans (New York & London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982) 145-46.

hostility in the handling of female patients; and the widespread reality of abusive practices, especially radical gynaecological surgery, in the treatment of female nervous disorders.<sup>62</sup>

Such proscriptive tendencies and medical discourses were reflected in the rest-cure methods prescribed by Silas Weir Mitchell whereby the female patient would be subjected to absolute confinement and not allowed access to any medium of expression, including writing. Mitchell's method of medical surveillance and the treatment of hysteria through confinement were popular well into the twentieth century. Doctors treating soldiers from the war also hoped to induce a strategic boredom among patients with nervous breakdown through uniform monitoring and control.<sup>63</sup> Medical treatments before the war were based on a materialist reductionism that perceived the male hysteric as "morally depraved, wilful and egoistic. These judgements led the physician to stress discipline, chastisement and even punishment as part of the therapeutic process."<sup>64</sup>

Both female hysteria and male shell-shock suggested the phallogocentric anxiety of losing control over the body. This threat was accompanied by a desire to construct a strategic 'Other' that could accommodate the anxiety of degeneration through a discourse of disgust and difference. This idea of deviance, as Sander Gilman has argued, needed to be structured through strategic stereotypes that offered

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<sup>62</sup>Mark S. Micale, "Hysteria and Its Historiography: A Review of Past and Present Writings", *History of Science* 27.4 (December, 1989):317-51; 322. Gilman was reported to have posted a copy of *The Yellow Wallpaper* to Mitchell (who is explicitly alluded to in the story as a *physician-extraordinaire* who will be sought for if the doctor-husband's treatment fails) as an exposition of the flawed and proscriptive nature of his therapy and characteristically received no response from the reverent physician who possibly regarded the story as essentially a work of fiction with little bearings on the actual medical ontology of hysteria. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1935) 121. Mitchell's therapy on hysteric women was medically premised on the advocacy to eat and gain weight, putting on weight being one of the signs of wholesome health. This was especially articulated in *Fat and Blood: And How to Make Them* (Philadelphia: J.B.Lippincott & Co., 1877). For an extensive account of Gilman's own illness and the trauma of the treatment she was subjected to, see Jeffrey Berman, "The Unrestful Cure: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and 'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" *The Talking Cure: Literary Representations of Psychoanalysis* (New York: New York University Press, 1985) 33-59.

<sup>63</sup> See Paul Lerner, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890-1930* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003)140-42.

<sup>64</sup> Ted Bogacz, "War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock'", 231.



a standardized language of loss.<sup>65</sup> Narratives of Social Darwinism and eugenics occupied the medical and cultural climates leading into and emerging out of the First World War: from trench trauma to public school repression, from the confusion of conscience in colonial conditions to its correspondent nervous melancholia. The political anxiety around the military masculinity crisis was spectacularly showcased by the establishment of The War Committee of Enquiry into Shell-Shock that ran its office from 7 September 1920 to 22 June 1922 under the chairmanship of Lord Southborough, a group of constitutionally class-conscious men who accused the lower orders of the military for malingering and who were themselves “products of an age dominated by the ideas of social Darwinism, the eugenics movement and racism; they reflected as well some of that pre-war obsession with national and racial degeneration.”<sup>66</sup> Similar notions were advocated by Lewis Yealland who, in his 1918 work, *Hysterical Disorders of Warfare* encouraged a strategic system of shaming the shell-shocked soldiers who were described as the “hideous enemy of negativism”<sup>67</sup> that ought to be threatened with court martial. J. C. Hunn, a medical military officer associated with the Royal Welch Fusiliers thought of Siegfried Sassoon’s transfer to Craiglockhart Military Hospital as a move into a society of degenerates and alcoholic malingerers who had fallen into the convenient classification of shell shock primarily to cajole their way out of the war.<sup>68</sup>

Social Darwinists before the First World War advocated a model of masculinity that upheld the theory that “the association of morbid introspection,

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<sup>65</sup>Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985) 20.

<sup>66</sup>Bogacz, 237. For an analysis of the ways in which Woolf herself could have been acquainted with the report of the War Committee presented in British Parliament in August 1922, see Sue Thomas, “Virginia Woolf’s Septimus Smith and Contemporary Perceptions of Shell Shock”, *English Language Notes* 25.2 (December 1987) :49-57.

<sup>67</sup>Quoted in Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (London: Pandora, 2001) 21. Yealland features in Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* (1992) as an embodiment of masculinist medical science that relied on coercion and corporeal domination in the form of electric shocks in order to treat shell shocked soldiers. The scene featuring Yealland in *Regeneration* is taken up later in this chapter.

<sup>68</sup>J. C. Hunn, *The War the Infantry Knew 1914-1919* (London: Abacus, 1994) 372. Similar notions of shell shock were ascertained by many contemporary doctors who combined the theses of somatic wounds and degenerative genes to account for the sudden influx of the syndrome during the war. Charles Moran, medical officer during the First World War and subsequently Winston Churchill’s private physician, spoke of the shell-shock victims as essentially the unfortunate progeny of “bad stock”. Charles Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage* (London: Constable, 1945) 26.

exaggerated self-consciousness, and ‘unnatural egoism’ with mental disorders was [. . .] fundamental, even causal, rather than symptomatic or accidental.”<sup>69</sup> Introspection and egoism were associated with undesirable ‘female’ attributes. The ideal British masculinity devised by the Social Darwinists instead relied on selfless spiritual as well as bodily courage and the subordination of individual agency before that which was more conducive to collective and corporate programmes. This model, which had largely invested in the expansion of imperialism, was also fostered during the war, along with associated notions of bodily and racial hygiene and disgust at messiness and corporeal contamination.<sup>70</sup> Thus Jose Harris argues in the context of imperial British masculinity:

Imperial visions injected a powerful strain of hierarchy, militarism, “frontier mentality”, administrative rationality and masculine civic virtue into British political culture. [On the other hand] domestic political forces were running in quite the opposite direction, towards egalitarianism, “progressivism”, consumerism, popular democracy, feminism and women’s rights.<sup>71</sup>

The masculine body was thus constituted by the medical, cultural and political discourse of the day, discourses often obsessed with questions of class and stock. As British medical records of the First World War evince, the issues of race, class and upbringing were initially of paramount significance to the physicians treating war soldiers. These were physicians who mostly appropriated the vocabulary and

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<sup>69</sup> Michael Clark, “‘Morbid Introspection,’ Unsoundness of Mind, and British Psychological Medicine, c 1830-1900”, *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry*, 3 Vols. eds. W.F.Bynum, Roy Porter and Michael Shepherd (London: Tavistock Publications, 1985-88) 3: 91. Jay Winter’s study of the shell-shock reveals how the syndrome offered ways to legitimize and salvage the stigma associated traditionally with nineteenth-century notion of neurasthenia and its association with urban malingering. Jay Winter, ‘Shell-shock and the Cultural History of the Great War’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 35.1(2000): 7-11. In a related work, Winter looks beyond its purely medical condition of shell-shock and observes how the phenomenon deconstructed “the point of reference from which an individual’s sense of self unfolds.” Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006) 53.

<sup>70</sup> The shell-shocked soldiers from the war came to occupy a similar social plane of mistrust and misgiving as that of the nervous white men at the colonies. Both showcased the stigma and shame that informed the discourses of degeneration and disgust in the twentieth century European masculinist imagination. Such discourses relied heavily on the binaries of masculinity and effeminacy, notions of racial purity and impurity, civilizational progress and savage atavism. The aversion towards corporeal messiness and the fear of contamination would be even more pronounced in the colonial site where economic exploitation would be accompanied by a desire to preserve and perpetuate racial and bodily purity. This analysis will be done in the following chapter in the study of Orwell’s *Burmese Days*.

<sup>71</sup> Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain 1870-1914* (London: Penguin, 1994) 6.

grammar of Social Darwinism, criminology and the discourses on degeneration, the tenets of which had contributed to the construction of an ideal masculinity and the ideal male body before the First World War. But, by the time the war ended, the normative model of masculinity had undergone a seismic shift with the presuppositions of patriarchy increasingly interrogated and exposed, along with the limitations of the materialist medical view on nervous illness.<sup>72</sup>

The epistemic shift in the map of medical science wrought by the experience of shell shock can hardly be overestimated. As Martha Nussbaum has argued, anxieties in the German masculinist imagination around the First World War incorporated disgust at the messy corporeality of the human body and aspired towards a steely stability of nerves that sought to transcend the body's fleshy frame. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to construct an 'Otherness' that would signify the body of shame and the shame of the body that the masculinist economy sought to overcome. This was ideologically instantiated by a mutable messiness which was projected onto the female body and Jewish men in the wake of the First World War. The constructed 'Otherness' contained both the categorised abject entity and the feeling of disgust directed against it. This was in opposition to the steely image of the model German man who was compared to the perfectly functioning machine.<sup>73</sup> The British public schools and their tenets about hygiene operated on similar principles and were crucially and ideologically alive to the project of building this discursive body as well as the compulsory body-less-ness of the model man in a culture of eugenics and Social Darwinism. Thus the *Strand Magazine* enquired in 1905 about the deterioration of the public schoolboy<sup>74</sup> and George Savage, who (mis)treated Virginia Woolf, asserted unequivocally in his Lumleian Lectures to the Royal College of Physicians, in 1907, that degenerative insanity was attributable to social misfits than to material brain disease.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel*, 225.

<sup>73</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 108.

<sup>74</sup> J.A.Mangan, "Social Darwinism and Upper-Class Education in Late Victorian and Edwardian England", *Manliness and Morality*, 135-36.

<sup>75</sup> George Savage, "The Lumleian Lectures On Insanity, Its Causes And Increase. Delivered Before The Royal College Of Physicians Of London", *The British Medical Journal* 1.2411 (March 16 1907): 622-23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2093548>. Web. 2 Oct. 2012.

The masculinity crisis that emerged during the First World War can be read as the product of a broader cultural condition whereby the binaries of good and evil, moral and immoral, male and female, could no longer hold on to the firmness of an earlier high-Victorian ethnography. Medicine was also challenged in similar terms as the spectacle of hitherto heroic men breaking down into neurotic fits grew increasingly familiar. By the end of the War, there were more than 80,000 instances of shell-shock that passed through the military medical records.<sup>76</sup> As Ted Bogacz argues in his article on the shell shock trauma and the political and cultural anxieties around it, reports of shell shock and male hysteria in the war were increasingly presented in the printing press that disseminated the trauma throughout the British civilian space:

A series of articles appeared in *The Times*, for example, referring to hysterical blindness (8 April), 'The Wounded Mind' (24 April), and deafness and paralysis resulting from 'Wounds of consciousness' (25 May) among soldiers in the trenches. By mid-1916, the shell-shocked soldier had become a virtual cliché in the English press.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> T. J. Mitchell and G. M. Smith, *Medical Services, Casualty and Medical Statistics of the Great War* (London: HMSO, 1931) 115.

<sup>77</sup> Ted Bogacz, "War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22", 234.

### 3.4 Post-war Metropolis and Mental Life in *Mrs Dalloway*

and think of poor Albert  
He's been in the army for four years, he wants a good time

T.S.Eliot, *The Waste Land*<sup>78</sup>

The returning soldier was a recurring symbolic figure in the post-First World War British novel, often embodying an enervated masculinity characterised by melancholic alienation in the normative civilian space. In his nervous movement from a realm of heroism to that of nihilism, the shell-shocked soldier embodied a no-man's land informed by an irrational displacement and detachment.<sup>79</sup> This is instantiated in many post-war novels such as Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), a fictional narrative about shell shock and its associated amnesia. In West's story, the soldier Chris Baldry forgets about the trauma of the trench as well as his unhappy marriage to a superficial woman as he moves back in his mind to that part of his life spent in profound and pure love for a working class girl, a love that was never consummated due to class barriers and the war.<sup>80</sup> The relation between war and class returns heavily in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* (1992-95) trilogy and also in Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), where a direct reference to the war also occurs in the exchange of working class women anxious to preserve their sexual appeal for the boys back from war who want a good time.

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1922) published in the same year as Eliot's *The Waste Land*, is a complex narrative of human loss that grew out of the author's

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<sup>78</sup> T.S.Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays*, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1969) 66.

<sup>79</sup> Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel*, 234. In becoming a no-man's land that contained a crisis that could not be cathartically articulated, the shell-shocked soldier embodying a condition that is fictionally anticipated by Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* who betrays the psychosomatic signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder characterising the nervous soldier back from the warfront.

<sup>80</sup> Rebecca West, *The Return of the Soldier* (New York: The Modern Library, 2004).

personal experiences under her contemporary medical gaze. The bio-political context of Woolf's novel is immediately evoked by her detailed descriptions of the mourning metropolis, where "Everyone has friends who were killed in the War."<sup>81</sup> The city in *Mrs Dalloway* – like the battlefields of the First World War – is a complex combination of speedy machinic rituals and privately embodied inertia. Woolf dramatizes the discourses of medical control that she herself had been subjected to, through the fictional characters of Holmes and Bradshaw.<sup>82</sup> Commenting on the historical significance of Woolf's novel, William Greenslade states: "*Mrs Dalloway* is the first to fully comprehend and objectify the myths of degeneration: it is the last, in that no subsequent sophisticated fictional account could or would take degeneration seriously."<sup>83</sup> Degeneration and decadence in Woolf's work – essentially a city-novel about one day in various connected lives – are carefully and disturbingly juxtaposed alongside notional signifiers of speed and scientific progress.<sup>84</sup> The male body in *Mrs Dalloway* emerges as the site where the bio-political gaze enacts its corrective measures and its heavy-handed erasure of deviance. Woolf's novel is all the more disturbing in the manner in which it depicts how such merciless medical execution was both socially sanctioned and legally permitted. Masculinity in the post-war metropolis of Woolf's novel is embodied by a range of figures, from Septimus Smith, the enervated shell-shocked soldier from the war, to Peter Walsh, the confused imperial officer back from the colonies. Both emerge as painful subjects of an imperial and masculinist machinery that is perpetuated in bio-political systems by imperious medical practitioners: "men who

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<sup>81</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (New Delhi: Worldview, 2006) 54. All subsequent references will be from this edition and will be made parenthetically as *MD*.

<sup>82</sup> It may indeed be argued that Woolf's characterisation of Holmes and Bradshaw in *Mrs Dalloway* was largely based on her personal and painful encounters as a patient of George Savage. Woolf's treatment by Savage entailed confinement and disconnection from the familiar world whereby she was subjected to a 'rest cure' in Jean Thomas' sanatorium in Twickenham, "denied pen and paper, kept in a darkened room and fed on cold rice pudding". Roy Porter, *A Social History of Madness: Stories of the Insane* (London: Phoenix Giants, 1999) 119. Savage's treatment of Woolf also led to the extraction of her teeth as a mode of therapy. As Roger Poole states, there was a massive disproportion between the amount of food that Woolf thought she needed and the amount that Savage prescribed for her and this actually accentuated her nervous breakdown and enslaved her under the medical eye of Savage. Poole, *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1978) 135.

<sup>83</sup> Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel*, 8.

<sup>84</sup> Thus speeding omnibuses and sky-writing aeroplanes cut across the city in *Mrs Dalloway*, which also contains hysteric males and repressed females embodying a post-war population of mourners and survivors.

never weighed less than eleven stones six, who sent their wives to Court, men who made ten thousand a year and talked of proportion [. . .] who mixed vision and the sideboard; saw nothing clear, yet ruled, yet inflicted” (*MD* 120).

The various men who inhabit Woolf’s fictional landscape correspond to various registers of cultural behaviour. The medically conditioned and corporeally controlled male body in *Mrs Dalloway*, as it emerges through the narrative of the novel, is mercilessly mapped by the bio-political machinery that seeks to re-construct its functional frame.<sup>85</sup> *Mrs Dalloway* is a novel that brings the male body, medical politics, and psychic trauma together with the backdrop of major socio-political changes wrought by the First World War. What makes Woolf’s novel even more complex is its depiction of the bio-political panic after the war and how its coercion is resisted by the feeling mind that unlearns its previous presuppositions through experiential change. A novel about the wounded male subject who embodies crisis and existentialist panic, *Mrs Dalloway* is a narrative about the changing masculine self and its subjective experience of emotional loss. In its human essence, Woolf’s narrative interrogates the ontology of crisis and degeneration, and disturbingly ascribes the same to the dominant bio-political apparatus that sought to control the body and behaviour of the human subject. A profoundly political text, Woolf’s novel is also a depiction of the manner in which male bodies turned to waste products due to their inability to re-integrate themselves within the praxis of post-war modernity.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>It is interesting to compare Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* with a case study by one of the first advocates of neuropsychology, the Russian psychologist Alexander Luria, whose work *The Man with a Shattered World* offers a more directly medical account of what it means to inhabit a liminal landscape characterised by perceptual and sentient mutations. Although it contains the Second World War as its cultural and political backdrop, Luria’s *The Man with a Shattered World* offers a very similar account of the changing body and its epistemic systems under a medical gaze. Based on a medical observation made by Luria on a real man with a brain damaged by a bullet, a man for whom “Writing was his one link with life, his only hope of not succumbing to illness but recovering at least a part of what had been lost”. Alexander Luria, *The Man with a Shattered World: The History of a Brain Wound*, trans. Lynn Solotaroff (London: Cape, 1973) xix-xx. *The Man with a Shattered World* is about the epistemology of agency enacted by a mind wounded as well as traumatized by the violence of War. Writing as a resistance to depletion is a theme that features also in *The Yellow Wallpaper* and Luria’s account of a real medical situation bears many discursive similarities to fictional works on hysteria and trauma.

<sup>86</sup>It is interesting to note, as Sarah Cole does, how Septimus embodies the trauma of War through a suspension in time that denies him the ability to move on temporally from his trauma and assimilate himself into the narrative of civilian life. Exploring the politics of time in *Mrs Dalloway*, Cole argues that in the context of Woolf’s narrative, “to be arrested in time is a death sentence.” Sarah Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship, And the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 179.

### 3.5 *Mrs Dalloway* and the Order of Trauma

Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway* is first introduced in the novel through markers of bodily and emotional enervation: “Septimus Warren Smith, aged about thirty, pale-faced, beak-nosed, wearing brown shoes and a shabby overcoat, with hazel eyes which had that look of apprehension in them which makes complete strangers apprehensive too” (*MD* 12). Septimus symbolizes the hysteric body of the male soldier in the civilian space which sees him not as a hero but as a shirker and simulator. Containing the shock of the war and hounded by the nerve doctors who dominate him bodily, Septimus presents the male body in pain as well as the loneliness of the mis-understood survivor. The trauma that he embodies is thus bodily as well as social, blurring the borderlines between the medical and the political realms. As recent studies in trauma have shown:

Traumatic disjunction occurs away from the combat zone as well. The failure of friends, neighbours, and other civilians, older and younger, to recognize the complexity of the losses produced by participation in combat and the resulting psychological trauma adds another layer to the devastation which the soldier must endure, and this lack of compassion deepens his isolation. This contrasts sharply with the attitudes shown toward the young men prior to the start of the war.<sup>87</sup>

The movement from a position of privilege to a position of loss was rendered more complex by the medical attitudes towards shell-shock after the First World War. Such class-conscious materialist medical science saw the syndrome as a pseudo-diseased condition of an essentially un-heroic de-energized clan of former soldiers. As the hollowed out shell rendered redundant after the war, Septimus embodies emptiness and continually fails to frame himself into the reconfigured post-war metropolis and its mental life.<sup>88</sup> The isolation he faces after the trauma of the war

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<sup>87</sup>Jane Robinett, “The Narrative Shape of Traumatic Experience”, *Literature and Medicine* 26.2 (2007): 290-311; 300.

<sup>88</sup> It is interesting to compare the condition embodied by Septimus to that of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that was classified in the medical dictionary after the Vietnam War. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association in 2000 defines PTSD as characterized by Intrusive Recollection, Numbing, and Hyper-Arousal whereby the sufferer experiences continued encounters with the original moment of trauma. The resultant condition is characterized by a feeling of detachment as well as hyper-vigilance, an inability to recall the



takes him into a hyper-reflexive selfhood that can no longer attach itself to the notional necessities of culture and its mechanisms in the metropolis. Septimus's emotional detachment from such structures of civility and ideologies of 'manly' behaviour is a consequence of his experiences in shock during the war, which the doctors treating him do not understand. Instead, the inward-looking melancholia of the shell-shocked soldier is perceived by contemporary medical practitioners as a dangerous form of self-absorption that is pathological, inasmuch as it is counter-productive to the heteronormative capitalist society that seeks to maximise masculinist profit principle. Thus, exemplifying a medical culture where the difference between dogma and discourse is precariously positioned, Dr Holmes advises Septimus' wife Lucrezia "to make her husband (who had nothing whatever seriously the matter with him but was a little out of sorts) take an interest in things outside himself" (*MD* 18).

In the eyes of the masculinist bio-political gaze, Septimus embodies the undesirable propensity of solipsistic self-introspection and morbid self-consciousness that Michael Clark studies in his work on medical psychology in late nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>89</sup> Thus Septimus is advised by the formidable neurologist Sir William Bradshaw to think as little about himself as possible (*MD* 80). More importantly, in the context of the melancholia he embodies, Septimus appears to appropriate the Freudian psychoanalytic formulation of traumatic repetitions where "the movement of the subject is always a movement towards death: towards the trauma that has not yet occurred, but is still inscribed in the novel's anticipations and repetitions [. . .] [whereby] Trauma becomes a foundational principle rather than an exceptional event."<sup>90</sup> Inhabiting the nebulous zone between subject and object, Septimus the shell shocked soldier embodies the compromised subject of modernity which is emptied of its intentionality under dominant bio-political gaze. In such

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fundamental features of the traumatic experience as well as enactment of the effect of the same experience. See Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>89</sup> Michael Clark, "'Morbid Introspection,' Unsoundness of Mind, and British Psychological Medicine, c 1830-1900", 91.

<sup>90</sup> Ariela Freedman, *Death, Men and Modernism: Trauma and Narrative in British Fiction from Hardy to Woolf* (New York & London: Routledge, 2003) 8.

culture of coercion and control, agency can only be enacted by a solipsistic irrationality that appears absurd in the eyes of bio-political agents.<sup>91</sup>

In a post-war culture of traumatophilia and hyperkinesis, the signs that are taken for wonders most often corroborate the aura of technocracy that fulfils Freud's prophecy of man becoming the prosthetic God with machines.<sup>92</sup> Thus the scene in *Mrs Dalloway* where the skywriting aeroplane advertises toffee in the air is significant as it dramatizes the contingency of the signifier and its metaphoric meaning in the post-war civilian space. The contingency of imaginary associations is brought into play in Woolf's novel in the nervous mind of the shell-shocked

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<sup>91</sup> This is a theme that is further explored by Woolf in her fascinating short story "Solid Objects" which shows a young man with a promising political career give up his social ambitions for an absurd fetish for collecting broken glass in London. The 'solid objects' in Woolf's short story may be interpreted as erotic signifiers that construct a deviant order of masculinity, breaking away from that of the gentleman flaneur to an obsessive wanderer and rag-picker in the metropolis, haunting the sites of demolished houses and the waste lands between railway lines. Woolf, "Solid Objects", *The Mark on the Wall and Other Short Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 54-59. Woolf's story has been interpreted as a literary text that points to the culture of collection and production in early twentieth-century modernity. See Douglas Mao, *Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). The title of Mao's work alludes to Woolf's short story "Solid Objects" which is a narrative about the fetish for collecting broken glass in London and the subsequent museumization of such brokenness in a room where the "distinctive elements speak not of an ability to purchase expressive objects but of a profound possession *by* things, where this possession itself might figure as a demystification of Victorian fantasies of self-fashioning through acquisition" (*Solid Objects* 27).

<sup>92</sup> In his book *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud stated that twentieth-century man has created a technologized topography of the pleasure principle that works by incorporation as well as lack with the endless supply of machines. However, even amidst the massive machines of comfort and connection, as man reaches increasingly towards the god-status, there is also an increasing awareness of unhappiness and hollowness that the utilitarian principle of demand supply cannot conceal. See *The Freud Reader*, 737-40. The traumatophilia and scopic consumption of shock feature also in a novel that may be read as a re-telling of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, one that will be taken up in the concluding part of this thesis as a complex narrative of nervous degeneration and the location of art in human imagination, Ian McEwan's *Saturday*. While in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* the skywriting advertising aeroplane suggests associations of loss to the mind of the shell-shocked soldier back from the horrors of the War, McEwan's *Saturday* opens with the spectacular sight of a burning aeroplane in a civilian sky that is immediately associated with a terroristic attack and sensationalized by the media until it is discovered to be an innocuous accident. If *Mrs Dalloway* belongs to that territory of history where the shock principle was fast becoming a norm, *Saturday* belongs to a time where shock is sensationalized and consumed as collective hysteria that is circulated through agencies of entertainment. Both novels belong to times of bio-political panic; *Mrs Dalloway* to a culture of increasingly familiarized loss post-First World War and *Saturday* between the 9/11 attacks and the Iraq invasion. More significantly both novels contain similar structures of masculinity pitted against each other. Thus while Woolf's narrative has the cocksure physicians of nerves upholding proportion and eugenics against the shell-shocked soldier Septimus, McEwan's novel has Henry Perwone, a genteel and complacent middle class neuroscientist pitted against Baxter, a baddy from the streets with Huntington's disease, a nervous condition with no known cure. McEwan's novel draws largely on the vocabulary of neuroscience in its treatment of human relationships, if only to evince the inadequacies of scientific medical knowledge in an understanding of the human mind and imagination.

soldier from the war.<sup>93</sup> Back from the trenches of war, a site where an aeroplane in the sky almost always signified destruction and danger to the body, Septimus is unable to locate and subjectivize himself in the civilian space where a plane in the sky displays and constructs commodity fetishism in the form of an advertisement for toffee. Septimus's agony in understanding the signs in the mutable metropolis corresponds also to the dialectic of attention and inattention in the order of things in twentieth-century cultural modernity. As analysed by social critics such as Walter Benjamin as well as by medical practitioners such as George Beard, early twentieth-century modernity was often characterised by inattention and distraction, with the subject moving across the metropolis through "dangerous intersection [where] nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery."<sup>94</sup> Likewise social theorists such as Georg Simmel as well as psychophysical researchers such as William Wundt perceived the conditions of modernity in terms of the subject's increasing exposure to autokinesis and acoustics and the ability to retain attention over windows of time.<sup>95</sup>

The dialectic between attention and alienation through distraction often constituted the shock principle that characterised twentieth-century cultural modernity, its metropolis and mental life. As Tim Armstrong asserts:

For Benjamin the shock effect is part of a genuinely dialectical view of technology, in which it offers new possibilities as well as new forms of

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<sup>93</sup> For an analysis of the historical context of the metaphor and how its meaning varies correspondingly, see David Lodge, "Metaphor and Context", *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977) 111-24.

<sup>94</sup> Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 175-76. The analogy of the electrical battery is significant inasmuch as it is a pointer to the dialogue between man and machine—what Sara Danius describes as a "general transition from technological *prosthesis* to technological *aesthesis*, thus moving from externalization to internalization." *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002) 3. More significantly, Benjamin's analogy serves also as a pointer to the finitude of human energy and the negative potential for atrophy such internalization entailed.

<sup>95</sup> Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life", 422. Wundt's experimental psychology was discursively different from Brentano's empiricist model and relied more on scientific experiments than on earlier empiricist philosophies of perception. As Judith Ryan illustrates, Wundt's methods in experimental psychology combined discoveries in contemporary physics and paved the ways for new discourses of the senses and forms of perception that had their bearings in the literary narratives of the day, most immediately evinced in the works of Robert Musil. Ryan, *The Vanishing Subject*, 219-21.

alienation – the shock is a symptom of alienation; it is what the worker on the production line experiences, since each of his actions is disconnected from a total purpose, representing an empty jolting rather than an intentional making.<sup>96</sup>

The metonymic mode of movements, that metropolitan modernity constructed, offered its citizens only incomplete locations across the narratives of association and alienation. The skywriting scene in *Mrs Dalloway* bears out this theme as various minds situated at various parts of the metropolis suddenly become equidistant from the advertising aeroplane, with each mind offering its own bit of meaning in an economy of signs and speculations. The metonymic meaning formation across the sky through a process of association and amalgamation is described in detail by the narrative:

Dropping dead down, the aeroplane soared straight up, curved in a loop, raced, sank, rose, and whatever it did, wherever it went, out fluttered behind it a thick ruffled bar of white smoke which curled and wreathed upon the sky in letters. But what letters? A C was it? an E, then an I? Only for a moment did they lie still; then they moved and melted and were rubbed out up in the sky, and the aeroplane shot further away and again, in a fresh space of sky, began writing a K, an E, a Y perhaps? (*MD* 17)

Septimus exists in the map of the metropolis with a reconfigured sentient structure that receives the double shock induced by machinic hyperkinesis as well as by the traumatic memory of the war. In effect, the advertising aeroplane in the civilian sky space also contains within its kinesis the violence to the human eye that sees its signs without understanding its fuller meaning, thus dramatizing the schism between the physical eye and the cognitive brain, a theme that Woolf takes up more immediately in her essay on cinema.<sup>97</sup> The sky-writing scene in *Mrs Dalloway* mixes

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<sup>96</sup> Tim Armstrong, “Two Types of Shock in Modernity”, 66.

<sup>97</sup> Virginia Woolf, “The Cinema”, *Collected Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966) 268-72. Woolf’s deliberately dramatic depiction of the fission between the brain and the eye before cinematic visuality is suggestive of the violence to the order of sentience corresponding to the new visual subject that emerged with the turn of the twentieth century. Woolf’s depiction of the cognitive schism – “Eye and brain are torn asunder ruthlessly as they try vainly to work in couples” (269) – is a statement of cinema’s subversion of the totality of organic perception in an age of mechanical reproduction. Woolf’s essay carries the remarkable reference to one of the most influential films in the history of cinema: Robert Wiene’s *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*. Wiene’s film is a cinematic spectacle of horror that was immediately associated with the growth of Fascism after the First World War. The human subject – overdetermined by the collective stimuli of the modern metropolis – often moved into a “hyper-reflexive” mode of denial that multiplied itself in its attempt to retain the “purity” of perception. Benjamin’s notion of the “posthumous shock” bears

fascination with fear, intimidation with wonder, in its spectacle of signs that swim out of machines in the sky. The sound waves travel to Septimus' reconfigured nervous system with different semantic structures, as do the visual signs and their signification. Thus the name of the toffee that is advertised in air is uttered to Septimus and it emerges with a different acoustic register to his nerves haunted by the shock of war:

‘K . . . R . . .’ said the nursemaid, and Septimus heard her say ‘Kay Arr’ close to his ear, deeply, softly, like a mellow organ, but with a roughness in her voice like a grasshopper’s, which rasped his spine deliciously and sent running up into his brain waves of sound, which , concussing, broke. (*MD* 18)

This episode depicting the matrix of machines in the post-war metropolis also exhibits the reception of the soundscapes of the city to a traumatized soldier dislocated from the war zone and discomfited in the reconfigured city-space. In an age of mechanical reproduction, the newly emerging politics of sound in the form of gramophone and radio technologies induced their corresponding nervousness to the human senses previously unaccustomed to such sound waves.<sup>98</sup> The new aural sensitivity that emerged in the wake of such technologies of reproduction also inspired “justifiable fears about state control, hegemonic dominance and a passive public”<sup>99</sup> in an era where new machines of sound produced and re-produced disembodied voices through telegraph and gramophones. The disembodied voices

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remarkable resemblance with Adorno’s notion of *Schauer*, that state of shuddering--the inverted wonder--experienced by modern man in his meetings with the machine. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, ed. Gretel Adorno and Ralph Tiedemann (London: Continuum, 2002) 15.

<sup>98</sup> As Adorno argues, the listener to the radio in his room is symbolically secluded in his private space where the uncanny polyphony of the radio animates him and the objects around him: “The isolated listener definitely feels overwhelmed by the might of the personal voice of an anonymous organization. Second, the deeper this voice is involved within his own privacy, the more it appears to pour out of the cells of his most intimate life; the more he gets the impression that his own cupboard, his own phonograph, his own bedroom speaks to him in a personal way, devoid of the intermediary stages of the printed word; the more perfectly he is ready to accept wholesale whatever he hears. It is just this privacy which fosters the authority of the radio voice and helps to hide it by making it no longer appear to come from outside.” Adorno, *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Cambridge: Polity, 2009) 114.

<sup>99</sup> Melba Cuddy Keane, “Virginia Woolf, Sound Technologies and the New Aurality”, *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. Pamela Coughie (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000) 71. See also Michele Pridmore-Brown, “1939-40: Of Virginia Woolf, Gramophones and Fascism”, *PMLA* 113 (1998): 408-21.

through machines of modernity such as the gramophone often carried connotations of deadness that emerged in a dialectic of newness and reproduction.

It is interesting, while analysing the K R scene in *Mrs Dalloway*, to make the analogy with Roland Barthes' notion of the difference between hearing as a physiological act and listening as a psychological act requiring attention. Thus, it is possible, as Barthes asserts:

[t]o describe the physical conditions of hearing (its mechanisms) by recourse to acoustics and the physiology of the ear; but listening cannot be defined only by its object, or, one might say, its goal.<sup>100</sup>

Barthes's analysis draws attention to the intentionality of the listening process, a quality that is associated with the agency of the listening subject. With his human agency compromised by the unresolved shock from the war and the tyranny of medical agents who promote proportion over human emotion, Septimus in Woolf's novel fails to integrate the hearing and the listening processes. The sky-writing episode from *Mrs Dalloway* problematizes the politics of watching and seeing by dramatizing the schism between the two processes in a mind uninitiated to the mechanism of the movement, thus extending the schism between the eye and the brain that Woolf dramatizes in her essay on the cinema. Crucially, the nursemaid's spelling out of the word to Septimus with the signs K and R and the shell-shocked soldier's reception of the same depicts an instance of *hyper-hearing* as a nervous condition whereby codes from two different orders of sound (the military and the civilian) jar incongruously within the nervous system of the shell shocked soldier.<sup>101</sup> This hyper-hearing propels Septimus to transform the alphabets K and R into the sound Kay Arr, one that carries the hope-less association of and desire for *care*. The sounds of the aeroplane carry to the shell-shocked soldier an increased and heightened awareness of the self and its potential danger while also attempting to resituate his nervous self in the reconfigured territory of the post-war urban soundscape. With his trauma and nervous breakdown, Septimus embodies this

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<sup>100</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representations*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985) 245.

<sup>101</sup> See Kate Flint, "Sounds of the City: Virginia Woolf and Modern Noise", *Literature, Science, Psychoanalysis, 1830-1970: Essays in Honour of Gillian Beer*, ed. Helen Small and Trudi Tate (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 191.

schism between the self and its signifier in the post-war landscape. This schism informs his hysteria in the haunted metropolis after the war that, despite its compulsive rituals of urbanity and machines of movement (the aeroplanes and omnibuses keep cutting across the narrative of *Mrs Dalloway* and the ambulance carrying Septimus's dead body speeds to the hospital swiftly and cleanly), is essentially a waste land where medical control neither heals nor hears but takes up a neo-fascistic hegemony.

### 3.6 Medical Science and the Crisis of the Feeling Self in *Mrs Dalloway*

The metropolis in *Mrs Dalloway* is a landscape where economies of shock are increasingly naturalized through repetitions and rituals. As Esther Leslie asserts in a work on Walter Benjamin's location of resistance in a culture of conformism, the unique product of the ceaseless structures of shocks across the modern metropolis was that of *numbness*, which emerged as a bodily as well as cultural discourse of familiarization through a ritual of compulsory repetitions, culminating at a point where the pure human self was almost indistinguishable from the aesthetics of the automaton.<sup>102</sup> Numbness of course emerges in the discourses of modern neuroscience as a neural condition characterised by a loss of emotions and cognitive capabilities whereby "the disturbance of cerebral auto-affection produces a sort of nihilism [. . .] an absolute indifference, a coolness that visibly annihilates all difference and all dimensionality."<sup>103</sup> Ironically, it is the shell-shocked soldier from the war who emerges as the most porous character in the urban landscape. The narrator informs the reader that "This susceptibility to impressions had been his undoing" (*MD* 58). In his susceptibility to experiential and emotional change, Septimus embodies an "extremity of consciousness which the others, protected by their social roles and their ability to draw themselves together as Clarissa does before her, will never reach."<sup>104</sup>

In his dislocation from the urban architectures of meaning around him, Septimus embodies the ambivalence of hypersensitivity as well as the inability to feel, an inability that compromises his functional social self. What characterizes Septimus and ironically underlines his subjectivity, is his awareness of his increasing inability to feel, an awareness that is also a painful pointer to the general numbness around him in a post-war metropolis that "has swallowed up many millions of young men called Smith" (*MD* 69). Tutored in the discourses of 'manly behaviour' before the war, Septimus had effaced his emotional self in favour of the 'manly self'. The

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<sup>102</sup> Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism* (London: Pluto Press, 2000) 182.

<sup>103</sup> Catherine Malabou, *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*, trans. Steven Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012) 50.

<sup>104</sup> Judith Ryan, *The Vanishing Subject*, 197.



return of the repressed occurs after the War in peacetime when Septimus becomes engaged to Lucrezia through the panic “that he could not feel” (*MD* 71). The repetition of this inability in Septimus’s haunted imagination corresponds closely to Freud’s notion of repetition in war trauma whereby “dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back to the situation of the accident.”<sup>105</sup> But more importantly, this repetition emerges as a pointer to the transformation of a privilege into a loss. Once the heroic male who congratulated himself for effacing emotions, Septimus now emerges as a traumatic and ‘unmanly’ subject ironically and precisely because of his inability to feel or emotionally connect to the people and objects around him. Thus:

He looked at people outside; happy they seemed, collecting in the middle of the street, shouting, laughing, squabbling over nothing. But he could not taste, he could not feel. [. . .] He could reason; he could read [. . .] he could add up his bill; his brain was perfect; it must be the fault of the world then – that he could not feel. (*MD* 72)

Septimus’ inability to feel is caused not so much by any physical injury but largely as an outcome of an intense period of emotional repression tutored and advocated by military masculinity coupled with the confrontation with unresolved shock at the trauma in the trenches during war. Septimus’s inability to feel corresponds to what William James classifies as the form of melancholic perversion where the sufferers perceive themselves as “sheathed in India-rubber; nothing penetrates to the quick or draws blood, as it were.”<sup>106</sup> As the ideal of jingoistic heroism disappears from the mind and the war emerges as a landscape of shock and loss, the masculine subject suffers an annihilation of agency through a combination of ineffectuality and incomprehension. While he retains the function of his reasoning brain and its logic of mathematics – the faculties that had informed the project of masculinity during the War – Septimus perceives the liquidation of his emotional self that cannot feel anymore or respond to the stimuli of the world around him. Viewing the world as an anarchic space of fleeting emotions that cannot constitute a self, Septimus thinks of procreation itself as a sin in a landscape of bio-political

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<sup>105</sup> Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia”, *The Freud Reader*, 598.

<sup>106</sup> James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 3 Vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) 2: 298.

determinism. The narrative informs the reader of the emotional and cognitive instability of Septimus through another process of *hyper-hearing* that further dramatizes Septimus's inability to feel. As Rezia informs him of Mrs Filmer's daughter's expectation of a child and laments her own childless loneliness in relation to it, Septimus stares blankly at the tragedy of his own *un-selfing* that cannot connect to feelings anymore:

She could not grow old and have no children! She was very lonely, she was very unhappy! She cried for the first time since they were married. Far away he heard her sobbing; he heard it accurately, he noticed it distinctly; he compared it to a piston thumping. But he felt nothing. (*MD* 73)

As the traumatized subject in the post-war metropolis, Septimus the shell-shocked soldier is increasingly robbed of his emotional, cognitive and integrative abilities and painfully embodies the growing schism between existing and living, looking and seeing, hearing and listening. In his nervous condition, Septimus embodies the subversive state in the bodily realm that Merleau-Ponty correlates to the politics of strikes against normative functioning society. Such a state of sickness subjects the person "the vital rhythms of his body"<sup>107</sup> that enact a defamiliarized structure of sentience in relation to the normative social markers. More importantly, Septimus's condition may be interpreted as an illustration of the break in the seamless unity in neural and cognitive behaviour that is compromised in a state of sickness and shock. Writing of his experiences after his own amputation, the neurologist Oliver Sacks studies how indifference, inattention and alienation may be read as symptoms that suggest a 'system-breakdown' in the subject. Sack's analysis demonstrates how classical neurology – pioneered in England in the works of Henry Head who was actually one of Virginia Woolf's personal physicians during her nervous illness – failed to understand the agony of the human being precisely due to

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<sup>107</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Collin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962) 199. Merleau-Ponty's makes an analogy between the sick man in heightened awareness of his body and the general strike which brings to light the normal economic conditions factoring normal production. Such analogy is important in the context of this chapter as that shows how the interrupted male body becomes the site where the productive economy of the society is rendered most visible.

its objectivising nature that did not comprehend the subjective agency of “the living ‘I’”<sup>108</sup>.

Septimus’s state may be interpreted as one objectified by a bio-political gaze which fails to fathom his subjective experience of shock and loss. Painfully embedded in a culture that sees emotions as anathema to the masculinist behavioural code, Septimus embodies an alienation that cannot be translated into language. As the disrupted self whose disruption ironically reflects back on the awareness of the feeling subject, Septimus experiences an emptiness that is neurologically underpinned as well as phenomenologically embodied. It is interesting to compare the sense of loss experienced by Woolf’s fictional character to Oliver Sacks’ concept of ‘existential neurology’ that looks at Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) for a fuller understanding of the neurological process. Thus Sacks states:

*Scotoma*, in Kantian terms, was an ultimate neuro-ontological extinction (or ‘Akantia’). Physically, physiologically, there was an absence of nerve impulse, image, and field; but metaphysically, or ontologically, an absence of reason, and of its constructs, space and time.<sup>109</sup>

In correlating neurology and existential ontology, Sacks demonstrates how existentialist crisis – one experienced by Septimus in his knowledge that “it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning” (*MD* 72) – is characterised by a loss of the feeling self that is conducive to the normal social and neural functioning of the body. Kant’s concept of the *Scotoma*, like Spinoza’s concept of the *conatus* and the conative self, is crucial in the analyses of modern neuroscience that looks at philosophy for a fuller understanding of the human mind, self and its sense of loss. Although his brain was perfect, and he could add up the bills, Septimus could not feel and was thus increasingly alienated from the world that moved around him. Woolf’s novel thus flags up the epistemic schism between the brain and the mind, between the neural patterns and the sense of self that Septimus’s contemporary bio-

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<sup>108</sup> Oliver Sacks, *A Leg to Stand On* (London: Macmillan, 1991) 164. In this work, Sacks demonstrates how the uniqueness of the self may elude the medical gaze of neurology and neuropsychology which has been overly reliant on a culture of empirical classification where it is difficult for patients experiencing alienation to “convey their feelings: the patient might not speak, the doctor might not hear” (156). By delineating the difference between the ‘schemata’ and ‘inner images’ of neuropsychology and the ‘experiencing’, ‘willing’ and ‘feeling’ that characterise the subjectivity of the self, Sacks affirms how the neural systems that are visible to the medical machines “are embedded in, and transcended by, selves” (164).

<sup>109</sup> Sacks, *A Leg to Stand On*, 166.

political culture did not understand, with its brutal materiality and love of proportion. In suffering the loss of his feeling self, Septimus embodies a compromised core consciousness that normally “relates information about the current state of the self to the prevailing circumstances in the outside world—the source of all the objects that the self requires to meet its inner needs.”<sup>110</sup>

In equating the sound of his wife weeping to that of a piston thumping, Septimus exhibits a cognitive system wounded by the war, whereby once familiarized paradigms of perceptions are rendered defamiliarized through a process of deferral and disorientation.<sup>111</sup> The connection and comparison that Septimus’s traumatized mind makes between his wife weeping and a piston thumping demonstrates the ubiquity of the automaton in his imagination whereby an emotional experience is immediately associated with a machinic operation through a process where feeling is increasingly reduced to entities. In retaining what he considers to be his reasoning self, while having liquidated his feeling self, Septimus embodies the dual effects of war trauma and masculinist repression gone wrong. His inability to emote or feel corresponds to that condition of numbness that modern neuroscientists classify as a form of consciousness disorder.<sup>112</sup>

Like Eliot’s tired typist in *The Waste Land* whose brain only allows a half formed thought to pass across it as she puts a record on a gramophone after the

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<sup>110</sup> Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World*, 105.

<sup>111</sup> It is interesting to compare Septimus’s hysteric hearing to the hysteric experience in Eliot’s short poem “Hysteria” where the male hysteric is seated in the social space of the urban café with a female companion and is increasingly disassociated from the logos of social cognition (exemplified by his passive hearing of the waiter’s enquiry whether they wished to take their tea in the garden, an enquiry that appears as an uncanny/machinic repetition to the hysteric male speaker’s ears). “Hysteria” ends with the speaker focusing attention “with careful subtlety” on the desire to “stop the shaking of her [the female companion’s] breasts” in a bid to collect “some of the fragments of the afternoon”; thus exemplifying a trait similar to that of Septimus; the hysteric subject’s submergence into a series of sounds (a motif that appears at the end of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” as well) and the impotent attempt to establish an objective correlative of consciousness that the male hysteric can attach himself to amidst the anarchy of stimuli in the post-War metropolis. The impotence that informs such attempt corroborates the masculinity crisis that both Woolf’s novel and Eliot’s early poetry depict. Eliot, “Hysteria”, *The Complete Poems and Plays*, 32.

<sup>112</sup> In delineating the difference between thoughts and emotions, Joseph LeDoux asserts that “emotional feelings and mere thoughts are generated by different subsymbolic systems [. . .] [and] that emotional feelings involve many more brain systems than thoughts.” Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998) 299.

departure of her carbuncular lover,<sup>113</sup> Septimus's mind as well as his body is characterised by a numbness born out of over-repression, a "cannibalistic solitude"<sup>114</sup> that had been exacerbated by the emotional shocks experienced in the war. In their inability to emote, both Septimus as well as the typist in *The Waste Land*, are hysterized by non-feeling. Their compromised emotional selves exist in an age when the typewriter and the machine gun were both constructed by similar aesthetics of automatism: indeed when the typewriter was "a discursive machine gun."<sup>115</sup> The culture corresponds to a vocabulary of violence on the senses that operates in the military as well as in the civilian space, marked by similar automatic machines that blur the borderlines between "wilful human action and helplessness of automatism."<sup>116</sup> In an age of mechanical reproduction and automatic annihilation, both the male soldier back from the war and the female typist consumed by her machine are reified by a masculinist machinic unconscious indifferent to the private perceptions of the emotional self. The neuropathology of the non-feeling self in post-war modernity is thus a condition that is both political as well as medical. More significantly, the emotional self that Septimus is bereft of through a process of masculinist appropriation, self-denial, and shock, also compromises his well-being and situatedness in the society and the stimuli around him.<sup>117</sup> Septimus's inability to

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<sup>113</sup> T.S.Eliot, "The Waste Land", *The Complete Poems and Plays*, 250. Eliot's poem has more extensive scenes of collective post-War metropolitan numbness with depictions of crowds flowing over London Bridge under the brown fog of a winter dawn, undone by death and exhaling short infrequent sighs. Although it does not have a direct depiction of a traumatized soldier from the War, *The Waste Land* has direct passages showcasing nervous breakdown and the corresponding collapse of language, most specifically in "A Game of Chess" and the violence on the human body and memory is a recurring theme in the poem. The collapse of communication in Eliot's *The Waste Land* corresponds closely to the hysteria in *Mrs Dalloway* where Septimus mutters, "Communication is health; communication is happiness" (MD 76) even as he increasingly perceives himself as a non-communicable and hence disposable entity in the post-War metropolis.

<sup>114</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) 71.

<sup>115</sup> Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999) 191.

<sup>116</sup> Lawrence Rainey, *Revisiting The Waste Land* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005) 68.

<sup>117</sup> For an analysis of emotions and how those contribute towards the preservation of the social and biological self through appraisals causing automatic changes in the nervous system, see Jenefer Robinson, "Emotion: Biological Fact or Social Construction?", *Thinking About Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotion*, ed. Robert Solomon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 28-43.

feel thus compromises his cognitive condition by compromising his notion of his own *autobiographical self* in his consciousness. Thus modern neuroscience affirms:

In a curious way, consciousness begins as the feeling of what happens when we see or hear or touch. [. . .] it is a feeling that accompanies the making of any kind of image—visual, auditory, tactile, visceral — within our living organisms. Placed in the appropriate context, the feeling marks those images as ours and allows us to say, in the proper sense of the terms, that we see or hear or touch. [. . .] From its most humble beginnings, consciousness is knowledge, knowledge consciousness, no less interconnected than truth and beauty were for Keats.<sup>118</sup>

Damasio's allusion to Keats in the passage cited above is doubly relevant in the context of *Mrs Dalloway*, for Septimus emerges in Rezia's imagination equated with Keats.<sup>119</sup> In a broader sense, Septimus's predicament arises out of his corporeal and phobic encounters with the bio-politics of proportions and eugenics, embodied by the agents of masculinist medical science.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotions and the Making of Consciousness* (London: Vintage, 2000) 26.

<sup>119</sup> "Was he not like Keats? she asked; and reflected how she might give him a taste of Antony and Cleopatra and the rest" (*MD* 69).

<sup>120</sup> It is also important to remember in the context of both Damasio's and Woolf's allusions to the poet that Keats was a trained physician and his poetry often appropriated the vocabulary of bodily illness, consumption and medicine. For a biographical study of Keats, his poetry and his contemporary discourses on brain and emotion, see Hermione de Almeida, *Romantic Medicine and John Keats* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

### 3.7 Masculinity and the Return of the Repressed in *Mrs Dalloway*

The narrative of *Mrs Dalloway* keeps emphasizing the effacement of emotion to which Septimus increasingly subjects himself. The ‘manly behaviour’ that Septimus congratulates himself for exhibiting during and immediately following the war, contains the forceful repression of emotion that automatically extends into an effacement of free-will and agency. This is evidently in correspondence with the unemotional masculinity principle advocated by the Boy Scouts and public school culture of his day. Thus:

[w]hen Evans (Rezia, who had seen him only once, called him ‘a quiet man’, a sturdy red-haired man, undemonstrative in the company of women), when Evans was killed, just before the Armistice, in Italy, Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognising that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably. The War had taught him. It was sublime. [. . .] The last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference. (*MD* 70)

The masculinity embodied by Evans – with his silent sturdy nature and undemonstrative countenance before women – and that exhibited by Septimus during times of loss, both uphold the primacy of ‘manly’ reason that congratulates itself on its cold indifference and negation of emotional expression. The primacy of reason over emotion is also placed in accordance with the rituals of dominant masculinity with its steely nerves and strong will. *Mrs Dalloway* is a significant study of the human mind in a stern bio-political culture inasmuch as it depicts how the supposedly ‘strong will’ exhibited by manly men (as manifested by lack of emotional attachments), ironically informs the negation of will and agency in the human system. The novel is a moving account of how the repressed emotional self gradually disappears along with the conative self required to enact the necessary rituals of living and social cohesion.

The cognitive and cohesive quotient of emotions and the awareness of the subject’s *feeling self* are increasingly highlighted by discoveries of modern neuroscience in terms of how those integrate the human being to the self-preservation and self-enhancing techniques in relation to the external environment.

In particular, Antonio Damasio's work on feelings suggests how the emotional self contributes directly to the construction of the practical self necessary to carry out social integration and cognition. Suggesting that emotions and the ability to feel are essentially (and neurologically) linked to the reasoning centres in the brain, Damasio states:

In short, feeling your emotional states, which is to say being conscious of emotions, offers you *flexibility of response based on the particular history of your interactions with the environment*. Although you need innate devices to start the ball of knowledge rolling, feelings offer you something extra.<sup>121</sup>

Emotions thus contain the “something extra” which – perhaps more than anything else – constitutes that which makes us fully feeling human beings, as well as allowing us to bodily and socially integrate with our environment. As the indeterminable element in the human system, emotions emerge in phenomenology<sup>122</sup> as well as in modern neuroscience as the pointer to the unmappable agency that contributes towards human uniqueness. Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* is a remarkably complex novel inasmuch as it brings together masculinity and the crisis of agency through an epistemology of the feeling self that cannot be mapped by medical science. By foregrounding the male body in crisis against a background of bio-political panic, Woolf's novel depicts how the cultural and materialist construction of masculinity affects and eventually consumes a human being by robbing him of that which makes him uniquely human. It is thus a novel that blurs the borders between the inside and the outside, material presence and unmappable essence, by depicting those together in the site where material interpellations and private emotions are constantly re-negotiated in real life: the human body.

The emotional repression that Septimus had enforced onto himself throughout his military career is the naturalized enactment of the ideological tutoring

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<sup>121</sup> Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (London: Picador, 1995) 133.

<sup>122</sup> As Raymond Gibbs suggests in his study of the three levels of embodiment (the neural, the cognitive and the phenomenological), it is only at the phenomenological level that we are most actively aware of our physical state as well as its relation to the external environment. While emphasizing how the three levels are constantly connected to each other for the proper functioning of the human system, Gibbs states that it is only at the phenomenological level of embodiment in which “we feel experience, of the way things appear to us, and of qualia, that is the distinctive quality of experience such as the pain of a toothache, the taste of chocolate, the sound of violin, or the redness of a ripe Bing cherry.” *Embodiment and Cognitive Science*, 40.



on masculinity and ‘manly’ propriety he had received since his boyhood. However, the constant and compulsory effacement of his emotions, coupled with the horrors he had experienced during the war, begins to adversely affect his normal functioning self by an increasing disappearance of agency and intentionality. Thus while his neural embodiment remains medically functional (thus making him non-sick in the eyes of medical science), his cognitive and phenomenological embodiment are compromised due to the crisis in his feeling self. The narrative informs how Septimus, with his inability to feel, descends into a pit (*MD* 74). This highlights how the repressed male subject transforms from the signifier of plucky masculinity before the war to the crumbling system embodying post-war trauma. His hysteric location after the war situates Septimus in the same plane as that of the women with nervous malady “through their common enemy, the nerve specialist.”<sup>123</sup> More importantly, in living the death of his unique human agency with the gradual loss of feelings, Septimus emerges as the example of emptied humanity. Thus the war that is initially perceived as a sublime experience in masculinity by Septimus, a slide show of glory and ‘manly’ love, is increasingly revealed as an inexplicable experience of loss that haunts the traumatic subject.

In the medical gaze embodied by Doctor Holmes, nothing is really wrong with Septimus and the doctors’ orders include playing cricket, a collective male sport that corresponded closely to the masculinist vocabulary of Edwardian Britain. The masculinist medical narrative in *Mrs Dalloway* that appears to override and consume the private narratives of loss and hysteria is symbolically embodied by the phallogocentric Big Ben whose beats of standardized clock time across the metropolis precludes the possibilities of private articulation and drowns the moment of epiphany. The narrative makes this abundantly clear at moments of hesitancy that emerge only to be felled and flattened, as evinced by the encounter between Clarissa and Peter Walsh when:

The sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour struck out between them with extraordinary vigour, as if a young man, strong, indifferent, inconsiderate, were swinging dumb-bells this way and that. (*MD* 39)

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<sup>123</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 192.

As the little narratives of human beings remain unarticulated and are lost in the indifferent metanarrative of the metropolis and its standardized time, the phallogocentric structure of sound from the tower clock denies the moment for private utterance. In the same manner, Septimus's pain is denied and decimated by the masculinist medical discourse on nerves and "His body was macerated until only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock" (*MD* 55). The reduction of Septimus's body to its network of nerves corresponds to the condition of his shock under the medical gaze that – like the body of the evening that Eliot's Prufrock sees as a patient etherised upon a table – pierces through his body like an X-Ray machine. The X-Ray's emergence in the late nineteenth century and pervasive use by the time the First World War ended, signified coercion as well as clarity, phobia as well as discovery. It constituted a "complex and contradictory relation of identification and exposure [that] exists among bodies, images, and cultural apparatus."<sup>124</sup> Exposed and reified by such a medical gaze that denies him his pain while seeking to bully him back into the masculinist mode of behaviour, Septimus emerges through similar hysteriography as that of the hysteric women of the late nineteenth century.

The traumatic nightmares that Septimus contains within him include the vision of his dead soldier friend Evans who emerges in his imagination unchanged in his grey uniform and appearing without wounds. It is interesting to compare this passage in *Mrs Dalloway* with a related scene in Katherine Mansfield's short story "The Fly" where the unnamed 'boss', having lost his son to the War, embodies a masculinity that is the obverse of Septimus's shell-shocked condition, with his stout, rosy and strong body seemingly in control of the architecture of his office, as well as that of his mind. Thus the specially designed new phallic architecture of his office corresponds to the boss's desire to overcome the loss of his son while his refusal to face the same loss except in its moment of purity also corresponds to the same masculinist principle of preservation through privilege. In his attempt to hystericize himself through a private performance after enacting the sadomasochistic drama of torture on a living body (the fly in his inkpot), the boss in Mansfield's story faces the

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<sup>124</sup> Lisa Cartwright, *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) 125.

failure of his project of preservation through his inability to evacuate himself through weeping.<sup>125</sup> Septimus's trauma at the prospect of seeing the dead body of his friend corresponds – in contrast to the boss in Mansfield – to the hysteria of one who has been to the real scene of loss and embodies the same in the manner of his shock. Thus while the grey uniform in which the dead soldier features in the photo-frame in Mansfield's story is an impediment to the performative hysteria of the boss (as it does not give him the pleasure of his desired release<sup>126</sup> through a masculinist mode of mourning), the grey suit in which the dead Evans appears in Septimus's vision carries real joy that reaches the dimension of mystic revelation:

I must tell the whole world, Septimus cried, raising his hand (as the dead man in the grey suit came nearer), raising his hand like some colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone with his hands pressed to his forehead [. . .] and with legions of men prostrate behind him he, the giant mourner, receives for one moment on his face the whole — (*MD* 57)

Mysticism and the machine appeared incongruously close in early twentieth-century modernity, with technology such as the camera and the telephone carrying their uncanny correlates in vocabularies of experience that form “an ellipse with foci that are far apart and are determined, on the one hand, by mystical experience [. . .]

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<sup>125</sup> Katherine Mansfield, “The Fly”, *The Stories of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. Antony Alpers (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1984) 529-32. A condensed narrative of the condition of man under increasing internalization of war neurosis, Mansfield's “The Fly” is a depiction of the epistemology of the masculine hysteric at the heart of the modern metropolis and the ritual of failed hysteria inside the closet space of the modern office. The effort of resistance to trauma in the story is enacted by a figure which wants to preserve the phallogocentric through a strategic system of nostalgia and orchestrated rituals of hysteric mourning. “The Fly” probes into the privilege of the hysteric who seeks to maintain the phallogocentric economy with its triumph over time by seeking to re-live and re-play the original moment of loss. Like the erotic economy of male homosexuality that is anxiously closeted and articulated in the nineteenth century drama of masculinity as evinced in texts such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the hysteria of the boss in Mansfield's “The Fly” emerges as a closeted drama and a ritual of retention. The failure of the boss to remember the original trauma of his loss despite the perfected rituals inside his closet is a pointer to the paradigm shift in memory that the boss had compulsively sought to repress. The hysteria at the end of “The Fly” is thus constituted by its paradoxical absence and the failure of the masculinist project of remembrance.

<sup>126</sup> It may be argued that the masculinist mode of mourning that the boss in Mansfield's story seeks to enact by locking himself up in his office space and staring at his dead son's photo works with similar rituals as that of masturbation, through its compulsory economy of secrecy, shame and satisfaction. The erotic economy is hinted at by Mansfield's narrative itself by the sadomasochistic pleasure the boss derives during the fly episode before his last attempt at weeping. The symbolic emasculation that the boss faces at the end of the story corresponds to his inability to weep anymore at the loss of his son, an inability that corresponds ritually to the inability to masturbate anymore. The lack of grief in the masculinist economy of the boss corresponds thus to the failure of phallic performance.

and, on the other, by the [machine induced] experience of the big-city dweller.”<sup>127</sup> Septimus’s isolation as the mourner is the obverse of the compulsory secrecy accompanying the boss’s mimetic hysteric performance in “The Fly”. The protagonist in Mansfield’s story and the shell-shocked soldier in Woolf’s narrative, although both impacted by the First World War, appear discursively dissimilar in their situatedness in relation to normative masculinity.<sup>128</sup> Thus while the boss in Mansfield’s “The Fly” embodies the plucky muscular masculinity that is still going strong by a strategic concealment of personal loss, thus appropriating the love for proportions advocated by the bio-political agents of eugenics, Septimus embodies the nervous masculinity rendered hysteric by the real horrors of the war.

The consumption that Septimus comes to embody equates him in Rezia’s imagination with that of Keats, the enervated male poet not understood in his day. The location of poetry in *Mrs Dalloway* exists in an interestingly incongruous relation with that of medical science.<sup>129</sup> The history of the war and the masculinist ideal that was invested in it is depicted vividly in the intellectual and physical vigour of Septimus:

He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square. There in the trenches the change which Mr Brewer desired when he advised football was produced instantly; he developed manliness, he was promoted; he drew the attention, indeed the affection of his officer, Evans by name. (*MD* 70)

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<sup>127</sup> Benjamin, “Some Reflections on Kafka”, *Illuminations* 142. For an analogy between the new machines of modernity and the panic in contemporary human imagination see Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 77-105.

<sup>128</sup> It is interesting to compare Septimus’s inability to appropriate the mimetic vocabulary of masculinity and the corresponding shame with Flory’s failure to perform the appropriate masculinist behaviour in the colonial contact-zone in Orwell’s *Burmese Days*, the analysis of which will be done in the following chapter.

<sup>129</sup> It is interesting to compare the location of poetry and medical science in *Mrs Dalloway* with that in McEwan’s *Saturday* again, for the scene of transformation that moves the degenerative criminal with Huntington’s disease in McEwan’s novel happens not inside a clinic but in a kitchen where a poet reads aloud Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” to him.

The metonymic markers of Englishness through Shakespeare's plays and genteel ladies who inspire poetry are in sharp contrast to the hurried cosmopolitanism and the mutable metropolis that take their places after the war. It is interesting to note the movement of Septimus himself from appropriating the normative model of masculinity to embodying helpless hysteria under the masculinist medical gaze. The construction of muscular manliness is produced through football in the trenches and the affection of Evans carries the suggestion of homoerotic desire that was both a signifier of clandestine love as well as military masculinity.<sup>130</sup> Likewise the death of the male lover moves Septimus to the culturally tutored indifference for which he initially congratulates himself, for upholding what he considered the manly stoicism against loss. This is the same 'manly' virtue that the boss in Mansfield's "The Fly" attempts to perpetuate with strategic and masturbatory modes of mourning.

The mode of masculinity that Septimus embodies through his non-feeling and betrayal of love is strikingly similar to that of Peter Walsh, the imperial officer back to the metropolis from the colonies. Both men marry women they do not love and guiltily look back at the life that did not happen because of their failure to feel, Septimus looking back at Isabel Pole whom he had outraged by marrying Rezia through a panic of non-feeling and Peter by marrying an Anglo-Indian woman instead of Clarissa Dalloway. Both men seek to appropriate the military model of masculinity, Septimus by actually joining the army in the war and Peter by looking admiringly and marching alongside the boys in uniform carrying guns up Whitehall. However, even as he sees and marches alongside the boys in admiration, Peter notices the imminent decadence in the masculinity they embody:

It is, thought Peter Walsh, beginning to keep step with them, a very fine training. But they did not look robust. They were weedy for the most part,

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<sup>130</sup> Sarah Cole studies the homoerotic strain in *Mrs Dalloway* and affirms that Septimus's shell-shock is caused not so much by the trauma of War as the death of his male lover in whom he had invested all his emotional self. While the argument in this chapter does not fully subscribe to Cole's analysis that appears to undermine the social and medical conditions informing First World War Shell-shock in its analysis of the homoerotic bonds that are structured and severed during and after the War, it is certainly significant that Evans reappears in Septimus's traumatic nightmares as the signifier of loss and guilt. As Cole asserts, "Septimus offers a striking image of the alienated soldier as bereaved friend [. . .] this isolated figure at times appears in connection with the self-enclosed group – a precarious form of community, with a language and sign system of its own, yet insufficient institutional structure to prevent its collapse into fragmentation and solitariness." *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War*, 181-82.

boys of sixteen, who might, tomorrow, stand behind bowls of rice, cakes of soap on counters. Now they wore on then unmixed with sensual pleasure or daily preoccupations the solemnity of the wreath [. . .] They had taken their vow. The traffic respected it; vans were stopped. (*MD* 42)

The middle-aged Peter Walsh's march alongside the young boys in uniform, emerge as a nervous mimicry of the masculinity the young soldiers embody as well as a montage of movements across the post-war metropolis. Returning from the colonial space into the Western metropolitan center, Peter, like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, quickly sees through the markers of gentility and discerns the signs of decadence and discontent that civilization cannot conceal.

Both Peter Walsh and Septimus emerge eventually as marginalized men in the reconfigured metropolis. Peter returns from the peripheries of the empire and is unable to appropriate the vocabulary of the urban rituals except through over-idealized wonder at the signifiers of civilization. Most importantly, both figures are characterised by a repression of emotions and feeling and come to realize how that undoes the self. Thus while the shell-shocked Septimus comes to be consumed by his repression, Peter Walsh realizes that “It had been his undoing – this susceptibility – in Anglo-Indian society; not weeping at the right time, or laughing either” (*MD* 122).<sup>131</sup> He comes to realize that: “Cleverness was silly. One must say simply what one felt” (*MD* 154) a realization that that is immediately followed by the confession that he does not know what he feels. The hyperlink narrative of *Mrs Dalloway* proceeds by making connections across characters and their minds along a complex praxis of space and time in a moving and mutable metropolis.<sup>132</sup> The suicide of Septimus is the fallout of the bodily panic of approaching terror as he perceives himself in the power of Holmes and Bradshaw who advocated that “he must be taught to rest” (*MD* 119) thus appropriating the vocabulary of violence of the Mitchell-method of cure even while seemingly suggesting peace-therapy.

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<sup>131</sup> The repression that Peter experiences and is subjectivized by in the Anglo-Indian social space around him is strikingly similar to the one faced by Flory in Orwell's *Burmese Days*, a text that will be taken up in the following chapter.

<sup>132</sup> The alternative and alternating perspectives of narration that *Mrs Dalloway* incorporates offers a complex paradigm of perception that has come to be increasingly associated with the literary narrative by modern neuroscientists. Thus V.S.Ramachandran, the neuroscientist, famous for his works on phantom limbs, asserts that the “need to reconcile the first person and third person accounts of the universe [. . .] is the single most important problem in science.” V.S.Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain: Human Nature and the Architecture of the Mind*, 229.

Septimus's final attempt to save his writing by burning those from the reaches of Holmes and Bradshaw – is symbolic of his desperation to retain his private symbols of signification from the panoptic gaze of masculinist medicine.

The masculinist vocabulary of medicine embodied by Holmes and Bradshaw is immediately evident in the cry of “Coward” by Holmes as Septimus leaps from the large Bloomsbury window, thus voicing not despair but disapproval, not sorrow for the human tragedy but disgust at the unmanliness of the act. The mangled body of the shell-shocked soldier lies as a testimony to the tyranny of masculinity and its medical discourses that preach proportion, until it is siphoned away with the sirens of civilization that thrill Peter Walsh as he hears the high bell of the ambulance speeding through the traffic.<sup>133</sup> Septimus, who jumps from the window and kills himself in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, emerges eventually as a frameless figure in the reconfigured social landscape. In his insight into the horror and epistemology of his loss,<sup>134</sup> and his helpless embodiment of the failure of feelings after the war, Septimus emerges as a subject who remains unarticulated in his refusal to be reified through the prisms of masculinity and medical science.

Woolf's novel is a story of the death of agency and free-will in the post-war metropolis. In its depiction of the bio-political regime that oversees human bodily and social behaviour, *Mrs Dalloway* demonstrates how the politics of masculinity and medical science reduces human complexities and capacities to mappable

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<sup>133</sup> Septimus's death by suicide by jumping from the window bears an almost uncanny resemblance with a case reported by John Connolly where a working class woman, suffering from what was at that point of time classified as postpartum depression in the medical vocabulary, jumped from the window after “repudiating her infant.” John Connolly, “The Physiognomy of Insanity”, *The Face of Madness: Hugh W. Diamond and the Origin of Psychiatric Photography*, ed. Sander L. Gilman (New York: Brunner-Mazel, 1976) 45. Puerperal insanity among women, attributed to their innate weak constitution after childbirth by common medical consensus, was an increasingly problematic act in nineteenth century culture that glorified motherhood and essentially deified the new born mother.

<sup>134</sup> It is interesting to compare Septimus with Conrad's Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, as figures who become problematic to the masculinist system precisely due to their over-identification with the system. The resultant crisis arises out of the knowledge of the horror that they embody in their decadence and death. Unlike Kurtz, who dies in the “other” space of the horror and can be preserved as a masculinist hero through a series of spurious posthumous reports, Septimus returns to the post-war civilian space and experiences the great lie of masculinist heroism, preserved and perpetuated in the civilian space by the male doctors obsessed with proportions and preciseness. Like Marlow who totters across the sepulchral city of Brussels after the horror of Congo and derides the people around him whom he perceives as petty and pathetic, Septimus too carries the cynicism of the seer who is hopelessly tied to his inability to articulate the knowledge of his loss.

methods of classification and cure. In its vivid instantiations of trauma and loss, Woolf's novel situates the feeling male body in resistance to the bio-political gaze in a deconstruction of political presuppositions and medical tenets. In their inconstant and incomplete inscriptions into the systems of patriarchy best exemplified by the dominant discourses of masculinity and medicine, the fictional Septimus and the real soldiers of the First World War embody in their nervousness a condition that is medical as well as immediately political, one that Slavoj Žižek classified as "the effect and testimony of a failed interpellation"<sup>135</sup> into the symbolic. The ambivalence, existentialist crisis, and eventual suicide of Septimus enact a resistance and show how ideological interpellations may be disrupted by phenomenological experience and subjective change. In its philosophical essence and literary complexity, Woolf's narrative emerges as a story that shows what it means to be truly, painfully and chaotically human, in a world that celebrates proportion and itemized knowledge. Historically and culturally located after the First World War, *Mrs Dalloway* is epistemologically dialogic with the postmodern world of western-liberal politics, state-terrorism and genetic engineering today.

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<sup>135</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ontology* (London: Verso, 1989) 113.



### 3.8 Coda: Two Scenes from Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* and Pat Barker's *Regeneration*

The ontology of trauma is characterised by a contingency that can assume medical as well as political dimensions. This contingency often blurs the borderlines between the biological body and the political subject as both are confronted by a catastrophe that ruptures the spatio-temporality of the self, destroying the divisions between before and after.<sup>136</sup> Thus Catherine Malabou affirms:

Coolness, neutrality, absence, and the state of being emotionally “flat” are the basic indexes of the meaninglessness of wounds that have the power to cause a metamorphoses which destroys individual history, that cannot be reintegrated into the normal course of a life or a destiny, and that, therefore, must be recognized as such even though it is impossible to categorize them as neurosis, psychosis, or, more vaguely, “madness.”<sup>137</sup>

One of the most powerful expressions of expressionlessness in literature, one that occurs with a dramatic reduction of emotions and consciousness and entails a condition of immobile muteness, occurs in the final scene of Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1958) where the pianist/artist Stanley is taken over bodily by the agents of the status quo who capture him away into the black van that waits outside. As a “phenomena of a paranoid state”<sup>138</sup>, Pinter's play may be interpreted as a systematic invasion of human agency by the agents of bio-political discourse. The

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<sup>136</sup> An interesting film that showcases a medical catastrophe that is informed by political conditions and renders it with dark humour is Wolfgang Becker's *Goodbye Lenin!* (2003). Set in East Germany immediately before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the film shows a German Socialist idealist Christiane fall into coma at the shock of seeing his son Alex arrested by the police in an anti-Government march. During Christiane's coma, the Berlin Wall collapses and Socialism comes to an end in Germany. The doctors advise Alex that any further shock would be fatal for the gradually recovering Christiane and to that end; Alex and his sister perform and perpetuate the culture of Communism inside their apartment for their mother by playing old tapes of East German news broadcasts and feeding her West German jam from old jars labelled with East German companies. Christiane's delusion is destroyed on seeing giant Coca-Cola advertisement banners and on witnessing a statue of Lenin being flown away by MI8 helicopter. *Goodbye Lenin!* is remarkable in the way it depicts the division in temporality that occurs in medical as well as political maps.

<sup>137</sup> Malabou, *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*, 53.

<sup>138</sup> E.T.Kirby, “The Paranoid Pseudo-Community in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*”, *Educational Theatre Journal* 30.2 (May 1978): 157-64; 157.

figure of Stanley, as he appears in the final scene, embodies on stage the muted immobility of the shocked subject whose mind as well as body is completely consumed by the trauma induced by systematic and pre-planned violence. The passage deserves to be quoted in order to evoke the drama of reduction and annihilation. As Stanley appears in the morning after the violent birthday party dressed in a dark well-cut suit and white collar (the uniform of conformation to status quo as it were) clean-shaven and holding his broken glasses, he is subjected to a series of etiological and cultural classifications by McCann and Goldberg, against which Stanley is unable to articulate his resistance anymore:

Goldberg. It goes without saying. Between you and me, Stan, it's about time you had a new pair of glasses.

McCann. You can't see straight.

Goldberg. It's true. You've been cockeyed for years.

[. . .]

McCann. You're in a rut.

Goldberg. You look anaemic.

McCann. Rheumatic.

Goldberg. Myopic.

McCann. Epileptic.

Goldberg. You're on the verge.

[. . .]

Goldberg. We'll watch over you.

McCann. Advise you.

Goldberg. Give you proper care and treatment.<sup>139</sup>

Stanley's symbolic castration at the hands of Goldberg and McCann – who in phenomenological terms, “intrude upon his condition of Being-In-The-World”<sup>140</sup> – constitutes the claustrophobic menace that informs Pinter's play. By situating the action in an absurdist frame, *The Birthday Party*, with its hysterical and ideological

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<sup>139</sup> Harold Pinter, *The Birthday Party* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991) 82.

<sup>140</sup> Kirby, “The Paranoid Pseudo-Community in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*”, 162-63.

tensions,<sup>141</sup> offers a remarkable narrative about the inevitable invasion of the ideological and repressive state apparatus that subjects the human self to a process of liquidation, reduction and reification. But more interestingly, in the context of this chapter, Pinter's play pitches the masculinity question by mapping it through political as well as medical realms. Thus Stanley is classified as an idler as well as an epileptic by the agents of status quo that come to classify and consume him through a series of shocks. It is important to remember that epilepsy and hysteria were closely associated in the medical imagination from Charcot's day<sup>142</sup> and McCann and Goldberg emerge as bio-political agents at this point in the play as they seek to brand the body of the dissenting subject. The violence in the play is directed against the non-conforming male body that becomes vegetative at the end through its failure to articulate the voice of the resistant self. Both neurologically as well as culturally, the sense of the self is inextricably attached to the production of language and the

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<sup>141</sup> In his work on the compromised subjectivity in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, Marc Silverstein studies how Stanley's de-formation and re-formation may be interpreted with the Althusserian concepts of ideological and repressive state apparatus that are used to integrate and control the subject. Subjectivity and subjection emerge as ideologically tied as Stanley's body and self are possessed by the agents of the status quo. Stanley's castration at the hands of the agents constitutes a loss of emotions, will as well as language. Silverstein also studies how the Jewish and Irish identities that appear in Pinter's play bring its political subtext into close correspondence with its hysteric landscape. Marc Silverstein, *Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power* (London: Associated University Press, 1993) 26-49.

<sup>142</sup> Jean Charcot, conventionally attributed as the first modern medical analyst of hysteria before the advent of Freud in the medical map, was reported to have discovered the hysteric's behavioural proximity to the epileptic through a serendipitous incident whereby during one instance in the Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris when epileptic men were placed in the same ward as female hysterics due to repairment work in the ward, the doctors were faced with the sudden difficulty in differentiating the 'real' epileptic seizures from the 'feigned' hysteric ones. See George Makari, *Revolution in Mind: The Creation in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008) 15. Despite its anecdotal nature, the incident can be seen as a case study in itself in the study of the history of hysteria and the medical debates it ensued at the end of the nineteenth century. If the 'real' physical ailment of the epileptics was indistinguishable from the symptoms exhibited by the 'mentally ill', hysteria seemed to emerge as a problematic territory between the somatic and the psychic and Charcot himself applied the hybrid nosological term *hysterio-epilepsy* to a number of his patients before abandoning it in his subsequent years. During his heyday as director of the Salpêtrière Asylum in Paris, Charcot gave public demonstrations of hysteric seizures and recorded the trajectory of his *la grande hystérie* with the use of photography. For an extensive description of Charcot's use of photography and advanced photographic techniques in the demonstration of hysterical seizures, see Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l'hystérie: Charcot et l'Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (Paris: Macula, 1982). The systematization of Charcot's study found its objective manifestation in the automatic precision of the camera as professional Parisian photographers such as Albert Londe worked in close collaboration with him and one of Charcot's personal assistants, Paul Regnard, set up a photographic exhibition of the hysterics which was subsequently published by Gilles de la Tourette and Paul Richer in 1888. Charcot's studies and photographic representation of hysteria will later be of significant influence on Surrealist artists such as Conroy Maddox who would describe the photography of the Salpêtrière as constituted by "convulsive beauty." Quoted in Silvano Levy, *The Scandalous Eye: The Surrealism of Conroy Maddox* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003) 211.

language breakdown in Stanley – as he appears like a hollowed-out self-less man in the end – dramatizes an aphasia normally characterised with the violence of shock.

As Martin Esslin contends, Stanley appears in the end “in a state of catatonic trance, unable to speak, without any human reaction; but dressed most respectfully in ‘a dark, well-cut suit’.”<sup>143</sup> With his clean suit and brushed hair, Stanley becomes the passive body ready to be reduced and reified, with his unique sense of self and its agency clinically killed as evinced in the symbolic collapse of his vanquished and vanishing voice. The scene constitutes the drama of failed resistance whereby the conscious cognitive self slips away and fails to find its figurative frame either in the body or in the voice:

*Stanley concentrates, his mouth opens, he attempts to speak, fails and emits sounds from his throat.*

Stanley. Uh-gug . . . uh-gug . . . eehhh-gag . . . (On the breath.) Caahh . . . caahh . . .

*They watch him. He draws a long breath which shudders down his body. He concentrates.*

Goldberg. Well, Stanny boy, what do you say, eh?

*They watch. He concentrates. His head lowers, his chin draws into his chest, he crouches.*

Stanley. Ug-gughh . . . uh-gughhh . . .

McCann. What’s your opinion, sir?

Stanley. Caaahhh . . . caaahhh . . .

McCann. Mr Weber! What’s your opinion?

[ . . . ]

*Stanley’s body shudders, relaxes, his head drops, he becomes still again, stooped. Petey enters from door, downstage, left.*<sup>144</sup>

Stanley’s linguistic collapse is depicted as analogous to the shattering of the subject whereby the wound perpetrates a permanent damage on to the sense of self. Language as a signifier of neural stability has long been a site of research among neurologists, perhaps beginning most systematically in the works of Henry Head,

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<sup>143</sup> Martin Esslin, *Pinter the Playwright* (London: Methuen, 1982) 70.

<sup>144</sup> Pinter, *The Birthday Party*, 84.

Britain's premier neurologist and researcher on aphasia during the First World War, a medical figure to whom: "The pathological form of speech manifested by the aphasic represented an attempt by the organism to adapt to a reduced level of functional efficiency resulting from some insult to the brain."<sup>145</sup> The physical condition of aphasia, in the works of neuroscientists since Head, has most often been perceived as a neural loss to the unique system of cognition and performance that constitutes the human self.<sup>146</sup> Language emerges as a central neural function in modern neuroscience whereby the areas in the cerebral cortex corresponding to comprehension and those corresponding to expression – Broca's and Wernicke's – are connected by neural pathways.<sup>147</sup> The seamless integration of mental activities in the brain is actually the result of the functioning neurons constituting "large, interconnected networks of specialized regions, such as those governing language".<sup>148</sup> Thus the failure of Stanley to assert his opinion is syntagmatic to the collapse of the language centres in his brain that constitutes his unique self, its agency and intentionality. The move from resistance to reduction is staged and embodied through a process that merges the medical and the political dimensions, whereby language meets nerves, masculinity merges with medical science.

The absurdist frame of Pinter's play further underlines the bio-political trauma that Malabou classifies as a ruptured condition whereby: "The individual's history is cut indefinitely, breached by the meaningless accident, an accident that is impossible to re-appropriate through either speech or recollection."<sup>149</sup> The passage of language collapse and the castration of the self from Pinter's play are premised on a

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<sup>145</sup> L.S.Jacyna, *Medicine and Modernism: A Biography of Sir Henry Head* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008) 142.

<sup>146</sup> As LeDoux contends, "the emergence of the cognitive capacities underlying language changed the way the brain works, making it possible for human brains to think and experience events in ways that other brains cannot." *The Synaptic Self*, 198.

<sup>147</sup> For a scientific study of the language centres in the prefrontal cortex in the human brain and their uniqueness in relation to non-human primates, see Gerhard Roth, "Is the Human Brain Unique?", *Mirror Neurons and the Evolution of Brain and Language*, ed. Maxim Stamenov and Vittorio Gallese (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publication, 2002) 73. In this essay, Roth suggests that the connective pathway between the cortex and the laryngeal motor neurons (responsible for speech sounds) holds the key to the uniqueness of human language. This is evident in the damage done to the language functions in man when facial motor cortex is destroyed due to accident or stroke.

<sup>148</sup> Eric Kandel, *In Search of Memory*, 123.

<sup>149</sup> Catherine Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Cambridge: Polity, 2012) 29.

violence of coercion and subjection not dissimilar to the scene of shock therapy meted out to the shell shocked soldier by Lewis Yealland as witnessed by W. H .R. Rivers. In contrast to the scene of muted immobility in *The Birthday Party*, the episode in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* (1992) is aimed at making the male subject *speak* by tying him by straps to a chair and subjecting him to varying degrees of electric shock in a locked room. However, the politics of persecution and domination is quite similar to that of the agents of the state apparatus in Pinter's *The Birthday Party* inasmuch both rely on compulsory control and violence on the body. Callan, the shell shocked soldier who features in the scene in *Regeneration*, appears in the eyes of Rivers at the beginning of the electric shock treatment as "indifferent, or defiant, though once he was settled in the chair his eyes shifted from side to side in a way that suggested fear."<sup>150</sup> The emphasis of Yealland in the electric shock scene in *Regeneration* is, appropriately enough, not on eking out the human voice but the physical sound of speech out of Callan, who is clearly perceived under the masculinized medical eye as a malingering dissenter who must be re-oriented and re-integrated like Pinter's Stanley in the economy of productive meanings.

Thus Yealland exclaims to his medical subject who is increasingly electrified, "*You must speak, but I shall not listen to anything you have to say*" (*Regeneration* 231) paradoxically highlighting similar schisms between hearing and listening that was evident in the *Kay Arr* scene in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* albeit in a different register. The scene in *Regeneration* is also significant inasmuch as it starts by a strategic blending of the medical and political models of masculinity that often found discursive convergences in Edwardian England. Thus, as the electrode is applied to the back of Callan's throat to such a degree that the leads rip out of the battery, Yealland appropriates the voice of the advocate of model masculine behaviour:

'Remember you must behave as becomes the hero I expect you to be.' Yealland said. 'A man who has been through so many battles should have a better control of himself.' He fastened the straps round Callan's wrists and feet. 'Remember *you must talk before you leave me.*' (*Regeneration* 230)

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<sup>150</sup> Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (London: Penguin, 1992) 229. Further references to this work will be made parenthetically.

The behaviour of the masculine hero thus constitutes stoic machismo in battlefield and adherence to the politics of masculinist medical politics and the voice of the doctor here converges seamlessly with that of the scoutmaster, the signifier and supervisor of model masculinity that was a construct of coercion, domination and repression. It carries the same pseudo-enthusiasm about perfect proportions and health that features in related figures in Pinter's *The Birthday Party* and Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. In blurring the borderlines between the ideological apparatus and its repressive counterparts, the voice of masculine authority in the form of the physician, the scoutmaster and the commander constituted what Foucault came to classify as the *panoptic schema*: a system of surveillance, containment and classification which seeks to ritualize and naturalize itself through inconspicuous repetition whereby schools, barracks and hospitals all come to resemble prisons.<sup>151</sup>

The scene in *Regeneration* offers a classic instantiation of how the medical violence perpetrated on the male body appropriates the vocabulary of cultural and ideological rectification. But the scene is rendered more complex by the difference of ideological location and medical practice that sees the neurologist Rivers (who seeks to draw on Freudian psychoanalysis in treating war hysteria) shiver at the sight of the treatment by electric shock that Yealland metes out to a shell-shock victim:

The 'ah' was produced by an almost superhuman effort [by Callan], the muscles of the neck in spasm, the head raised in a series of jerks. Even the torso and the arms were involved in the immense effort of pushing this sound across his lips. Rivers had to stop himself trying to make the sound for him. He was himself very tense; all the worst memories of his stammer came crowding into his mind. (*Regeneration* 231)

The unconscious and almost automatic empathy that the Freudian physician establishes with the victim subjected to the brutal materiality of bio-politics is dramatized in the episode by the allusion to Rivers' stammer, a signifier of nervousness that he himself embodies. The structure of sympathy that is evoked in the scene of shock cuts across the rigid binaries between the doctor and the patient upheld by Yealland who advocates that "The last things these patients need is a sympathetic audience" (*Regeneration* 228). Rivers' worst memories of stammer occur at a crucial moment during the scene where the medical violence on the shell-shocked body increasingly coerces it to speak. In effect, Rivers himself emerges as

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<sup>151</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 206-28.

the co-victim and co-patient in the scene despite his status as a neurologist. The brutal and merciless taxonomies Yealland embodies through his strategy of no-sympathy and electric shock induce the repressed hysteria in Rivers himself as he is reminded of the social stigma of his stammer.

Like Septimus who stammers before Sir William Bradshaw's assertion of the brilliant career he has before him despite his condition (*MD* 74), Rivers' stammer, like Callan's 'ah', is located in the landscape of the body where language can only emerge in its non-completion and non-complicity in relation to the real. The stutter, as Iain Chambers asserts, constitutes a "leaky habitat" where "the violent transitivity of language [. . .] erupts most starkly across the hyphen of hybridity."<sup>152</sup> The stutter thus appears as the schism between the realm of standardized structures of culture and knowledge, and that of private utterance. It is a schism that is resistance as well as shame, a nervous condition as well as subconscious strategy that "dislocates voice, and throws into ontological uncertainty the body that it breaks away from."<sup>153</sup> The scene in *Regeneration* ends with Callan starting to speak again, forced through the increasing pain of electric shock, with the last remnant of defiance in his smile crushed by further shock applied to the side of the mouth. The passage is explicit in its depiction of destruction concealed as cure, an episode that heightens the licensed tyranny of the medical science and its violence on the human body and the human self:

'Are you not pleased to be cured?' Yealland asked.

Callan smiled.

'I do not like your smile,' Yealland said. 'I find it most objectionable. Sit down.'

Callan sat.

'This will not take a moment,' Yealland said. 'Smile.'

Callan smiled and the key electrode was applied to the side of his mouth. When he was finally permitted to stand up again, he no longer smiled.

'Are you not pleased to be cured?' Yealland repeated.

'Yes, sir.'

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<sup>152</sup> Ian Chambers, "Leaky habitats and broken grammar", *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, ed. George Robertson et al. (London: Routledge, 1994) 248.

<sup>153</sup> Ankhi Mukherjee, *Aesthetic Hysteria*, 96.



‘Nothing else?’

A fractional hesitation. Then Callan realized what was required and came smartly to the salute. ‘Thank you, sir.’ (*Regeneration* 233)

In electrically remodelling Callan into the normative mode of masculinity that is approved by the bio-political gaze, Yealland appropriates a process of dehumanization whereby the human self and agency are clinically killed in the bio-political construction of the perfectly functioning subject. Like Stanley in *The Birthday Party* who cannot speak again, Callan in *Regeneration* who *can speak* again, is located at the interfaces of merciless violence and sanctioned ideological hegemony, perpetrated by the agents of the status quo through a process that necessitates the liquidation of the unique human intentionality and the birth of the passive performing body. The birth of the functioning bio-political subject is thus also the death of subjective agency and emerges as a direct result of violence on the self and its free will. The scenes from Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* and Barker’s *Regeneration* show male bodies bio-politically regenerated in order to be integrated as functioning social objects from being anti-social agencies. The regeneration is effected through material coercion and bodily shock, and the resultant product is a will-less non-subversive self with mere motor mechanisms. These scenes portray how humanness is constituted by subjective ambivalence and doubt, and how the same is ironed away by the purely objective machineries of bio-political science that aims at sameness and standardization rather than uniqueness and difference. The absurdist frame of Pinter’s play with its structures of silence heightens the crisis of the human subject and “the realities of the human mind with its despair, fear and loneliness in an alien and hostile universe.”<sup>154</sup> Such *irrational alienation* characterises not only the fantastic theatre space but also informs human locations in real political situations, where subjective change takes place through shock, shame and existentialist awareness.

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<sup>154</sup> Martin Esslin, *Absurd Drama* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1965) 22-23.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **The White Man's Nerves: George Orwell and the Bio-politics of British Colonial Masculinity**

#### **4.1 The Epistemology of Edwardian Masculinity**

As previous chapters have demonstrated, the project of British masculinity since the nineteenth century almost always contained within it the necessity to correspond (culturally as well as bodily) to the imperialist politics of the day. The body of the boy who would grow to become a man of the empire needed to be conditioned into a perfect state of nerves in order to play its part in perpetuating the processes of colonial control. As Revathi Krishnaswamy argues in her analysis of the epistemology of British colonial masculinity from the late-nineteenth to early twentieth century, the dominant discourses of British masculinity changed from Thomas Arnold's notion of goodness and learning in the 1830s to the muscular Christianity associated with Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, down to the self-help and athleticism advocated by Samuel Smiles and Baden Powell.<sup>1</sup> This was of course also the time, as the first chapter has demonstrated, when the discourses of degeneration along with their many pseudo-scientific premises produced a collective paranoia about racial decline through encounters with *other* races and cultures. That, along with the necessity to produce and perpetuate a brand of masculinity that would uphold the steely structure of imperial control, saw the emergence of public schools and social movements geared towards manufacturing the model man. Indeed the rearing of ideal British masculinity that would successfully inherit the ideologies of colonial control was one of the primary concerns of the Boy Scout movements in Britain at the turn of the century.

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<sup>1</sup>Revathi Krishnaswamy, *Effeminism: The Economy of Colonial Desire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998) 15-27.

As Michael Rosenthal argues in an analysis of the epistemology of the Boy Scout movement, Baden Powell, generally considered as the pioneer of scouting in Britain, systematized a model of masculinity that encouraged an effacement of individual emotion and instead prepared young boys for collective corporate service to the empire. Classifying such a mode of upbringing as a “character factory”, Rosenthal analysed how skills in cricket (a sport where individual skills contribute towards the collective quality of the group) were seen as pointers to the masculine ideology in the colonies.<sup>2</sup> Powell, of course, was a close friend of Kipling whose adventure narratives, more often than not, played up the stereotypes of British notions of masculinity with a combination of imperial ideology and conquest of ‘Otherness’.<sup>3</sup> In his book, entitled appropriately enough, *Scouting for Boys*, Powell delineated the dictum of normative masculinity that was to be constructed and corroborated in the service of the empire. Defining the boy scouts as the executioners of the empire during peacetime, Powell expounded their political significance:

These are the frontiersmen of all parts of our Empire. The ‘trappers’ of North America, hunters of Central Africa, the British pioneers, explorers and missionaries over Asia and all the wild parts of the world, the bushmen and drovers of Australia, the constabulary of North-West Canada and of South Africa – all are peace scouts, real men in every sense of the word [. . .] They are accustomed to take their lives in their hands, and to fling them down without hesitation if they can help their country by doing so.<sup>4</sup>

Powell’s advocacy of plucky masculinity exemplified a condition whereby “the ideal of manliness was frequently tied to a reworked Christian code of knightly conduct, itself placed within a newly articulated national tradition.”<sup>5</sup> The amalgamation of masculinist and nationalist discourses encouraged a productive

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Rosenthal, *The Character Factory: Baden Powell’s Boy Scouts and the Imperatives of Empire* (New York: Pantheon, 1984). For an incisive analysis of the correspondence between cricket and imperial masculinity as exemplified by the Bodyline Series between England and Australia, see Nalin Jayasena, *Contested Masculinities*, 61-104.

<sup>3</sup> This is demonstrated in the introduction with my reference to the critique of Kipling by Edward Said and George Orwell.

<sup>4</sup> Baden Powell, *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship*, ed Elleke Boehmer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 300.

<sup>5</sup> Allen Warren, “Popular Manliness: Baden-Powell, scouting, and the development of manly character”, *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940*, ed. J.A.Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) 200.

bodily economy devoid of distractive sentimentality and committed almost entirely to the maximisation of the empire. Such discourses operated on an erotic economy that prohibited masturbation, homosexuality and effeminacy, encouraging a model of masculinity that would be replicated paradoxically in the anti-colonial movements against the empire in the Indian political and spiritual scene. As Revathi Krishnaswamy asserts in her complex analysis of the epistemology of effeminacy and its resistance in the Indian colonial scene and its emergent nationalism:

In fact, the self image of Indian, especially Bengali, men in the nineteenth century was deeply conditioned by a negative view of effeminacy. Whether they urged their fellow Indians to cultivate a robust physique or advocated violent military resistance to imperial rule, whether they undertook to revitalize Hinduism along the lines of muscular Christianity or attempted to reform the lives of women, many Bengali writers, reformers, political and religious leaders of the time – men like Michael Madhusudhan Dutt (1824-73), Dayanand Saraswati (1824-83), Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94), and Vivekananda (1863-1902) – were simply reacting to being labeled effeminate.<sup>6</sup>

Thus curiously enough, the dominant discourses that informed British imperialism as well as the ones that sought to resist colonial control and reincorporate Indian indigenous nationalism were characterised by a brand of masculinity that operated along the principles of military idealism and disgusted reaction against perceived effeminacy. The brand of British masculinity that emerged and was popularized at the turn of the twentieth century was in close correspondence with the discourses of imperialism and colonial control. The tenets of such masculinity were premised on principles of production and perpetuation that upheld the episteme of the empire and

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<sup>6</sup> Revathi Krishnaswamy, *Effeminism*, 42. Vivekananda's advocacy of a muscular masculinity, that informed the construct of strength in its self-effacement and abstinence, appropriated largely the Hellenistic Eurocentric models of the strong and rational man. His revulsion against what he considered sentimental effeminacy of the Vaishnava cult of Chaitanya is well known, as is his appeal to the youth of India to take up muscle building as well as character building exercises such as football and gymnastics. Vivekananda's spiritual message thus contains an interesting combination of rationality and muscle-building, and his role as a strong Hindu monk has subsequently been grossly misappropriated by Hindu fundamentalist political parties in modern India such as the RSS. Vivekananda's *To the Youth of India* opens with a direct acknowledgement of the contribution of the Western world to his worldview as he affirms: "what was before the result of an emotional nature perhaps, has gained the certainty of conviction, and attained the power and strength of demonstration." *To the Youth of India* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama Publications, 1989) 1. Vivekananda's advocacy for strong muscular body is amply evinced in his statement of the world as a great gymnasium where one comes to make oneself strong, his advice of playing football rather than reading The Gita for a better way to be at one with God, and his ideal that Indian youth ought to develop muscles of iron and nerves of steel.

thus “sexual desire between men frequently ruptured Britain’s imperial allegory by shattering national unity and impeding the entire defeat of subject groups.”<sup>7</sup>

The public school discourses and scout movements during Edwardian Britain thus promoted and eventually facilitated a heterosexual and homosocial masculinity that operated along the axes of production, classification and control of imperialist ideologies. Such systems of education and upbringing often relied heavily on strategic shaming and stigmatization, strategies that were rampant in the medical discourses that sought to treat the victims of First World War shell-shock. The term “sissy” thus entered common vocabulary not signifying endearing effeminacy but as a signifier of social shame. As Julia Grant argues in her astute analysis of the paradigm shift in the politics of turn-of-the-century British masculinity:

While effeminate or unmanly boys were not artifacts of the twentieth century, the meaning attached to them shifted in conjunction with the politics of masculinity and transformations in child rearing, gender socializations and the new sciences of human development. Nineteenth century sissies were castigated by their peers, but twentieth century sissies bore clinical as well as social stigma. As the peer group loomed ever larger as a means of the socialization of children, confirming to the code of boyhood became increasingly central to the establishing to the normalcy of boys’ personalities and behaviours.<sup>8</sup>

The anxiety to appropriate the model of masculinity that would successfully negotiate with nervousness amidst adventures was a progeny of boys’ public school as well as common cultural vocabularies. The sprightly sporting boy manifesting masculinist attributes was consequently reared and recruited as a potential candidate for imperial adventures as well as for capitalist expansion.

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher Lane, *The Ruling Passion: British Colonial Allegory and the Paradox of Homosexual Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995) 4.

<sup>8</sup> Julia Grant, “A Real Boy and not a Sissy: Gender, Childhood and Masculinity, 1890-1940”, *Journal of Social History* 37. 4 (Summer 2004): 829-51; 829.

## 4.2 Orwell and his Location in Contemporary Masculinist Ideology: Reading “Such, Such Were the Joys”

Very few figures came to occupy as much significance in an analysis of British imperial masculinity and its repressed colonial nervousness as that of George Orwell. Orwell’s problematic position in the public discourses on masculinity in an intensely class-conscious Britain in the early decades of the twentieth century, coupled with his personal encounters at the contact zones as a colonial police officer in Burma, render him as well as the body of his works, into a remarkable contact zone in itself. It is one where British masculinity mixes with colonial contingencies, where private melancholia meets political nervousness. Ashish Nandy’s analysis of Orwell’s position in the colonial machinery in India is of special significance here. Orwell, as Nandy points out in his assessment of the writer and his location in the ideology of imperialism, had had personal difficulties as an adolescent growing up in the masculinist atmosphere of late nineteenth-century Britain. Bed-wetting was a “sin” as well as a crime that attracted retribution in the British public school and Orwell was often subjected to that shame in a regime not unlike that which was meted out to the shell shocked soldiers by British materialist psychiatrists.<sup>9</sup> Orwell thus emerges as an interesting figure that connects the European panic of masculine degeneration (and the compulsive need to build and preserve a model of masculinity) to the masculinist ethnographies in the colonial contact zone.

The politics of man-making and empire building were both premised on similar notions of expansionist production out of imperial investment. Especially pertinent in relation to this thesis is Orwell’s accounts of strategic shaming and corporeal punishments as methods to correct and deter dissenting schoolboys in Edwardian Britain. Orwell’s accounts – most poignantly presented in the autobiographical essay “Such, Such Were the Joys” (1952) – thus carry special significance in a study of the politics of cultivating the masculinist ideal of

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<sup>9</sup> Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 41.

Edwardian Britain, a time when “bully worship and the cult of violence”<sup>10</sup> emerged as the most popular themes in Boys’ Weeklies. Orwell’s accounts bear significant resonance in relation to the treatment of shell shocked soldiers of the First World War most often shamed and treated on the basis of their lineage and stock.

A retrospective look at the horrors of his public school days, “Such, Such Were the Joys” is a remarkable essay that combines personal disgust and ideological revulsion towards the dominant discourses of boyhood, class and the grammar of education that informed imperial masculinity during late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Taking up issues of contention and obsession such as class discrimination, hygiene, masculine taboos, homosexuality and masturbation, Orwell’s essay is a poignant statement as well as a retrospective reminder of the fetish and phobia of the British society of his times. Such a culture was keen on preserving its racial and societal purity while also exhibiting xenophobic tendencies in its discourses of domination and discrimination. More significantly, in the context of this thesis, “Such, Such Were the Joys” points to the politics of privileged masculinity and its formations in early twentieth-century Britain. Orwell’s essay belongs to and points towards a cultural climate increasingly marked by a reified masculinity and its prescribed ideals. Such ideals were often propounded and publicised by schoolmasters who saw institutional education as informing the ideal masculinity for imperial Britain. Thus G.G.T.Heywood, one of the prominent schoolmaster-idealists of late nineteenth century Britain, pronounced:

From a master’s point of view, the ideal boy is the one who makes the most of his natural gifts of mind and body, a boy who can work hard and play hard, yet behind all this he possesses the virtues and characteristics which we

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<sup>10</sup> Orwell, “Boys’ Weeklies”, *Collected Essays*, ed. Alan Hill (London: Mercury Books, 1961) 106. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *CE*. The nervous white men in the colonies who crowd Orwell’s narratives are both the product of as well as the dissenters of the character factory of masculine formations in contemporary England; manifested most readily in public schools and Boy Scouts. The popularity of such masculinity formations is evinced in the various Boys’ Weeklies in Britain in the early decades of the twentieth century, a study taken up by Orwell himself in an essay. The weekly magazines containing boy adventures from public schools were readily consumed by the general public and their cult figures such as Billy Bunter ranked, as Orwell argues, in the same plane of popularity as Tarzan and Sherlock Holmes; the two brands of masculinity embodying the perfect body and the perfect intellectual mind respectively. Playing up the traditional stereotypes of masculinity; the boys’ weeklies also exhibited contemporary xenophobia through a convenient circulation of race-stereotypes. Thus, Inky, the Indian boy, “is the comic babu of the Punch tradition”, Wun Lung, the Chinese boy, “is the nineteenth-century pantomime Chinaman, with saucer-shaped hat, pigtail and pidgin-English” (*CE* 101).

all associate with a Christian gentleman. He is unselfish, modest, frank and honourable, and although he does his best to conceal it, he has a foundation of true religion.<sup>11</sup>

The brand of masculinity prescribed by the status quo curiously and appropriately amalgamated the military as well as the missionary zeal that informed the construction and corroboration of the empire. As Helen Kanitkar contends, the three dominant strands of masculinity that emerged out the machinery of imperial masculinity were the sporting boy, the all-white boy, and the Christian boy. Discussing the role of the boarding school and boys' magazines in fostering the culture of masculinity in the Edwardian imagination, Kanitkar asserts:

To be moulded into this imperial masculinity, boys either entered the highly structured, all-male, boarding-school environment or were presented with idealized views of such institutions through 'ripping yarns'. [. . .] At entry to boarding school new loyalties and points of pride – friendship, school, sports team – were generated, preparing boys for later, greater loyalties to regiment, nation and empire. Readership of 'ripping yarns' extended to boys from a variety of backgrounds a positive and beguiling image of a public-school code, presenting the virtues of a class whose position of undeniable power and privilege was, so these books imply, derived from adherence to its ideals.<sup>12</sup>

Kanitkar's argument thus persuasively asserts the culture of desirable masculinity that was constructed and circulated by a discourse network of boarding schools' curricula and popular boys' weeklies, both of which feature heavily in Orwell's accounts of Edwardian Britain. More significantly, Kanitkar's account showcases the compulsory comradeship and homosocial politics that constituted such masculinity formation.

The ability to work and play hard as well as to retain the pure principles of religion all constituted the conditions conducive to the political and spiritual ideologies that justified the empire and its masculinist expansionist economies,

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<sup>11</sup>G.G.T.Heywood, "Ideals of Schoolboy Life", *Unwritten Laws and Ideals of Active Careers*, ed.E.H.Pitcairn (London: Smith, Elder, 1899) 242. Cited in J.A.Mangan, "Social Darwinism and upper-class education in late Victorian and Edwardian England", *Manliness and Morality*, 136.

<sup>12</sup> Helen Kanitkar, "'Real true boys': Moulding Cadets of Imperialism", *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*, ed. Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne (London: Routledge, 1994) 185-86.



exemplified most (in)famously by Kipling's maxim of the White Man's Burden. The eugenics operative in the British public schools of the late Victorian and Edwardian period often constituted a social Darwinism that appropriated the Spencerian maxim of the survival of the fittest.<sup>13</sup> The criterion of fitness was more often than not premised on a privilege that was inherited through lineage, rather than acquired through merit. The masculinity manufactured out of Edwardian boarding schools before the First World War was driven by a discourse of hierarchy and social signifiers of supremacy, that corresponded closely to the ostensible opulence of the imperialist economy before the advent of the war. Thus Orwell reports:

There never was, I suppose, in the history of the world a time when the sheer vulgar fatness of wealth, without any kind of aristocratic elegance to redeem it, was so obtrusive, as in the years before 1914. [. . .] From the whole decade before 1914, there seems to breathe forth a smell of the more vulgar, un-grown-up kinds of luxury, a smell of brilliantine and crème de menthe and soft centered chocolates—an atmosphere, as it were, of eating everlasting strawberry ices on green lawns to the tune of the Eton Boating Song.<sup>14</sup>

The signifiers of supremacy, metonymically delineated by Orwell, constitute an unwholesome and hollow materiality that operated along a discourse of difference. The economy before 1914 corresponded closely to the ontology of ostentation that carried the sanctioned signifiers of class, an ontology that was permanently shaken and deconstructed after the First World War and “After 1918 it was never quite the same again. Snobbishness and expensive habits came back, certainly, but they were self-conscious and on the defensive” (*SJ* 357).

As Christopher Hitchens's analysis of the author contends, Orwell's gaze into the horrors of empire was informed by his earlier experiences in childhood that showcased models of discrimination, exploitation and injustice. Such models hypocritically upheld facades of well-intentioned ideology and humanitarian objectives. These were particularly operative and extended in more immediately politicized contexts in the contact-zones of British imperialism, where structures of

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<sup>13</sup> See J.A.Mangan, “Social Darwinism and upper-class education in late Victorian and Edwardian England”, *Manliness and Morality*, 135-59.

<sup>14</sup> George Orwell, “Such, Such Were the Joys”, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, 4 Vols, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968) 4: 357. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *SJ*.

privilege and exploitation were concealed beneath a vocabulary of liberal philanthropy.<sup>15</sup> Various critics have argued for and against the historical veracity of Orwell's account in "Such, Such were the Joys."<sup>16</sup> But as in "A Hanging", Orwell's essay on the horrors of his school life is less interesting for its purely factual veracity than for its instantiating quality that operates as a pointer to the broader issues of the day. Even biographers who contend the content of truth in Orwell's essay agree on its thematic proximity to the totalitarianism of *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949), as the two works were published almost contemporaneously. The dystopian world of Winston Smith and young Eric Blair correspond closely to similar structures of surveillance and containment. This is amply corroborated by Gordon Bowker who describes "Such, Such Were the Joys" thus:

It is the recollection of a place and period viewed through a highly sensitive and complex mind, filtered through time and coloured by ideology, the account of a closed and oppressive world from the alter-ego of Winston Smith, the last apostle of free thought. [. . .] 'Such, Such Were the Joys' is an extraordinary piece of retrospective reinvention, an adult version of a long-felt hurt coming from the pen of a master satirist who could be as savage as he could be inventive.<sup>17</sup>

The continual comparison critics make between "Such, Such were the Joys" and *Nineteen Eighty Four* exemplifies the complexities born out systems of totalitarianism, political as well as institutional. In its depictions of the dystopian conditions that ironically informed the ontology of privilege, "Such, Such were the Joys" emerges as a significant insight into the mechanism of masculinity-formation in Edwardian Britain, a mechanism that sought to send its manufactured product to the service of the empire.<sup>18</sup>

The school itself emerges in Orwell's essay as a signifier of constant surveillance and supervision and the resonances with the crime-obsessed world of *Nineteen Eighty Four* are not far to seek. As Jeffrey Meyers in his study of Orwell's

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<sup>15</sup> Hitchens, *Orwell's Victory* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2002) 128.

<sup>16</sup> See Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980) 15-32.

<sup>17</sup> Bowker, *George Orwell* (London: Little, Brown, 2003) 29.

<sup>18</sup> Again one can make the connection to Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* here, as the manufactured product of all Europe that cracks up and goes wrong and renegade at the heart of the pure imperial space that transforms through Kurtz from being governed by profit principle to that of pleasure principle while also instantiating how the former can immediately and ideologically inform the latter which then becomes a dangerous threat to the machinery of imperialism.

school education asserts, “Behind its ugly but imposing facade, the school offered all the attractions of a penal colony.”<sup>19</sup> The recurrent anxieties of being bullied and shamed by the status quo in “Such, Such were the Joys”, along with the politics of privilege such model upheld, give a remarkably astute analysis of the politics of masculinity-formations of the day that operated with a mixture of indoctrination and intimidation. Perhaps the most unequivocal of Orwell’s essays, “Such, Such were the Joys” opens with the shame of being a bed-wetter in a boys’ public school and the fear and routine retribution associated with the same:

Soon after I arrived at St Cyprian’s (not immediately, but after a week or two, just when I seemed to be settling into the routine of school life), I began wetting my bed. [ . . . ] it is normal reaction in those children who have been removed from their homes to a strange place. In those days however, it was looked on as a disgusting crime which the child did on purpose and for which the proper cure was beating. For my part I did not need to be told it was a crime. [ . . . ] There was no volition about it, no consciousness. You did not properly speaking *do* the deed: You merely woke up in the morning and found that the sheets were wringing wet. (*SJ* 330)

The crime without a consciousness that came to be associated with bed wetting in Orwell’s imagination was a pointer to the passive personal helplessness against social stigma. The shame in boys’ bed wetting can be interpreted as a proleptic signifier of the shame in not being manly enough in terms of exerting perfect phallic and nervous control.<sup>20</sup> Orwell’s shame in being the enuretic offender in a boys’ public school was a mixture of fear and forbiddenness that came with the threat of symbolic emasculation as evinced in the figure of the “grim statuesque matron” who inspected his sheets meticulously every morning.

The women figures in “Such, Such were the Joys” emerge with hypermasculine attributes in the boy Eric’s imagination and the essay is remarkable in the way it reports the original trauma in a confused boy’s mind with the voice of a

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<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Meyers, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation* (New York & London: Norton, 2000) 17.

<sup>20</sup> Masculine enuresis was considered a serious symptom of juvenile delinquency and potential criminality in early twentieth century English imagination and even as late as 1965, Stein and Susser published a report based on a survey of boys’ schools in Manchester that corroborated that enuretic boys were low in intelligence, nervous control and showed greater propensity towards criminality. Zena A. Stein and M.W.Susser, “Socio-Medical Study of Enuresis among Delinquent Boys”, *British Journal of Preventive and Social Medicine* 19.4 (October 1965): 174-81.

more mature male looking back at it all. The shame in being enuretic is accentuated in the emasculated exposure before the female figures that exemplify the trauma of the nervous formative male in a constrictive landscape where the loving mother figure is conspicuously absent. Thus, Mrs Wilkes, the headmaster's wife, was a "stocky, square-built woman", who evoked immediate guilt in the boy Orwell "even at moments when one was not guilty of anything in particular" (SJ 331). The *strange lady* who appears with Mrs Wilkes, and who is immediately and mistakenly associated in the boy Eric's imagination as Mrs Form (from the allusion to the Sixth Form boys deputed to beat younger boys) is described as an "intimidating, masculine looking person wearing a riding habit" (SJ 331). With the fear of being physically beaten by her creeping in his mind, Mrs Form immediately appears in the boy Orwell's shuddered imagination as a "terrifying vision [. . .] arriving for the occasion in full riding kit and armed with a hunting whip" (SJ 332).

The masculinity in the figure of Mrs Form and the threat of castration she embodies with the hunting whip in the boy's mind combines sexual fear with physical domination. In effect, Mrs Form embodies the ideal masculine hunter unleashing merciless and ruthless retribution on masculine inadequacies, a figure that recurs in *Burmese Days* as Verrall who emerges surrounded by an "aura of horsemanship and soldiering."<sup>21</sup> The figure of Verrall dramatizes the symbolic emasculation of the protagonist John Flory who could be read as a sufficiently Orwellian figure in the colonial contact-zone with his private hesitations and 'unmanly' ambivalence. Mrs Form's hunting whip in "Such, Such Were the Joys" effectively becomes the metaphor of the phallus that the young Orwell is guilty of abusing with bed-wetting and masturbation, both undesirable exercises in exhaustion without production, and thus inviting corrective measures. The scene of shame also constitutes the fear of symbolic castration by stronger females as Orwell's description affirms:

To this day I can feel myself almost swooning with shame as I stood, a very small, round faced boy in short corduroy knickers, before the two women. I could not speak. I felt I should die if 'Mrs Form' were to beat me. But my dominant feeling was not fear or resentment: it was simply shame because

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<sup>21</sup> George Orwell, *Burmese Days* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961) 214. Further references to this work will be made parenthetically as *BD*.

one more person, and that a woman, had been told of my disgusting offence.  
(*SJ* 332)

The presence of the women gazing at his inadequate masculinity (reminiscent of the boss's reverie-image of Woodfield's girls gazing at his dead boy's grave and opening it up in Mansfield's "The Fly") constitutes both a moment of disclosure as well as disintegration for the young Eric, leading up to the epistemic violence perpetrated on the non-integrated masculine self. In her analysis of the politics of shame and stigma, Martha Nussbaum asserts that shame is an unsettling emotion that corresponds closely to the moment of disclosure of the social self, arrested in its inadequacies in relation to normative principles of behaviour:

Shame therefore cuts beneath any specific social orientation to norms, and serves as a highly volatile way in which human being negotiate some tensions inherent in their humanness—in, that is, their awareness of the themselves as beings both finite and marked by exorbitant demands and expectations.<sup>22</sup>

The normative masculinity that is desired and decreed in the boy's public school through a combination of cricket, classics, and mnemonic history tests, was set to prepare boys to be *real men*. In order to rise above being "a little office boy at forty pounds a year", the boys in St. Cyprian's were supposed to demonstrate skills in discipline and performance of the mind as well as of the body, and refrain from bodily aberrations such as enuresis and masturbation, both considered crimes constituting aberrant masculinity and located on a similar pedestal of deviance as homosexuality.

"Such, Such were the Joys" emerges as an essay that exhibits social Darwinism at work at boys' school in early twentieth century Britain where money, class and lineage held the tickets to progress and privilege. As Gordon Bowker asserts in his analyses on Orwell's experiences at St. Cyprian's:

Later, as a socialist, he saw the place [St. Cyprian's] for what it was – a commercial venture, dedicated to profit, favouring the rich pupils and abusing the poor [. . .] Not only did it embody all the things he came to reject – imperialism, snobbery, the valuing the strong over the weak, the

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<sup>22</sup>Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006) 173-74.

denigrating of his curiosity about the natural world – but helped to distort his normal feelings about sex.<sup>23</sup>

More significantly, Orwell's earlier experiences in shame and segregation provided him with a clearer and more directly recognizable look through the ideologies of imperialism. Orwell's first person accounts and focalized fiction about masculinity formations at home as well as colonial configurations in Burma throw light on the epistemology of private hesitation in the face of a collective totalitarian ideology. This hesitation manifests itself in the nervousness and nervous narratives of individuals who seek, eventually ineffectually, to interrogate the machinery of masculinity operative in colonial contact-zones.

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<sup>23</sup> Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell*, 49.

### 4.3 Nervousness, Agency and Masculinist Performance in “Shooting an Elephant”

Orwell’s essays and fiction set in colonial Indo-China, most notably depicted in his novel *Burmese Days* (1934), serve to inscribe an insider’s perspective into imperialism. His writing paradoxically also reconstitutes the insider-outsider relationship within the ideology of the imperial system. More significantly, like the fictional narrators of Joseph Conrad, Orwell’s narratives tend to be focalized through nervous and ambivalent figures at the heart of imperialism. Like Conrad’s narratives, Orwell’s essays and novel on the colonial situation in Burma offer an insider’s account of the epistemic violence that informed colonial melancholia and the existentialist knowledge of loss. As Christopher Hitchens argues, Orwell’s gaze into colonialism and his articulation of its human horrors “are an indissoluble part of his lifelong engagement with the subjects of power and cruelty and force, and the crude yet subtle relationship between the dominator and the dominated.”<sup>24</sup> However, as Orwell’s own writing often evinces, especially in his essays on colonial Indo-China such as “Shooting an Elephant” (1936), “A Hanging” (1931), and his novel *Burmese Days* (1934), the distinctions between the dominator and the dominated were far from straightforward or linear in a cultural climate mapped by denial, deception and disintegration.<sup>25</sup>

In disguising an epistemology as a fixed unchallengeable ontology, the politics of classification in the colonial space operated in a manner that cemented the expansiveness of ‘white privilege’ that was politically necessary for imperialist control and its ideological apparatus.<sup>26</sup> Orwell’s writing is often characterised by the

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<sup>24</sup> Hitchens, *Orwell’s Victory*, 25.

<sup>25</sup> As Ashish Nandy studies, “Shooting an Elephant” dramatizes the subordination of the human self in favour of the grandiose masculine performance that would perpetuate control in the colonial space. Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 40.

<sup>26</sup> In her lecture entitled “The Power of Hesitation: Bergson, Merleau-Ponty and Seeing Differently” delivered as an IAS Fellow at St. Cuthbert’s Society at Durham University on 25 October 2012, Alia Al-Saji spoke on the epistemic and political significance of personal hesitation in fracturing racialized perception which otherwise operates with the dialectic of an innate ability to see difference and an equally innate and ideologically ingrained inability to perceive otherness without hierarchy. As Alia

fault-lines in such structures of presupposed political privilege that hold up the cracks in the constructed quality that informs imperial identity. Set in Lower Burma and offered as a first-hand report of his personal experiences as a colonial officer, the essay “Shooting an Elephant” starts by stating the collective aversion Orwell was subjected to and was subjectivized through as an agent of the British empire. The essay carefully delineates the dilemma in the mind of a young officer entrusted with executing the mission of imperialism in a colonized space and is a significant study of the reificatory repression that informs an imperialist culture of compulsory classifications and control. What emerges in the essay almost immediately is the ambivalence that informs the schism between the collective consciousness and the individual will. The will appears as systematically subjugated by the political unconscious which informs the economy of expectations of the colonizer as well as the colonized.

In her work on white identities, Linda Martin Alcoff refers to the film *Dances with Wolves* (1991) as a politically flawed narrative with supremacist pretensions that nevertheless manages to depict the dilemma of an “awakened white consciousness”<sup>27</sup> in a political contact-zone riven by war. Likewise, Orwell’s essays and fiction about the colonial contact-zone are fascinating frames that depict the spurious strategies of supremacy operative in colonial Burma. They also depict the political and personal moments of hesitation in which such narratives of order and control are momentarily fractured with eventually unfulfilled glimpses into existentialist awakenings. Thus the fragile figure of Orwell in “Shooting an Elephant” – who happens notionally to be a colonial master – receives a reconfigured knowledge of his own servility to a system of expectations that constitutes a political will operative at an excess to the personal will. More significantly, the essay also dramatizes the dilemma of the self that is expected to

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Saji goes on to expound in her fascinating lecture that constitutes an analysis of the works of Fanon, Merleau-Ponty and Bergson, it is only through *hesitation* as a privately embodied strategy that the human agency can resist the totalizing tendencies of discourse-formation in contingent political and cultural conditions that uphold differences in race, language and power. It is the politics of private hesitation and ambivalence that Orwell captures so fascinatingly in his work set in colonial Burma that, with its political incorrectness, emerges with significant pointers to the crisis of individuality, intentionality and agency in the colonial contact-zone.

<sup>27</sup>Linda Marin Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 205.



appropriate colonial masculinity at its hegemonic best, a hegemony that operates not only at the interfaces between races (the colonizer and the colonized) but also in the borderlines between the private self and its cultural and political signifiers.

Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" dramatizes a state where the conscientious colonizer torn between his personal hatred of individual colonized natives and ideological aversion towards imperialism "could get nothing into perspective" (*CE* 15-16), thus exemplifying the loss of intentionality and the crisis of agency in a political landscape of compulsory difference. The agony of being the object of collective aversion that was too weak to assume political proportion manifested itself in various surreptitious forms of retaliation at the imperial contact-zone:

As a police officer I was an obvious target and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so. When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football field and the referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter. This happened more than once. In the end the sneering yellow faces of young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance, got badly on my nerves. (*CE* 15)

The location of subversion is significant in Orwell's account: the football field where the grammar of the sport offered a space for retaliation without political penalty and where the subversion would be spectacular as well as safe, where it would be *unmanly* to uphold and seek protection from the notional politics of privilege. The laughter of the Burmese spectators on seeing the *sahib* tripped emerges as a release from repression in an otherwise political regime reified by the rituals and discourses of difference.

"Shooting an Elephant" is about the no man's land between active intervention and passive acceptance, collective hysteria and private nervousness, and the nervous negotiations – political as well as personal – that constitute the epistemology of compulsory difference. The political indecision embodied by the young Orwell torn between his hatred of imperialism and an equal degree of disgust against the Burmese natives is vividly illustrated:

All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible. With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an

unbreakable tyranny, as something clamped down, in saecula saeculorum, upon the will of prostrate peoples; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts. (CE 16)

With his ideological hatred of imperialism and his private aversion against the colonized natives who are described as an array of anonymous entities with revolting attributes, Orwell in "Shooting an Elephant" articulates the ambivalence that characterizes the critique of an ideology that is paradoxically embedded in the very ideological narrative it seeks to spurn. Here, as elsewhere in Orwell's *oeuvre*, one sees the drama of dislocation powerfully at work, torn between the historical materialist narratives in which the subject is embedded and the private narrative that is directed against the same historical materialism that the subject is painfully part of.

In his vacillations between the macrocosmic and the microcosmic narratives of violence and aversion, Orwell in "Shooting an Elephant" dramatizes the distinction Foucault makes between the universal 'left' intellectual "acknowledged the right of speaking in the capacity of master of truth and justice" and the "specific intellectual" embedded in "a question of real, material, everyday struggles".<sup>28</sup> In his hopeless embedded-ness in the very ideology he seeks to decry, Orwell in "Shooting an Elephant" also showcases what Slavoj Žižek classifies as the structural mechanism that produces "the effect of subject as ideological misrecognition" while also forcing the subject to acknowledge that "this misrecognition is unavoidable – that is, we must accept a certain delusion as a condition of our historical activity, of assuming a role as agent of the historical process."<sup>29</sup> As a powerless agent of a powerful historical process, Orwell in "Shooting an Elephant" enacts the death of agency at the heart of the colonial contact-zone. The human experience as depicted in the essay emerges as constricted by the political presuppositions of power, with free will and intentionality giving way to the pre-set codes of performance. With its political complexity and mutually contradictory strands of personal and ideological priorities, "Shooting an Elephant" dramatizes a nervous condition that contains elements of black comedy. Informed of a mad elephant ravaging the local bazaar, Orwell the colonial superintendent of police was forced to set out to look for it in a

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<sup>28</sup> Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, trans. and ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Vintage Books, 1972) 126-27.

<sup>29</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989) 2.

pony with a .44 Winchester rifle, presenting the iconic image of the colonizer expected to control any potential anarchy.

What constitutes the image of the colonizer on horseback with a rifle is not only the signifier of power in the colonial condition but also the compulsory performance of grand imperial machismo. Appropriately enough, as the *sahib* marched on in a bid to shoot the elephant, the Burmese population flocked out of their houses to follow him in an image that approximates as well as parodies the Pied Piper signifier even as it produces the possibility of collective hysteria in a spectacular sport. The Pied Piper image evoked by Orwell with his embodiment of the sahib with a rifle (followed by thousands of natives flocking out of their quarters in excited expectation of a spectacle of annihilation) is interesting in relation to the discourse on degeneration in European imagination where the Pied Piper attribute was associated with the pathologically degenerate with the potential for seduction as well as annihilation.<sup>30</sup> The Pied Piper attribute of degeneration has been associated in literary fiction with Conrad's Kurtz, the archetype of the excesses of masculinist greed and decadence in the ideology of imperialism.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, like Kurtz, Orwell in "Shooting an Elephant" presents the European male "whose nerves went wrong" (*HD* 50) in an imperial economy driven by compulsory and compulsive principles of privilege. Unlike Kurtz, who paradoxically attempts to assert his agency by becoming a renegade to the very system that had historically constructed his type, Orwell in "Shooting an Elephant" emerges as a passive performer and perpetuator of the discourse of domination and difference that proceeds along with its strategic system of stereotypes.

Orwell's initial reluctance to shoot the harmless elephant and his eventual surrender to the collective will show not so much as a real act as a mimetic one, one that must powerlessly replicate the rituals of imperial masculinity always already inscribed for the individual who emerges as perfectly reducible and replaceable in the discursive space of difference. The mimetic and performative quality of his imperial identity is exposed before Orwell at the moment in which he is forced to surrender the will of his private self in order to enact the performance of the *pukka*

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<sup>30</sup> Nordau, *Degeneration*, 23.

<sup>31</sup> See C.T. Watts, "Nordau and Kurtz: A Footnote to *Heart of Darkness*", *Notes and Queries* 219(1974): 226-27.

*sahib*. Orwell's insight into his personal helplessness under the collective gaze occupies the epistemic moment when the ontology of privilege is cracked open and the notional hierarchy is turned on its head. The dialectic between the collective gaze that turns the self inside out and the private gaze into the hollowed-out caricature of power in "Shooting an Elephant" deserves to be quoted in full so as to grasp its full impact:

I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly. And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's domination in the East. [ . . . ] I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib. For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the "natives", and so in every crisis he has to do what the "natives" expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. (*CE* 19-20)

Orwell's discovery of the hollowness of the white man's privilege occupies an epiphanic moment where phenomenological awareness mixes existential insight with political unlearning. In its experience of hollowness, Orwell's articulation is akin to that of Kurtz's in *Heart of Darkness*, a novel that also depicts the dangerous and inevitable shift from an excessive profit principle to a decadent pleasure principle that informs the pathology of imperial greed. The compulsory self-fashioning of the white man in the colonial contact zone becomes compulsive at the point when the human face is subsumed by the social mask that signifies difference and domination.<sup>32</sup> More significantly, the politics of masking and compulsively appropriating normative masculinity through a hyper-mimetic mode also points to the loss of agency in the face of such compulsory performance. The anxiety of the human self to appropriate the imperial masculinity that informs white privilege in the colonies was as political as the anxiety of the *hyper-civil* native to appropriate the colonizer's tongue. Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" is an essay where masculine behaviour emerges as a nervous mimicry of the imperial masculinist code. Thus, in preparing to shoot the elephant against his pure human will in "Shooting an

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<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to compare this passage with the anxiety of appropriating the appropriate mask in Eliot's Prufrock who sees himself being seen and reified by a collective gaze of societal structure where he continually fails to frame himself. Like Orwell, Prufrock too emerges as a masculine hysteric in a performative space that, although seemingly less immediately political than that of "Shooting an Elephant", is nonetheless characterised by similar economy of expectations.

Elephant”, Orwell enacts the *neuromimesis* of the colonial master who is forced to feign and enact his pre-assigned narrative of masculinist performance:

A white man mustn't be frightened in front of “natives”; and so, in general, he isn't frightened. The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued, caught, trampled on and reduced to a grinning corpse like that Indian up that hill. And of that happened it was quite probable that some of them would laugh. (CE 21)<sup>33</sup>

Linda Martin Alcoff's analysis of the crisis of individual identity in a collectively constructed political space of difference is again significant here, especially in relation to the interrogation that the self can potentially present in the face of such ideological coercion. This fractured fault line of identity-reconfiguration enacts an existentialist awakening accompanied by an immediate political knowledge whereby “one realizes how one's own hegemonic hermeneutic horizon of shared meanings has been infected by white supremacy, one's own sense of identity becomes invalidated.”<sup>34</sup> While the state of the shell-shocked soldier and the male hysteric was almost always perceived as a pseudo-hysteric performance based on psychosomatic degeneration, the compulsory enactment of imperial masculinity was rarely perceived as a performance and was strategically premised on a seamless naturalness, like the narrative of imperialism itself: the *pukka sahib's code*. “Shooting an Elephant” ends with the confession mixed with the fear of being found out from this strategic seamlessness, as Orwell “wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking like a fool” (CE 23).

Orwell's essay is a remarkable articulation of human hesitation, confusion and horror. It contains the paradoxical knowledge that the experience of privileged political power can also be one of pure human helplessness, that the assertion of privileged masculinity can also emerge as one containing the dissolution of agency.

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<sup>33</sup> In her historical analysis of colonial masculinity in the context of colonial India, Mrinalini Sinha studies how “The figures of the ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali *babu*’ were produced and circulated in order to shape, the shifts in the political economy of colonialism in late nineteenth century: the changing imperatives in the strategies of colonial rule as well as the altered conditions for the indigenous elite's collaboration with colonial rule.” Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and ‘the effeminate Bengali’ in Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 2. Sinha's historical analysis illustrates how the brands of masculinity produced and perpetuated by the episteme of the empire relied on their reified binaries of sexual and political performativity.

<sup>34</sup> Linda Martin Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 206.

In situating the hesitant human self and will against the overarching structures of domination and hierarchy, “Shooting an Elephant” is a disturbing study of shame, guilt and the knowledge of powerlessness. Such knowledge emerges as a phenomenological and existentialist awareness in the colonial space where the borders between victory and loss, assertion and acceptance, are constantly revised as well as reified.

#### 4.4 Colonial Masculinity and Its Discontents: A Study of *Burmese Days*

In his analysis of the white man's nervousness in the colonial condition – writing specifically on American colonialism in the Philippines – Warwick Anderson traces the trajectory of nervous illness of the colonizer as a pathology that was culture-specific and essentially masculinist. Studying the dialectic between masculine hysteria and colonial machismo, Anderson asserts:

The medical shaping of nervousness, initially mechanistic in character, later psychodynamic, contributed to the cultivation of masculinity and whiteness in a colonial culture. The new tropical colonies, the latest in the long line of last frontiers, presented both a special resource for white male self-fashioning and its testing ground. In this novel setting, the combination of ideas of bourgeois masculinity with ideas of whiteness and civilization becomes startlingly obvious, even as the nervy instability of the combination is revealed with equal clarity.<sup>35</sup>

The white masculinity in the imperial agon was thus rendered hysteric by the compulsion of the presupposed ontology of privilege and its anxious self-fashioning. The anxiety born out of inadequate masculinity is a theme that recurs in Orwell's novel *Burmese Days*, whose protagonist John Flory carries his birthmark as a signifier of shame. Like Orwell who saw his school solely as a profit making enterprise, and like Conrad's Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* who sees the horrors of European imperialism from close quarters as an evil network of lies and exploitation, Flory in *Burmese Days* uses the metaphor of the sick female patient to describe the dying British empire and asserts unequivocally his disgust at the spurious discourse of the white man's burden:

I'm here to make money, like everyone else. All I object to is the slimy white man's burden humbug. The pukka sahib pose. It's so boring. Even those bloody fools at the Club might be better company if we weren't all of us living a lie the whole time. (*BD* 39)

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<sup>35</sup> Warwick Anderson, "The Trespass Speaks: White Masculinity and Colonial Breakdown", *The American Historical Review* 102. 5 (December 1997): 1343-70; 1346.

Evidently positioning itself against the Kiplingesque narrative of imperial adventure and its edificatory duties, Orwell's *Burmese Days* is a remarkable novel about an insider's account of the horrors of colonial domination, horrors that consume the dominator as well as the dominated. The nervous tension that constitutes power and its compulsory hierarchies in colonial Burma in *Burmese Days* incorporates issues of race, gender as well as language. If the characters in *Burmese Days* are less focalized or rounded than that of Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), Orwell's novel emerges as a more direct depiction of the compulsive qualities of racial law and its perpetuation in the colonial contact zone. Thus the xenophobic imperialist Ellis, who combines the stereotypes of the crude colonizer with that of incorrigible presumptuousness, is immediately threatened when the Indian waiter at the English club retorts in near-perfect English:

“Don't talk like that damn you—I find it very difficult!’ Have you swallowed a dictionary? ‘Please, master, can't keep ice cool’—that's how you ought to talk. We shall have to sack this fellow if he gets to talk English too well. I can't stick servants who talk English. (*BD* 26)

Crucially, the inadequacy of the Indian servant rests precisely at the point where he exhibits an adequate and accurate appropriation of the normative language of the colonizer. The incident immediately instantiates one of the central issues in Orwell's *oeuvre* on the colonial contact zone: the compulsive construction and circulation of the discourse of difference and its stereotypes. The nervousness of the cocksure colonizer (embodied in Ellis who never changes throughout the course of the novel from being a megalomaniac imperialist) is located at the point where his arrogant assumption of racial superiority is, if only marginally, threatened, not by an actual act of rebellion that can be conveniently punished, but by what is perceived as the sly civility of the colonial servant.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In his analysis of the sly civility that characterises the colonial dialectic of non-reconciliation, Homi Bhabha describes its double inscription. Thus Bhabha states that “Between the civil address and its colonial signification – each axis displaying a problem of recognition and repetition – shuttles the signifier of authority in search of a strategy of surveillance, subjection, and inscription. [. . .] Both colonizer and colonized are in a process of miscognition where each point of identification is always a partial and double repetition of the *otherness* of the self – democrat and despot, individual *and* servant, native and child.” Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 138-39. The threat that is enacted through hyper-civility is further accentuated through language for Bhabha, as mimicry in the colonial space emerges as a subversive act of spectacular resistance. Thus for Bhabha, “When the words of the master become the site of hybridity [. . .] then we may not only read between the lines but even seek to change the often coercive reality that they so lucidly contain.” Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders”, *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (1985): 144-65; 162.



The complex luggage of language and its political performance are depicted again when Ellis “deliberately exaggerated his Cockney accent, because of the sardonic tone it gave to his words,” (*BD* 22) while dramatizing his resentment to Macgregor’s proposing membership of the club to the natives.<sup>37</sup> Cockney as a social signifier within an English space stands in stark contrast to the standardized English practised at the colonial contact-zone, one that is desired and appropriated by the colonized. Language thus emerges in *Burmese Days* both as a signifier of class and race through varying epistemological frames. The political condition depicted in the novel corresponds closely to the class condition in England as the natives in India are frequently equated with the lower classes in Britain. *Burmese Days* thus blends the discourse of degeneration (and its notion of ‘bad stock’) with that of colonialism through its fictional frame. Thus Mrs Lackersteen, another stereotype of the crude colonizer, laments the loss of authority over the colonized masses by drawing attention to an analogous situation in Britain: “We seem to have no *authority* over the natives nowadays, with all these dreadful Reforms, and the insolence they learn from the newspapers. In some ways they are getting almost as bad as the lower classes at home” (*BD* 29).

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<sup>37</sup> For an analysis of Cockney accent as a signifier of a certain social symbol, see Lynda Mugglestone, *Talking Proper: The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 50-76. As Mrinalini Sinha asserts in her analysis of the culture of clubbing during the British Empire, the imperial English club emerged not only as a spatial signifier of the expansive ontology of homosocial white masculinity in the colonial contact-zone; but also grudgingly granted right to women to enter the notionally all-male-space, for the sole purpose of continued and closely monitored protection from the contaminating presence of the colonized male. Mrinalini Sinha, “Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere: The Genealogy of an Imperial Institution in Colonial India”, *Journal of British Studies* 40.4 (October 2001): 489-521; 515. The club in *Burmese Days* emerges both as a symbol of desire as well as disgust, along with being the spatial location of hegemonic homosocial masculinity. Thus, while for the Burmese elite males such as the Machiavellian (and perversely pious) gangster Ko Po Kyin and the hyper-Westernized and hyper-servile doctor Veraswami the White Man’s Club at Kyauktada emerges as a sacred shrine of social status that is both desired as well as feared; for Flory it represents the crude complacency of imperial English masculinity that is driven by humbug and “booze as the cement of the empire” (*BD* 39). It is this complex location of difference within the masculinist imperialist economy that makes *Burmese Days* a work of original revelation despite its political incorrectness and ultimate appropriation of the vocabulary of imperialism. Sinha’s study of the discourse of difference signified by the subscription to imperial clubbability in the colonial contact-zone shows how such clubbability “was always defined in relation to the dependent and the subjected—women, children, servants, employees, slaves, and the colonized.” Mrinalini Sinha, “Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere”, 497. It is interesting to note that such politics of privilege and exclusive system of admittance are still operative in several clubs in Kolkata (formerly the capital of colonial India) that were originally formed during British imperialism. Also, such clubs still subscribe to strict dress codes that adhere to the grammar of dressing appropriated by imperial British and Anglo-Indian masculinity.

The lower classes back in Britain and the colonial natives are both perceived from similar positions of privilege by the status quo and Orwell's novel echoes similar sentiments of segregation as that in the 1956 play by John Osborne *Look Back in Anger* whose protagonist Jimmy Porter appears as a hysteric young man of working class background profoundly envious of the Edwardian gentility while also appreciating the privilege of nostalgia such Englishness possesses with its proud past of imperial glory, a past that can only be preserved in strategic and essentialized remembrance. The masculine hysteria of Jimmy constitutes sadistic misogyny as well as desire for the mother-protector, hatred of upper-class etiquette as well as resentment of the yobs at the front rows of cinema halls in a curious combination that mixes personal failure with political decadence, similar to the setting in Orwell's *Burmese Days*.<sup>38</sup>

Curiously enough, despite his ostensible aversion towards upper-class gentility, Jimmy in Osborne's *Look Back In Anger* appreciates the loss that his father-in-law Colonel Redfern carries with his fall from masculine military grace, a fall that emerges as a metaphor for Britain's descent as an imperial power post-Second World War. In a sentimentally evocative passage, Redfern describes his disconcertion to his daughter Alison by narrating his imperial adventure and its corresponding heroic code, one which had initiated for him personally in 1914 (interestingly, the date Orwell himself had chosen for his descriptions of the unreal un-grown-up luxury and spurious sentiments to the tune of Eton boating songs in "Such, such were the Joys") and ended with his departure from colonial India back to a Britain where he could not re-locate himself emotionally or politically. The image of imperial British-ness (parodied as well envied by the twenty-five year old Jimmy who inhabits the post-imperial landscape with no brave new causes) is

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<sup>38</sup> Jimmy Porter belongs to the post-Orwellian generation of Englishness which sees itself as having no brave good causes to die for anymore. The decline of England as a colonial and imperial power is immediately evident as a political sub-text in Osborne's play that emerges as the fallout of the Orwellian gaze into imperialism and its discontents. More significantly, in relation to Orwell, Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* also incorporates the loss of definite political faith that ensued after the Spanish Civil War and Jimmy Porter's father who fights and dies of the War, is a sufficiently Orwellian figure conspicuous through his physical absence in the play, while also symbolically informing the loss in the political landscape. The dead father who had fought in the Spanish Civil War had emerged enervated and broken out of its confusion through a climate that Orwell himself had described as "the horrible atmosphere produced by fear, suspicion, hatred, censored newspapers, crammed jails, enormous food queues, and prowling gangs of armed men." George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938) 142.

revealed in *Look Back in Anger* by one of its nostalgic upholders only at the moment of its loss:

Perhaps Jimmy is right. Perhaps I am a – what was it? An old plant left over from the Edwardian Wilderness. And I can't quite understand why the sun isn't shining anymore. [ . . . ] It was March 1914 when I left England, and apart from leaves every ten years or so, I didn't see much of my own country until we all came back in '47. [ . . . ] When I think of it now, it seems like a dream, if only it could have gone on forever. Those cool, long evenings up in the hills, everything purple and golden. [ . . . ] I think the last day the sun shone was when that dirty little train steamed out of that crowded, suffocating Indian station, and the battalion band playing for all it was worth. I knew in my heart it was all over then. Everything.<sup>39</sup>

The image of spiritual fecundity Redfern delineates is a direct progeny of imperial glory that the colonel comfortably embodied and is now painfully dislocated from. His disintegration as a signifier of masculine order thus emerges from a fall from the moment of imperial and political potency. This fall is accentuated with the symbolic departure from the colony in the last train in a day where the symbolic sun last shone over the dying British Empire. The political privilege that Redfern mourns in *Look Back In Anger* had been informed by the maximization of a masculinist economy that had thrived through discourses of domination and deception. Such a culture is powerfully presented in Orwell's *Burmese Days* which, unlike Redfern's picture of the seamless imperial idyllic, sees "continuity and coherence underscored by division and difference".<sup>40</sup>

Flory in Orwell's *Burmese Days* (who is considered "notoriously Bolshie in his opinions") embodies nervous masculinity in the colonies, and like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, also realizes the horror of imperialism without being able to articulate or explicate it, except during moments of private hysteria that paradoxically inform his existentialist insights. Curiously located between his private hatred of imperialism and his discomfort under the collective gaze of the colonized (a nervous ankylosis that is spectacularly dramatized in the essay "Shooting an Elephant"), Flory sees himself and his creed of colonizers as "condemned forever to

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<sup>39</sup> John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger* (New York: Criterion Books, 1957) 68.

<sup>40</sup> Homi Bhabha, "Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism", *The Theory of Reading*, ed. Frank Gloversmith (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1984) 96.

dance the *danse du pukka sahib* for the edification of the lower races” (BD 151) whereby his imagination retains the rhetoric of racism despite his personal hatred of its inherent ideology. The borderlines between the dominator and the dominated are not always clearly demarcated in *Burmese Days*, despite its subscription to the logic of binaries operative in the empire and its colonial space. Thus while Doctor Veraswami embodies the stereotype of inferiority complex characterizing an entire race as advocated by European psychiatrists such as Octave Mannoni working on colonial territories<sup>41</sup>, the protagonist of the novel, John Flory, notionally a white imperial male, embodies a different strand of inferiority marked by a psychosomatic condition. As the narrative informs the reader, Flory’s dislocation and difficulty had begun at the moment of his birth, indeed “in his mother’s womb when chance put the blue birthmark on his cheek” (BD 64).<sup>42</sup> The birthmark in the novel does not only emerge as a signifier of social shame<sup>43</sup> but also as a mark of self-loathing and sexual shame (as evinced in Flory’s covering his birthmark right after his sexual act with Ma Hla May for he “always remembered the birthmark when he had done something to be ashamed of”).

The politics of naming as a strategy of shaming runs throughout *Burmese Days* as evinced in Flory’s childhood in school where he was called Blueface and Monekybum in a couplet written by the school poet who had gone on to be a writer for the *Nation*: “New-tick Flory does look rum, Got a face like a monkey’s bum” (BD 64). The shame in looking rum and being equated with a monkey (a simile that is loaded with racist connotations) is solely and partially redeemed by Flory’s being a “liar and a good footballer, the two things absolutely necessary for success at

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<sup>41</sup> Mannoni’s work on anthropological psychiatry and his hypotheses on human behaviour on the basis of race and cultural locations are perhaps most explicitly presented in *Prospero and Caliban* (1950). The notion of inferiority complex was of course first propounded by Alfred Adler in *The Neurotic Constitution* (1917). Mannoni’s highly racialized analysis was subsequently taken up and critiqued for its essentialism by Fanon in his *Black Skin White Masks* (1952).

<sup>42</sup> The description of Flory’s chanced inheritance of the disfiguring birthmark is curiously similar to the Neo-Darwinist notion of the random genetic code that is conferred at the moment of conception. Indeed, Flory’s birthmark operates like genetic determinism that situates him in shame and self-disgust. The Neo-Darwinist genetic character is studied in greater details in the following chapter on McEwan’s *Saturday*.

<sup>43</sup> Flory is nicknamed Blueface and Monkey-bum in his school and tries to conceal the mark as best he can during his amorous advances towards Elizabeth who in turn embodies high-art and high-class in Flory’s nervous imagination with her pure European-ness signified by her past in Parisian cafes and artistic associations.

school” (BD 64). Football and lying thus emerge as two essential criteria for appropriating the model masculinity that is muscular as well as manipulative in what is described by the narrative as the “formative period” of masculine formation, the horrors of which are personally elucidated by Orwell in “Such, such were the Joys.” The formative period had featured again for Flory in a different ontology of imperial masculinity in the colonial contact-zone during his first few months at Burma with four other young Englishmen when:

They swilled whiskey which they privately hated, they stood round the piano bawling songs of inane filthiness and silliness, they squandered rupees by the hundred on aged Jewish whores with the faces of crocodiles. That too had been a formative period. (BD 65)

The two different phases of formative periods delineated here correspond to what Raymond Williams classifies as “negative identification” that constitutes an abduction of one’s “initial and formative social experience”<sup>44</sup> in favour of a new horizon of cultural and social hermeneutics. The formative phase in Burma had thus taught Flory the necessity of withholding private preference in order to superordinate cultural signifiers of the performances of imperial masculinity, a condition that is manifested by the nervous tensions embodied by Flory at various points in the narrative. The Jewish whores, with faces of crocodiles, embodied the stereotype of fallen degenerated human species in the imperial masculine imagination, embedded in highly racialized stereotypes. Flory’s sense of inferiority (due to the disfigurement caused by the birth-mark on his face) becomes a nervous condition and a neural reflex in the novel and seems to subscribe to the medical theory posited by Alfred Adler in his work on the inferiority complex. In the opening chapter of *The Neurotic Constitution*, Adler had studied the “relationship between somatic inferiority and psychic overcompensation” and offered “detailed description of organ-inferiority as the etiology of the neurosis”.<sup>45</sup> In his work, Adler analyses the compensation through the central nervous system sought by the subject subsumed by inferiority complex, leading on to the condition of psychogenesis.

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<sup>44</sup> Raymond Williams, *George Orwell* (Glasgow: Collins, 1971) 20.

<sup>45</sup> Alfred Adler, *The Neurotic Constitution: Outlines of a Comparative Individualistic Psychology and Psychotherapy*, trans. Bernard Glueck and John E. Lind (London: Routledge, 1999) 1.

A narrative that blends the medical and the political through a mode that locates culture as well as body under the hegemonic gaze that decides discourses, Orwell's *Burmese Days* emerges as a novel that contains the contingencies in the colonial contact-zone with its nervous masculinities. Indeed, Flory's discomfiting shame about his birthmark as well as his insight into the horrors of the empire are characterised by a nervous strain that becomes almost hysteric in its compulsive concealment and behaviour: "He was quite aware of its [the birthmark's] hideousness. And all times, when he was not alone, there was a sidelongness about his movements, as he manoeuvred to keep the birthmark out of sight" (*BD* 17). As a signifier of shame, the birthmark also stands for an 'Otherness' that Flory appears to be overdetermined by. It eventually contributes towards his failure as a lover as well as an imperial official in the imperial space. Martha Nussbaum's discursive analysis of shame is particularly pertinent here as a nervous manifestation of inferiority born out of visible physical aberration or cultural deviance. Thus Nussbaum argues:

People who look different from others—people with visible diseases or so-called deformities, the mentally or physically handicapped—wear their shame on their faces [. . .] When there is no visible brand, societies have been quick to inflict one, whether by tattooing or branding or by other visible signs of social ostracism or disapproval.<sup>46</sup>

Due to the degree of visible social shame that his birthmark carries and contains, Flory's facial manoeuvres also correspond to the compulsory neural rituals of concealment and evasion through which the shame is effaced. The medical as well as the social signifiers of shame are contained and corroborated by the facial expressions that Darwin believed to represent innate mental patterns.<sup>47</sup> Flory in *Burmese Days* embodies both forms of shaming and segregation analysed by Nussbaum, with the conspicuous marker of shame on his face through his crescent-shaped birthmark as well as his private hatred of the ideology of imperialism.

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<sup>46</sup>Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 174. The facial politics of shame is significant from its very origin as Elspeth Probyn informs, "Etymologically *shame* comes from the Goth word *Scham*, which refers to covering the face." Elspeth Probyn, "Writing Shame", *The Affect Theory Reader*, 72.

<sup>47</sup>In his 1872 work *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Darwin drew heavily on the analyses of the French physician Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne, who in 1862 had used photography and electrical stimulation to study facial expressions and how those corresponded to the various emotional states of the human self. Darwin had reportedly requested Duchenne to allow him to reproduce the photographs in his *Expressions of the Emotions*. See Randolph R. Cornelius, *The Science of Emotions: Research and Tradition in the Psychology of Emotions* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996) 28-32.

Indeed, his Bolshie-ness and birthmark appear together in the vocabulary of tirade used against Flory by the more ascertained imperialist Ellis:

“He’s a bit *too* Bolshie for my taste. I can’t bear a fellow who pals up with the natives. I shouldn’t wonder if he’s got a lick of the tarbrush himself. It might explain that black mark on his face. Piebald. And he looks like a yellow-belly, with that black hair, and skin the colour of a lemon.” (*BD* 34)

Thus discursive deviance and bodily degeneration appear and merge in the same rhetoric of rage and it is interesting to note how Ellis’s tirade moves swiftly from an ideological antagonism to bodily abhorrence, from intellectual aversion to visceral disgust that were rampant in the dominant late nineteenth-century cultural vocabulary, directed against figures who embodied such deviance, such as Oscar Wilde.

The possibility of piebald-ness that Flory carries with his birthmark (which, although actually blue, appears black under Ellis’s imperialist gaze) demarcates him from the normative mappings of the imperial homosocial space exemplified by the Englishman’s club. More significantly, and in keeping with the discourse of degeneration and denigration in the narratives of imperialism, Flory is equated with effeminacy and homosexuality through his association with the colonized males. This is a further corroboration of the possibility of degeneration that he seems to embody with his piebald skin and black birthmark before Ellis’s eyes who calls Flory “a nigger’s Nancy Boy.” The narrative describes the bodily and the ideological transitions by describing Flory’s disgust with the empire through the development of his brain:

For as his brain developed—you cannot stop your brain developing, and it is one of the tragedies of the half-educated that they develop late, when they are already committed to some wrong way of life—he had grasped the truth about the English and their Empire. (*BD* 68)

The development of the brain and the knowledge that comes with the process is both political and neural and the intersections between anthropology and neuroscience yield rich research into the human mind and how it makes meaning out of matter, how consciousness is informed by culture. This argument is augmented by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz who states that:

As our central nervous system – and most particularly its crowning curse and glory, the neocortex – grew up in great part in interaction with culture, it is incapable of directing our behaviour or organizing our experience without the guidance provided by the systems of significant symbols.<sup>48</sup>

Geertz's argument upholds the traffic between brain and external matter and analyses how the brain and the body are situated and informed by cultural systems and signifiers. Such a study shows how the self and its cultural location are positioned apropos of each other. Likewise, neuroscientists and psychiatrists have increasingly come to look at the cultural and anthropological determinants that emerge as “a complex interaction between biological and psychological and social sources of vulnerability”.<sup>49</sup>

Like Kurtz who discovers the horror of the truth about imperialism in *Heart of Darkness* only when his nerves go wrong, Flory attains the knowledge of the horror only with the transitions in his brain. The connection with *Heart of Darkness* as well as with *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949) is made more direct (albeit at an implicit level in *Burmese Days*) with the depiction of the horror of the one who is overdetermined by the power-paradigm that he must compulsively inscribe himself

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<sup>48</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 49. In his analysis of the epistemology of medical anthropology as a discursive discipline, Byron J. Good states how medicine and its welding with anthropology studies the often under-noticed political and economic conditions that govern the character of the health systems in any period. Likewise, the cognitive science that has informed medicine during the last four decades has also been critical of the consensual character of medicine that upholds absolutist knowledge over cultural difference and “focused largely on describing the ethnotheories or cultural models for emotions, psychological functioning, and illness in various societies.” *Good, Medicine, Rationality and Experience*, 50. The societal nature of neuroscience is of course immediately and powerfully voiced by scientists who increasingly argue that the interchange between the social and the biological is an essential component of the making of the human subject and must be factored into any analysis of the human brain. See Suparna Choudhury and Jan Slaby ed. *Critical Neuroscience: A Handbook of the Social and Cultural Contexts of Neuroscience* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). In this collection, the psychologist Shaun Gallagher asserts that experience entails at its most pragmatic level, the affective as well as the social forces that factor into the sentient subject's cultural milieu that can never be detached from modes of cognition and perception (90). This argument situates itself intellectually against the DNA-centric theory of Neo-Darwinism and looks at synaptic plasticity and epigenetics as modes through which the self is rendered unique and unmappable due to its interactions with the structures of stimuli around it. This debate will be taken up in greater details in the following chapter on McEwan's neuro-novel *Saturday* which pits different orders of masculinity and cultural locations against each other, with the backdrop of political unrest and the medical narratives of neuroscience.

<sup>49</sup> Arthur Kleinmann, *Rethinking Psychiatry: From Cultural Category to Personal Experience* (New York: The Free Press, 1988) 58.



into, through a combination of unarticulated hysteria and claustrophobia. This is amply evinced by the narrator's descriptions of the culture of colonial control:

It is a stifling, stultifying world in which to live. It is a world in which every word and every thought is censored. In England it is hard to imagine such an atmosphere. Everyone is free in England; we sell our souls in public and buy them back in private, among our friends. But even friendship can hardly exist when every white man is a cog in the wheels of despotism. Free speech is unthinkable. All other kinds of freedom are permitted. You are free to be a drunkard, an idler, a coward, a backbiter, a fornicator; but you are not free to think for yourself. Your opinion on every subject of any conceivable importance is dictated for you by the pukka sahib's code. (*BD* 69)

The absolute censorship on free speech and free thinking connects the condition immediately with *Nineteen Eighty Four*, with the totalitarian dystopia that punishes thought-crime. But *Burmese Days* goes a step further with its complex depiction of the dialectic of law and permissible lawlessness where the insider is also always an outsider who must consummate the compulsory performance of the *pukka sahib's* code. This is the nervous strain that comes with the compulsory perpetuation of the code manifested in Flory as well as in the Orwellian self in "Shooting an Elephant". More significantly, the location of the code is significant inasmuch as it is situated at an epistemic excess in relation to the personal will. This assumes a manner similar to the ontology of normative masculinity operative at a strategic remove from the human self that seeks to appropriate it. As the narrative informs, focalizing itself through the state and voice of Flory, "You are a creature of the despotism, a pukka sahib, tied tighter than a monk or a savage by an unbearable system of tabus" (*BD* 69). Thus the state of the colonized *native* which is described as a nervous condition by Sartre in his foreword to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*<sup>50</sup> receives its obverse on the other side of power in Orwell's novel even as it retains the essentialized and essentializing vocabulary of the imperialist self.

*Burmese Days* may be justly criticised for appropriating strategies of imperialist stereotyping and essentialism in its descriptions of "naked black coolies squabbling over the luggage" (*BD* 71), Burmese women as Dutch dolls and English-

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<sup>50</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, Preface, Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin Books, 1967) 18.

educated Indians as greasy *babus*.<sup>51</sup> Like *Heart of Darkness* which frequently appropriates a Lombrosian vocabulary, *Burmese Days* depicts the remnants of such rhetoric, in the essentializing imagination of the naïve Westerner located in the non-Western *terra incognita*. Thus Elizabeth asserts her revulsion on seeing the black bodies of the Burmese acrobats who induce disgust in her ingrained ideology of European physiognomic superiority:

But they have such hideous-shaped heads! Their skulls kind of slope up behind like a tom-cat's. And then the way their foreheads slant back—it makes them look so *wicked*. I remember reading something in a magazine about the shape of people's heads; it said that a person with a sloping forehead is a *criminal type*. (*BD* 118-19) (my italics)

The sloping forehead as a physiognomic signifier of criminal propensities as classified by the criminology of Lombroso continued to exist in the common Western public discourse of disgust<sup>52</sup> well into the twentieth century. Elizabeth with her European past of Parisian life of white wine and arty cafes subscribes to such discourses of difference. But it is precisely due to its political incorrectness that *Burmese Days*, like *Heart of Darkness*, stands out as a complex text that resists closure even as its narrative moves towards a conventional finale.

Flory emerges in *Burmese Days* as an ambivalent outsider to the code in a manner which acts as the converse to the fearful 'Otherness' that Kurtz comes to embody in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Both their states are eventually connected by a discourse (more immediately ostensible in Conrad's novel) as well as a

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<sup>51</sup> One can take up Edward Said's analysis of the politics of representation here and assess how anthropology offers representation as a political choice that also constitutes the local and the personal with the inference that "anthropological representations bear as much on the representer's world as on who or what is represented." Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors", *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989): 224. Interestingly enough, in a different yet related work, Said looks at Conrad and analyses *Heart of Darkness* as a classic instance of a text that houses the tensions between real political presence and the desire to escape from it. This reading that can be extended to Orwell's *Burmese Days* and accounts for the ambivalence through which it enacts its critique of imperialism while essentially retaining its racist vocabulary. Said, *Freud and the Non-European*, 26.

<sup>52</sup> The discourse of disgust was almost always embedded in racial and anthropological dimensions and Darwin's analysis of disgust at the sight of cold cooked meat at Tierra del Fuego interestingly effaces the presence of the "naked savage" who touches it. The disgust that Darwin experiences and analyses, although appearing to focus on "the strong association in our minds between the sight of food, however circumstanced, and the idea of eating it", is actually accentuated by the body presence of racial and anthropological otherness. Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965) 256-57.

degeneration of nerves. Thus while Flory's failure is a result of his inadequate appropriation of the masculinist vocabulary specially coded for the colonial contact-zone, Kurtz's decline and eventual demise stem from his over-appropriation and over-internalization of the same code. Relevant in both narratives are the issues of location and agency that correspond to the external environment that in-forms and re-forms the constitution of the self. The significance of the surrounding as conditioning the making and unmaking of the self is vividly described in Orwell's novel. Flory's continuous and compulsive envisioning of the perfect future in terms of escaping the corruption of the colonial contact-zone and settling down with a "civilised girl, not a pukka memsahib" is evocative in its escapist zeal and romanticized fecundity:

They would buy a cottage in the country, surround themselves with friends, books, their children, animals. They would be free for ever of the smell of pukka sahibdom. He would forget Burma, the horrible country that had come near ruining him. (*BD* 70-71)

The passage constructs not only a utopian cosmos that would never be realized (like Jimmy Porter's political ideal in *Look Back In Anger* that never existed), it also connects, at a more medical level, to one of the traits taken up by Adler, in his study of the neurotic character subsumed by an inferiority complex. In his analysis, Adler argues:

The gaze of the neurotic, on account of this feeling of uncertainty, is directed far into the future. All present experience to him is a preparation. Moreover, this circumstance is largely responsible for encouraging his dreaming proclivities and estranging him from the world of reality.<sup>53</sup>

Emerging increasingly in the narrative as an embodiment of nervous masculinity in the colonial contact-zone, Flory is also characterised by an inferiority complex that exists in the same plane of shame with the discourses of degeneration and effeminacy in a culture that necessitated compulsory and compulsive performance of imperial masculinity and its ideal body.

With his private ideology of self-disgust and hatred of empire, Flory comes to embody a secrecy that is variously manifested in his clandestine visits to Dr

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<sup>53</sup> Adler, *The Neurotic Constitution*, 11.

Veraswami for intellectual comfort and his sexual relationships with colonial women, both prohibited by the parameters of the colonizer's law. Like the ivory in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the timber in Orwell's *Burmese Days* emerges as a signifier of the exploitative potential of imperialism driven by a masculinist economy constituting hunting expeditions, horse riding and excesses of drinking. As Flory's attempts to escape Burma are frustrated by the sudden death of three men in his firm due to blackwater fever and he is forced to return to his old quarter in Burma, he experiences a sudden and sad insight that transforms him internally. On seeing his Indian servants busy in their usual chores and on being greeted by the same people in a manner akin to the homecoming of a hero, Flory realizes the certainty of his location in colonial Burma and the futility of escaping from the same, a certainty that is also perceived as decadence. The passage, despite its realist frame, is couched in a vocabulary not unlike that of the high-Modernist epiphany:

Something turned over in Flory's heart. It was one of those moments when one becomes conscious of a vast change and deterioration in one's life. For he had realised, suddenly, that in his heart he was glad to be coming back. This country which he hated was now his native country, his home. He had lived here ten years, and every particle of his body was compounded of Burmese soil. Scenes like these—the sallow evening light, the old Indian cropping grass, the creak of the cartwheels [. . .] were more native to him than England. He had sent deep roots, perhaps his deepest, into a foreign country. (*BD* 71-72)

The thought processes of Flory here extend into the existentialist realm. The phenomenological revelation of his location in the colonial contact-zone appears as an epistemic moment of change that is internal and private while being directly informed by the external and the material environment. It is a moment that perhaps connects Flory most closely to Orwell himself who himself was born in Motihari in Bengal near the Nepal border and had difficulties situating the ontology of *nativeness* throughout his life, appearing alternately as an uncomfortable outsider to the class-conscious patriotism in Britain as well as an over-essentialized Englishman. More significantly, the figure of Flory appears as characterized by a political determinism (one that makes him painfully aware of his externality to his coveted pure-British space) that fixates him like his bodily birthmark. As Keith Alldritt contends in an analysis of the passage describing Flory's recognition of his location, "If Burma has set its marks on Flory, so also has heredity; though Orwell's use of

this element of naturalistic doctrine is such that it has symbolic force rather than meaning in straightforwardly genetic and physiological terms.”<sup>54</sup> But although couched in symbolic and cultural terms, the nervous and genetic determinism that is used to characterise Flory in *Burmese Days* is never lost sight of, as is his birthmark that continues to stay as a signifier of ineradicable shame.

The association of shame with a mark of bodily aberration, and the inscription of inferiority related to the same, dramatize the complex discourse of difference in *Burmese Days*. The homosocial white masculinist space of the English Club in Kyauktada is continually threatened in the novel not only by external entities (the election of an Indian as a member of the club and the mob of angry Burmese who gather to attack Ellis) but also by the presence of the uncomfortable Eurasians who notionally belong to the breed of the colonizers. The Eurasians who appear in *Burmese Days* embody the problematic state of in-between-ness that induces disgust in the Europeans in the colonies, precisely as a bodily reminder of sexual and racial degeneration. The Eurasians Francis and Samuel who approach Elizabeth and Flory before they enter the club come to represent the degenerate types in Elizabeth’s imagination, with their impure skin and inadequate European-ness. Elizabeth’s enquires to Flory carry the rhetoric that classified criminology and degeneration from late nineteenth-century discourses of racialized pseudo-science:

“They looked awfully degenerate types, didn’t they? So thin and weedy and cringing; and they haven’t got at all honest faces. I suppose these Eurasians are very degenerate? I’ve heard that half-castes always inherit what’s worst in both races. Is that true?” (*BD* 123)

With her earlier assumptions about the inherent criminal propensities of the Burmese men based on the physiognomic feature of their forehead, and with her revulsion on seeing the half-breed Eurasians as degenerates, Elizabeth comes to voice the vocabulary of bio-political panic that grew out of the popular fin de siècle European imagination with its obsession with hygiene, racial and bodily order. This was historically manifested perhaps most infamously in the Anti-Semitism that grew out

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<sup>54</sup> Keith Alldritt, *The Making of George Orwell: An Essay In Literary History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969) 22.

of the Nazi regime.<sup>55</sup> Thus the collective abhorrence towards the Eurasians Francis and Samuel (who ironically exemplify the progeny of English fathers who were clergymen in holy orders) constitutes and corroborates the condition which sees racial mixing as a threat to haematological purity. The progeny of such racial/sexual transgression are characterised by the determinism that informs the retribution of the act, as the Eurasians are termed “yellow-bellies” (a term used, interestingly enough, by Ellis in his attack against Flory’s perceived proximity to the colonized natives) by the British at the colonies and are considered absolute outcasts.

In her work on the politics of disgust, Martha Nussbaum underlines the difference between disgust and anger “in that its [disgust’s] thought-content is typically unreasonable, embodying magical ideas of contamination, and impossible aspirations to purity, immortality and nonanimality.” More significantly, as Nussbaum goes on to contend, “disgust has been used throughout history to exclude and marginalize groups who come to embody the dominant group’s fear and loathing of its own animality and mortality.”<sup>56</sup> The discursive binary that disgust constructs, works by exclusion and segregation, with a structure of sentiments that informs xenophobic and political presuppositions. Thus disgust operates viscerally by drawing attention to and appearing as a repulsive reminder of the messy corporeality of the body as opposed to the perfect functional frame advocated by the logic of imperialist control. With its threat of contamination and pathological possibilities, disgust often emerges as a nervous and unconditioned reflex-response to the non-

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<sup>55</sup> Thus the Jewish whores in *Burmese Days* carry a bio-political implication of degeneration. It is interesting at this point to note the vocabulary that Orwell himself had used while describing anti-Semitism in England. Orwell’s analyses of the cultural conditions of his times include a reading of the rhetoric of political and racial reductionism. In the essay “Anti-Semitism in Britain”, for instance, Orwell investigates the structure of the sentiment that informed anti-Semitism, offering literary, cultural and anecdotal accounts while expounding what he considered to be the discursive difference between anti-Semitism and the localized dislike of Jews. Describing anti-Semitism as a “neurosis [. . . that . . .] has its rationalizations, which are sincerely believed in and are partly true” (CE 311), Orwell invites an investigation that begins from the self supposedly immune from similar proclivities. The presence of anti-Semitism as a medical condition is reiterated towards the end of the essay as Orwell asserts: “The point is that something, some psychological vitamin, is lacking in modern civilization, and as a result we are all more or less subject to this lunacy of believing that whole races or nations are mysteriously good or mysteriously evil” (CE 314).

<sup>56</sup>Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 75.

normative entity and event.<sup>57</sup> The embodiments of degeneration in *Burmese Days* appear in the form of the mixed-breed Eurasians who, with their bodily markers of racial miscegenation, emerge as a shameful and almost pathologized presence before Elizabeth who, with her interpellated ideas of racial purity, is overwhelmed by revulsion. Such revulsion becomes bewilderment on seeing Flory converse easily with the degenerates and revealing the Eurasians' financial dependence on the natives' charity.

Flory's connection with the degenerates is not just constituted by his shameful birthmark but also by his deviance from the normative imperial ethic in *Burmese Days*. Thus, as he explains to Elizabeth:

“Oh well, I break the rules occasionally. I meant that a pukka sahib probably wouldn't be seen talking to them [the Eurasians]. But you see, I try—just sometimes, when I have the pluck—not to be a pukka sahib.” (*BD* 124)

The discursive domains of the words *pukka* and *pluck* are significant in the context of the passage. The word *pukka* had entered English vocabulary from the colonial contact-zone in India and its corresponding linguistic traffic. In common Hindi parlance, the word *pukka* means cemented, strongly ascertained and ascertainable. Most commonly associated with the vocabulary of construction (of building and walls), *pukka* carried a sense of inherent strength against external attacks as well as internal weaknesses. Thus crucially, *pukka* signified the consummated process of

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<sup>57</sup> It is interesting to do a comparative analysis, in the light of Nussbaum's arguments on the politics of disgust where she studies the religious and racial disgust that was exacerbated between the Indian Hindus and Muslims during the Gujarat riots of 2002, between the disgust towards racial degeneration in turn-of-the-century European imagination and that towards the communities of *hijras* (the colloquial umbrella Urdu word for eunuch and hermaphrodites and all other non-normative modes of sexuality) in contemporary India. Both emerge as disturbing reminders of what is commonly conceived by the dominant discursive imagination as pathologized excesses of the body that carry the physical signifiers of shame. The Indian eunuchs caused disgust and revulsion to the contemporary British colonial officers. Thus James Forbes, a British trader in eighteenth century India, examined the hermaphrodites employed as cooks in the Maratha army regiments and described them as “the objects disgusting.” See Laurence W. Preston, “A Right to Exist: Eunuch and the State in Nineteenth-Century India”, *Modern Asian Studies* 21 (May 1987): 371-87; 377. Serena Nanda argues in her persuasive analysis that the special location that the hijras inhabit, operate outside the normative binaries of the male-female and constitutes the third space in the map of gender. See Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1990). But it can also be argued that, in the vocabulary of public discourses in India, hijras are tragically relegated to a position that is largely an embodiment of bodily shame that evokes visceral disgust with their male voices and female breasts. Like the degenerates in the European colonial contact-zones, the hijras are largely located outside the protective penal and medical code of the dominant discourses and appear as disturbing bodily reminders of the code gone wrong. See Zia Jaffrey, *The Invisibles: A Tale of the Eunuchs of India* (New York: Pantheon, 1996).

construction that incorporates integration of disparate entities and clinical closure, leading on to a final seamless product with no visible loose ends.

It is interesting to read the usage of this metaphor for construction in the vocabulary of colonial masculinity, a discourse that was as characterised by integrated incorporations and closure as the construction of roads and dams. Apart from exhibiting the constructed quality of imperial masculinity, *pukka* also carried a sense of immediacy and integration characterising a code constituted by domination, difference and deification.<sup>58</sup> The word can also be read as a throwback on the machineries of masculinity in English schools and scout movements that operated along similar constructions of strength and splendour in a cultural climate where “manhood was an artificial product coaxed by austere training and testing.”<sup>59</sup> Essentially appropriating the vocabulary of road construction, *pukka* thus signified a model of masculinity that would leave no loose ends of its construction process and could thus immediately inform and perpetuate the ontology of privilege. The seamlessness of the epistemology of imperial masculinity as exhibited in the colonial contact-zone can be seen as an instance of what Shannon Sullivan classifies as the surreptitious workings of white privilege that operates precisely where it appears not to operate and is most functional precisely where it appears invisible. The ideologies of racial supremacy, as Sullivan asserts, “function as if not-existent and actively thwart conscious attempt to pinpoint their existence. This unconscious, invisible mode of operation is what enables white privileged habits to be increasingly effective and pervasive.”<sup>60</sup> Likewise the grammar of being the *pukka sahib* worked best when it concealed its constructed epistemologies and instead appeared as an expansive ontology of innate and unquestionable supremacy.

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<sup>58</sup> An episode in Eliza Pollard’s *White Dove of Amritsir* depicts the desire of Sikh colonizers to worship the English colonial officer John Nicolson, a gesture that infuriates the officer embodying the masculinist mode of muscular Christianity. Nicolson orders that Kasan Singh, the head of the Sikh group, be subjected to three dozen lashes, an act which further corroborates the godliness of the Englishman in the Indian imagination. The story is a good example of how the stereotypes of *pukka sahib* masculinity were internalized and circulated across the colonial homosocial spaces through bestselling works of fiction. Eliza Pollard, *The White Dove of Amritsir* (London: Partridge, 1900) 168.

<sup>59</sup> David Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990) 18.

<sup>60</sup> Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness*, 187.



The irony that is dramatized in Orwell's *Burmese Days* constitutes the knowledge of the fact that the cemented strength that informs the *pukka* construct of the empire is essentially reliant on alcoholism and mendacity. As Flory asserts this to the non-believing Indian doctor Veraswami who embodies absolute loyalty to the empire:

“It’s a tradition to booze together and swap meals and pretend to be friends, though we hate each other like poison. [. . .] It’s a political necessity. Of course drink is what keeps the machine going. We should all go mad and kill one another in a week if it weren’t for that. There’s a subject for one of your uplift essayists, doctor. Booze as the cement of empire.” (*BD* 38-39)

Stimulation and its corresponding simulation inform imperialism and its discontents in Flory's mind and the complexity of *Burmese Days* is enhanced by the dramatizing of the private interrogations of the ideology as well by the showcasing of the eventual failure of such attempts. Thus the pluck *not* to be *pukka* enacts the private deconstruction of the discursive vocabulary that Flory seeks to subvert through his ambivalence, if only occasionally. The word pluck is almost always associated with masculine machismo and one remembers the boss in Mansfield's "The Fly" who thought admiringly of the struggling fly as a "plucky little devil" with just the right attitude to handle crises.<sup>61</sup> The culture associated with the word corresponded closely to the normative masculinity engineered out of Boy Scouts and public schools with its stoic indifference to feminine sentimentality and physical bravado (attributes embodied extremely and perfectly by Verrall in *Burmese Days* whose comradeship with his horses is stronger than his emotional bonds with any human beings in the novel). But in the context in which Flory uses it before Elizabeth, it required real pluck to break the discourse of pluckiness that informed normative masculinity in the colonial contact-zone, a pluckiness that emerges only as a sporadic sentiment and an eventually ineffectual attribute in the nervous narrators in Orwell's narratives about colonial Burma.

Unsurprisingly, Elizabeth, who embodies the essentialized European-ness in the colonial contact-zone, appropriates and largely worships the model of imperial masculinity that thrives in hunting, shooting and exhibiting normative masculine

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<sup>61</sup> Mansfield, "The Fly", 532.

machismo. Thus when Flory describes his hunting adventures, her immediate interest incorporates a nervous unconditioned reflex-response:

Elizabeth wriggled her shoulder-blades against the chair. It was a movement that she made sometimes when she was deeply pleased. She loved Flory, really loved him, when he talked like this. The most trivial scrap of information about shooting thrilled her. If only he would always talk about shooting, instead of about books and Art and that mucky poetry! In a sudden burst of admiration she decided that Flory was really quite a handsome man, in his way. [. . .] He was standing with his birth-marked cheek away from her. She pressed him to go on talking. (*BD* 161-62)

The passage is remarkable in the manner in which it incorporates the nervous behaviour of the two individuals: Elizabeth's wriggling emerging as an almost unconditioned neural reaction that manifests her (possibly sexual) excitement, and Flory's manoeuvre of hiding away his birthmark at the moment of high-affirmation as a conditioned nervous reflex ingrained into his system with time. Both Elizabeth as well as Flory exhibit what Horacio Fabrega classifies as the motor behaviour of human nerves, a term that is used "to denote patterns of muscular responses which are viewed in psychological terms."<sup>62</sup>

Fabrega's enquiry on the neural behaviour of a particular human being exposed to a unique environment as breaking off from the original genetic narrative is particularly significant in the case of Flory in *Burmese Days* whose sense of shame with his birthmark and the corresponding nervous behaviour may be seen particularly accentuated by the cultural code of the colonial contact-zone that operates with the notional binaries of masculine/feminine, white/black, civilized/uncivilized, and, most significantly, powerful/powerless. Thus while his birthmark stands as a signifier of genetic determinism, Flory's continuous and almost unconditioned manoeuvre to conceal the same during moments of assertion emerges as nervous reflex naturalized by habit. Struggling to inscribe himself into

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<sup>62</sup>Horacio Fabrega, "Culture, Behaviour and the Nervous System", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6. (1977): 419-55; 443. In his interesting article on the correlation of the human nervous behaviour and the coefficients of culture, Fabrega enquires whether observed group differences are genetically wired in the individual or do they grow out of an adaptive ability to respond to the unique structure of stimuli that a specific environment sends to the self, an enquiry that connects to later works on synaptic plasticity in neuroscience and its correlates in literary narratives, a study that will be taken up in the concluding part of this thesis.

the colonial masculinist code, Flory keeps looking back at Britain as a special space where freedom of thoughts and speech runs undeterred in his imagination, thus assuming a gaze that is both essentializing as well as nostalgic. More interestingly, the masculinity of Flory emerges before the imagination of Elizabeth as metonymically constructed by the hunting narrative that operates in all effect as a strategy of seduction.

As John Mackenzie asserts in his analysis of imperial masculinity and hunting narratives, with the turn of the twentieth century, hunting shifted from a mode of survival and preservation to an imperial masculinist ritual that increasingly reified its class and cultural codes. By the 1920s more and more women were participating in the hunting process and partaking of its elite vocabulary.<sup>63</sup> Flory's interest in books, art and poetry are an anathema to the normative masculinity Elizabeth subscribes to and allows herself to be seduced by. Flory's subsequent and almost reluctant shift to a more normative masculinist code in order to impress Elizabeth is premised on a strategy of seduction. In it, Flory performs imperial masculinity with his hunting trips with Elizabeth as well with his anecdotes about personal hunting machismo exhibited earlier:

Flory told it all perfunctorily enough—did not the proverbial Anglo-Indian bore always talk about tiger-shooting?—but Elizabeth wriggled her shoulders delightedly once more. He did not realize how such talk as this reassured her and made up for all the times when he had bored her and disquieted her. (*BD* 162)

The recurrence of the word “bore” is significant in the passage as it relates to two mutually contradictory epistemologies of boredom that are politically located as well as gendered. The first arises from the ritual repetition of the masculinist narrative to a male audience already always expected to perform it. The second mode of boredom is perceived by a female interlocutor freshly introduced to the machinery of

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<sup>63</sup>John Mackenzie, “The Imperial Pioneer and hunter and the British masculine stereotype in late Victorian and Edwardian times”, *Manliness and Morality*, 176-98.

imperialism and eager to consume its normative narratives. Elizabeth's boredom thus results when she is denied the typical masculinist narratives of imperial heroism.<sup>64</sup>

As Nalin Jayasena argues, Flory "realizes too well the role he is expected to play, but he fails to disavow this peculiarly imperial invention for fear of disappointing Elizabeth."<sup>65</sup> The discursive correlation between "Shooting an Elephant" and *Burmese Days* situates Elizabeth as well as the Burmese natives in similar planes as consumers of the white man's machismo. Flory's hesitation and private deconstruction of the ideology of imperialism characterise him in a similar manner as his reluctance to perform the normative imperial masculinity, and highlight his eventual failure to retain the prerogatives of his private self. Thus Flory's betrayal of Veraswami emerges as discursively similar to his betrayal of his private conscience in favour of a forced appropriation of the ethic of heroic masculinity before Elizabeth. Flory's attempts to appropriate stereotypical imperial masculinity results in a spectacular and pathetic failure as he embarks on tent-pegging after Verrall in a bid to impress the approaching Elizabeth.

Unsurprisingly, the libidinal and masculinist economy in the narrative of *Burmese Days* is reconfigured dramatically with the arrival of the military officer Verrall who with his "aura of horsemanship and soldiering" seduces Elizabeth immediately as the latter sees in Verrall "the splendid panache of a cavalryman's life" (*BD* 214). As the narrative informs the reader, Flory is reduced in Elizabeth's imagination at this point only to his birthmark and her bond with Verrall is exacerbated by their mutual hatred for highbrow culture. In effect, Verrall embodies in the novel the hard-core military masculinity that had emerged out of the Boy Scouts and public school and his extravagant callousness towards people as well as property is a complex combination of abstinence and indulgence. Seen in a more

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<sup>64</sup> In her naive consumption of narratives of imperial heroism, Elizabeth may be compared with Kurtz's Intended in *Heart of Darkness* who would only receive a report on Kurtz that is overly couched in romanticized masculine glory. Both Elizabeth and Kurtz's Intended appear as perfect performers in the established economy of eulogy and mourning in the imperialist narrative. Likewise, both Marlow and Flory appear as discomfited agents of imperialism who must forego their human ambivalence and agency and perpetuate the politics of pseudo-glory in the imperial space. The burden of masculinity experienced by Marlow and Flory thus appears as an overarching construct that consume their independent intentionality and free-will. In depicting the schism between the human subject and the imperial agent, Marlow and Flory depict the painful ambivalence that may never be respectfully articulated. This constriction of will and agency directly informs their public cynicism and moments of private hysteria.

<sup>65</sup> Jayasena, *Contested Masculinities*, 136.

epistemological light, Verrall embodied the stereotype of the sporting boy as extolled by the *Empire Annual for Boys* at the turn of the twentieth century. Thus, the first volume of the *Empire Annual* in 1909 contained a celebration of the sporting masculinity that was put in the same pedestal as nationalist triumph:

The bond of sport is one of the strongest and most far-reaching in the British race. [. . . ] accepted as almost the hallmark of uprightness. ‘To play the game’ is constantly quoted as the supreme standard of excellence.<sup>66</sup>

Crucially, Verrall’s brand of masculinity is characterised not just by the perfect nervous and muscular condition advocated by the boys’ manuals – “He exercised himself ceaselessly and brutally, rationed his drink and his cigarettes, slept on a camp bed (in silk pyjamas) and bathed in cold water in the bitterest winter” (*BD* 203) – but also by manipulative and excessive egotism: “Up and down India wherever he was stationed, he left behind him a trail of insulted people, neglected duties and unpaid bills” (*BD* 203).

The perfect comfort and command that Verrall managed to achieve and enjoy in the colonial space is based on his perfect appropriation of the dominant and desirable code of imperial military masculinity, its associated heroism and non-emotional constitution. In effect, Verrall embodies in *Burmese Days* the perfect clinical and almost automatically functioning body that Nussbaum studies as the desirable construct of imperial and xenophobic masculinity that saw fluidity and messy mutability of the body as filthy and subversive signifiers associated with women and racial ‘Others’.<sup>67</sup> Verrall’s easy and almost constant disgust with all around him, including the other Europeans in the colony, stems from his knowledge of his own bodily and masculine superiority over others and differs discursively from the uneasy and self-loathing disgust that Flory carries within him with the existentialist knowledge of the horror and hollowness of the ideology he is forced to embody. Thus Verrall’s interest in Elizabeth is purely bodily and erotic without any personal emotional attachment:

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<sup>66</sup> J.E.K. Studd, “Foreword”, *Empire Annual for Boys*. Quoted in Kanitkar, 187.

<sup>67</sup> Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 111-12.

He had no intention of mixing himself up with all the petty *sahiblog* of the district. He knew the society of those small Burma stations—a nasty, poodle-faking, horseless riffraff. He despised them. (*BD* 202)

The politics of disgust that Flory and Verrall embody with their strands of masculinity differ dramatically and constitutionally and although Flory emerges as the real hero (he rescues the Europeans from the mob attack of the Burmese by swimming to the nearest police station whereas Verrall was nowhere to be seen) while Verrall simply the model of one, even Flory is intimidated in his anxiety to appropriate the model that Verrall so elegantly embodies with his showy horsemanship and military demeanour.

In effect, Flory emerges as a pathetic mimic man trying to incorporate the hegemonic discourse of masculinity and it is here that Orwell's novel becomes most political, in its depiction of the stratified realms of power and difference even within the seemingly homogenous hermeneutics of colonizers' laws. Flory's failure to be sufficiently masculine before Elizabeth thus emerges as pathetic as Veraswami's inability to speak English except in stilted phrases and his ultimate failure in becoming a member of the Europeans' Club in Kyauktada. The tension between Flory and Verrall around Elizabeth thus emerges as the dialectic between real human emotions and mimetic masculinity with the latter overshadowing and overwhelming the former in the discursive space of the imperial Europeans in Burma with its pre-set codes of conduct. Flory's life thus emerges as well as ends with his anxiety and inability to be sufficiently mimetic, what with his discomfited dislocation from the imperial ideology in the colonial contact-zone or with his attempted and failed representation of the model masculinity that would seduce Elizabeth. The failure to be appropriately and adequately mimetic is corroborated by political as well nervous conditions in a cultural climate where "When one does get credit in this life, it is usually for something that one has not done" (*BD* 85).

Ironically as well as appropriately, what finishes Flory ultimately and makes him an immediate and permanent *pariah* in the colonizers' community in Kyauktada is a mimetic act of hysteria that is strategically performed by his former Burmese mistress Ma Hla May. She makes a spectacle of Flory's shame (as instructed by the Machiavellian gangster U Po Kyin who seeks to destroy Flory in order to destroy

Veraswami) during “the six-weekly church service [that] was the great social event of their [the Englishmen in Burma] lives” (*BD* 269). Barging into the service, Ma Hla May performs the spectacular and stereotypical act of female hysteria that is immediately intimidating yet credible in its disconcerting as well as familiar excesses, as she demands the money Flory had supposedly promised her for her sexual services:

She was screaming like a maniac. The people gaped at her too astounded to move or speak. Her face was grey with powder, her greasy hair was tumbling down, her *longyi* was ragged at the bottom, she looked like a screaming hag of the bazaar. Flory’s bowels seemed to have turned to ice. [. . .] The wretched woman was yelling out a detailed account of what Flory had done to her. (*BD* 273)

The hysteric intrusion into the church service enacted by Ma Hla is as performative as the elegant mourning enacted by Kurtz’s innocent European fiancé in the domestic space in *Heart of Darkness*. Both episodes arrest the males – Marlow and Flory – in a state of real repression due to their inability to explicate or articulate agency in the rigid imperial narrative where masculinity is reified through structures of shame and glory. With her carefully engineered hysteric appearance – her powdered face and greased hair – and dramatic disruption of the sacred social space of the white colonizer, Ma Hla manages to induce the intended disgust and visceral shudder that shocks with its sudden violation of social normalcy.<sup>68</sup>

The pseudo-hysteric mimetic act that is politically strategized as well as bodily performed emerges immediately as the obverse of the private unarticulated nervousness of Flory who sits “staring fixedly at the altar, his face so rigid and so bloodless that the birthmark seemed to glow upon it like a streak of blue paint” (*BD* 274). The episode is significant in a number of aspects, apart from depicting the obvious dramatic contrast between sanctioned spectacular female hysteria and forbidden masculine nervousness, strategic mimesis and failed appropriation. On a

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<sup>68</sup> The politics of disgust in operation here may be compared again to the ritual of disruption performed by the Indian *hijras* in social ceremonies such as child-births and heterosexual normative marriages. As Serena Nanda affirms, the hijra song and dances during marriages include “improvised verses making fun of the groom and his family, suggesting perhaps that the groom was born out of wedlock or casting aspersions on the family’s social rank and pretensions to high status.” Targeting especially the groom’s side, the hijra songs and dances during marriages enact a “ritual of reversal” given that most Indian weddings presume the higher status of the groom’s side during marriage. Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman*, 4-5.

more discursive level, the episode also dramatizes the blurring borderlines between the notionally powerful and powerless in *Burmese Days*. Thus the scheming Burmese gangster U Po Kyin wields absolute control by pitting the doubly marginalized Burmese woman against the British imperial officer in a deliberate drama of disgust that can transcend the codes of notional imperial hierarchy. The episode also highlights the difference in mimetic performances that characterises Flory and Ma Hla, between the latter's successful appropriation of spectacular feminine hysteria and the former's failed mimesis of the white man's masculinity in the colonies. Crucially, what emasculates Flory socially and casts him out of the white community in Kyauktada is not the illegality of his action but the disgust born of it, a disgust that is operative outside the notional parameters of imperial law. This disgust is focalized through the physiognomy of Flory that appears in the eyes of Elizabeth as an objective correlative of ugliness:

She had not understood a word of what Ma Hla was saying, but the meaning of the scene was perfectly clear. The thought that he had been the lover of that grey-faced, maniacal creature made her shudder in her bones. But worse than that, worse than anything was his ugliness at this moment. His face appalled her, it was so ghastly, rigid and old. It was like a skull. Only the birthmark seemed alive in it. She hated him now for his birthmark. She had never known till this moment how dishonouring, how unforgivable a thing it was. (*BD* 274)

The vocabulary of hysteria that Ma Hla performs through her body requires no narrative in the form of understandable language to signify the scandal it seeks to communicate. The signifiers through which Flory's ugliness travel to Elizabeth are his skull and his birthmark, both carrying pseudo-scientific suggestions of degeneration and disgust in the imperial European imagination in early twentieth century. The animated birthmark flickers with Flory's shame and disfigures him permanently in Elizabeth's eyes after Ma Hla's hysteric act. The theme of genetic determination is returned to here and as the narrative informs the reader, "It was, finally, the birthmark that had damned him" (*BD* 278).

The mark that had informed Flory's inferiority complex all his life suddenly and permanently deforms and decimates him as he realizes the impossibility of attaining the mythical piano in his imagined landscape of an ideal future. The final



moment of rupture is narrated in a vocabulary that is symbolic in a high-Modernist manner:

Like a hallucination, painfully clear, he saw again their home as he had imagined it, he saw their garden, and Elizabeth feeding Nero and the pigeons on the drive [. . .] and the bookshelves, and the black piano. The impossible, mythical piano—symbol of everything that that futile accident had wrecked! “You should have a piano,” he said despairingly. “I don’t play the piano.”  
He let her go. It was no use continuing. (*BD* 278)

The mythical piano in Flory’s oneiric landscape beams up as a final reminder of his hopeless vision and its destruction.<sup>69</sup> As the narrative hurries towards closure with Flory’s suicide and Elizabeth’s consolidated conversion into being a *burra memsahib* (dominating and intimidating white woman) through her marriage to Mr. Macgregor, *Burmese Days* reveals the rewards of adherence to the imperial code of the white man in the colonies and the retribution for deviance from the same. Flory’s death is as un-heroic as his life had been and he perpetuates his failure to inscribe himself into the masculinist discourse through his suicide. The marker of shame that had characterised Flory disappears with his death – “With death, the birthmark had faded immediately, so that it was no more than a faint grey stain” (*BD* 282) – and his posthumous ignominy is partially resisted by the doctor Veraswami who spuriously certifies that Flory had died accidentally while cleaning his revolver.

While Marlowe’s spurious report of Kurtz’s death in *Heart of Darkness* retains him as a romantic masculinist hero in the European imagination within the European space, Flory’s death is too direct not to be derided in the real colonial contact-zone where imperialism as a masculinist misadventure emerges as “not a pretty thing when you look into it too much” (*HD* 10). Thus his failure to mime the desirable discourse of masculinity haunts Flory even after his death as he is reduced to a local legend and a signifier of shame, a “dark chap with a birthmark” a “bloody

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<sup>69</sup> Again, one can interestingly compare Flory’s vision to Prufrock’s continual escapes into oneiric landscapes from the failures to frame himself in the map of the real. Like Prufrock, who cannot conceal his masculinist inadequacies despite his coded dress of neckties and pins, Flory succumbs finally to the shame of not being sahib enough in the colonial contact-zone. The mermaids in Prufrock’s dream who do not sing to him dissolve away eventually and his final waking up carries also the connotations of death on having been found out with his inadequacies, an act that is clinically consummated by Flory in *Burmese Days*. The analogy with Jimmy Porter in Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*, who constructs his future with his childless wife Alison in the form of toy bears and squirrels, also invites analysis.

fool” who shot himself in Kyauktada in 1926 over a girl” (*BD* 283). Although his physical birthmark had disappeared with his bodily death, Flory’s shame continues to circulate among the Anglo-Indians and colonial officers in Burma in their drunken discourses in homosocial spaces. Orwell’s *Burmese Days* is a novel, like Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, about the contingencies of power, performance and privilege that characterise as well as problematize the self in the colonial contact-zone, the political space where the machinery of imperialism operates with perfectly reducible and replaceable human beings. If Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* becomes a threat to the machinery of imperialism due to his over-identification with the imperial economy of power and privilege, Flory in *Burmese Days* dramatizes the discomfort due to his insufficient-identification with the same system. More significantly, like *Heart of Darkness*, Orwell’s narrative is about the nervousness at the heart of the empire and the dialectic between private hesitation and public performance within the epistemological frame of existentialist awakening.

As the background to this chapter sought to illustrate, masculinity as a construct of nerves and narratives emerged less as a homogenous structure of suppositions and more “as a historical phenomenon that responded to the economic, political, and cultural shifts in the imperial social formation in the late nineteenth century.”<sup>70</sup> Although ostensibly less medical than Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, texts that carry direct bearings with the bio-politics of their day, *Burmese Days* exhibits medico-cultural myths on degeneration, criminology and inferiority in a more racialized space of epistemic exchange, despite its flawed narrative space where the subaltern never speaks except as a stereotype. Thus Elleke Boehmer argues:

*Burmese Days* is distinguished from earlier colonial writing by its knowingness—its anti-adventure cynicism, its penetrating insights into the less than honourable mechanisms of empire. Flory the anti-hero, the little man of modernism transplanted to the colonial town, bears the painful self-consciousness of one aware of imperial wrong-doing yet impotent against it.<sup>71</sup>

The knowledge of ambivalence that Flory carries without articulation marks him as a uniquely dislocated figure who informs the narrative about nervous conditions in the

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<sup>70</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, 184.

<sup>71</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, 155.

imperialist space. More significantly, ironically located in a notional position of power, Flory illustrates with his failure the curious and complex convergence of structured forms of privilege – medical, cultural and political – and their strategic politics of presuppositions. Like Septimus Smith in Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, Flory’s suicide emerges not so much as an act of escape as one of the ultimate assertion of the self’s impotence under a hegemonic gaze characterized by compulsive classification, love of proportions and strategic shaming.

The materialist medical science that dislocates Septimus and the political ideology that ostracizes Flory are both characterized by crude classifications that allow no ambivalence to the agency of the human self, in a culture that demands compulsive performances in power. More tragically, both figures are characterised by an inability to narrativize their lack and anxiety before their immediate audience, a condition that exacerbates the loneliness of their trauma and pushes them to becoming “a social pariah of the worst kind: malingerer, liar or lunatic.”<sup>72</sup> Embodying models of fallen and shameful masculinities through their inadequate idioms before the dominant masculinist gaze that is as medicalized as politicized, both Septimus and Flory come to embody the ambivalence that makes them unaccommodated outsiders to their contemporary structures of privilege. It is precisely through this ambivalence that they arrive at the awakened agency – with its existentialist and phenomenological insights – that informs the complex human self not reducible to the bio-political definitions of the day.

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<sup>72</sup> Anna Donald, “The Words we live in”, *Narrative Based Medicine: Dialogue and Discourse in Clinical Practice*, ed. Trisha Greenhalgh and Brian Hurwitz (London: BMJ Books, 1998) 23.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **“Sixteen bacon slices through Baxter’s brain”: Bio-politics, Masculinity and the Epistemology of Identity in Ian McEwan’s *Saturday***

#### **5.1 Introducing the Chapter**

Man hands on misery to man

It deepens like a coastal shelf

Philip Larkin<sup>1</sup>

The final section of this thesis will explore how medical science and metropolitan identities in the twenty-first century are revisited with renewed interest in the phenomenological description of an existentialist experience. It also looks at the interfaces where personal and literary narratives are investigated through a hermeneutic turn. It foregrounds questions on empathy and emotional response in the face of ultra-Darwinism and genetic determinism that operate on similar principles of selection and certainty as that of dominant rational ideologies about identity in Western liberal political systems. The bio-political dogma at work in the twenty-first

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Larkin, “This be the Verse”, *Collected Poems*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London: The Marvell Press, 1988) 180. It is interesting to note that McEwan classifies Larkin as the atheist poet who “also knew the moment and the nature of transcendence”. Ian McEwan, “End of the World Blues”, *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Non-Believer*, ed. Christopher Hitchens (London: Da Capo Press, 2007) 363. Larkin represents for McEwan the combination of atheism and transcendence that is enacted by poetry and is significant in the light of the arguments in this chapter about the combination of the rational and the phenomenological frames.

century often constitutes a *hyperlogical ideology* masquerading as liberalism that effaces crucial questions on multiplicity and difference in its promotion of (largely capitalist) notions of progress and rationality.<sup>2</sup>

In a culture of surveillance and bio-political determinism, the resistance that the literary narrative can uniquely offer is through its depiction of the phenomenological frame that can extend into philosophical knowledge and existentialist experience. Such experience highlights the difference between the mappable brain and the unmappable mind, between ossified ontology and an ambivalent epistemology that is eventually enriched by the self-reflective knowledge of its uncertainty. These issues are especially pertinent in the backdrop of recent works on cognitive science and artificial intelligence. Also pertinent to such analysis are the medical discourses which have produced ambivalent reactions but also challenges for a more phenomenological as well as cognitively grounded approach to subjective experience in more ‘distributed’ models of understanding of mind and brain relations.<sup>3</sup> These debates are often refracted in the literary narrative about the human mind and its unique agency in relation to the cognitive machine infused with hard-wired artificial intelligence.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Steven Rose, Richard Lewontin and Leon J. Kamin, *Not In Our Genes: Biology, Ideology and Human Nature* (New York: Penguin, 1984) 8. In this work, the authors argue that the data-centric model of modern genetic theory (especially as propounded by Richard Dawkins and E.O.Wilson) with its discourse of determinism lends itself easily to other reductionist realms as “Cost benefit analysis, investment opportunity costs, game theory, system engineering and communication, and the like are all unabashedly transferred into the natural domain” (59-60). The alliances between medical scientists and political journalists such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens in their polemical stance against any form of theism and religious belief and absolute advocacy for scientific logical supremacy are a classic case in point. Hitchens’s position is most problematic, as he moves from classical leftist politics (in his diatribe against the Vietnam War and Henry Kissinger) to an Islamophobic neo-conservatism (in his consistent arguments in favour of the Iraq-War).

<sup>3</sup> Andy Clark, *Microcognition: Philosophy, Cognitive Science, and Parallel Distributed Processing* (Cambridge, MA & London: The MIT Press, 1990). In this work, Clark argues that the spaces between the neural connections (Clark compares the synapses with the spaces between music notes) hold the key to the understanding of a distributed model of the human mind that sees the human thought process as a complex combination of interrelated levels and networks that are mutually dependent. In a related work, Clark emphasizes the importance of an integrated model of perception, cognition and action, breaking away from the classical distinctions between the modes and describes the brain “as an organ of *environmentally situated control*.” Andy Clark, *Mindware: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Cognitive Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 95.

<sup>4</sup> Crucially, literary theorists and novelists such as David Lodge make a strong case for literature and the literary narrative to be capable of communicating the *qualia*, the contingent quotient of the human consciousness, more so than any empirically established scientific machine with its coded programmes can. Lodge’s own novel *Thinks* (2001) with its contest between artificial intelligence and the human mind, provides a classic case in point of medical science’s arrogant attempt at quantifying

This chapter explores the mapping of identities in relation to this turn, examining the new psychosocial and medical categories as well as the ambivalences in brain sciences. Such ambivalences emerge in relation to a late modern condition where liberal politics and the ontology of Western middle-class privilege are almost always enmeshed with the cultural logic of late capitalism. Looking at the way the tenets of ultra-Darwinism conveniently merge with the war against terrorism and how both ultimately uphold the primacy of the status quo, this analysis will explore how the bio-political gaze – with its discourse of determinism – is operative across the fictional space of the literary novel about an ideological condition where “we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom” and phrases such as “‘war on terrorism’, ‘democracy and freedom’, ‘human rights’ and so on — are false alarms, mystifying our perception of the situation instead of allowing us to think it.”<sup>5</sup> In tracing the way what may be defined as Neo-Darwinist medicine<sup>6</sup> (with its easy

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consciousness through a specially simulated machine and the failure it faces at the moment of pure perception. *Thinks* is a narrative about the unique significance of literary narrative itself in describing how the human mind perceives and is located at an epistemic excess in relation to the hard-wired intelligence. The novel emerges as an exploration of the sensory space that appears to reside at “the interface between the virtual machine and the real physical flesh-and-blood machine of the body.” David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel*, 290-91. For a scientific analysis of the content and characteristics of the qualia, see Clotilde Calabi, “Emotional Qualia”, *Emotions, Qualia, and Consciousness*, ed. Alfred Kaszniak (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2001) 75-83.

<sup>5</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 2. Žižek’s contention of the absence of the possibility of protest in an apparently benevolent liberal capitalism takes up medical premises in his reading of an age heralding “post-political bio-politics.” Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008) 34. In similar vein, post-9/11 terror for Derrida is an enigmatic epistemology that blurs borderlines between liberation movements and attack. See Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) 152-53.

<sup>6</sup> Neo-Darwinism is a term commonly used to describe the medical culture that advocates a synthesis of Darwinian evolution and Mendelian genetics. First coined by George Romans in 1895, Neo-Darwinism as a term was originally less connected to the tenets of original Darwinism than to the Panselctionist School upheld by Alfred Wallace and August Weisman. Neo-Darwinism rules out the Lamarckian idea of soft inheritance (explained in the first chapter on degeneration) that Darwin himself had not absolutely rejected and instead proposes a pure randomness of selection that highlights the necessity for selfishness. See Stephen Jay Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) 210-20. This term is used in this chapter to refer primarily to the zoological and genetic theories of evolution and selection propounded by Richard Dawkins whose works – especially *The Selfish Gene* (1976) and *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986) – will be referred to frequently. Dawkins’s notion of the primacy of the DNA and its innate informative quality is coupled with the belief that genes are survival machines gifted with the ability to replicate their codes through extended phenotypes. Such ideas are supported by popular science journalists such as Matt Ridley who emphasize the “inevitable, algorithmic certainty that genes which cause behaviour that enhances the survival of such genes must thrive at the expense of genes that do not.” Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue* (London: Penguin Books, 1997) 18. This chapter will argue how the arrogance in such scientific certainty can be resisted through a phenomenological experience and how the literary narrative is uniquely suited – in its self-reflective and meta-fictional use of language – to

alliances with the political tenets of Neo-Conservatism) becomes a vehicle for what Foucault had classified as “that technical world that is the armed, positive, full form of his [man’s] finitude”<sup>7</sup>, this chapter will also investigate the manner in which the finitude of the bio-political realm is interrogated by the non-quantifiable quality of the phenomenological agency and its unique intentionality. Taking up the ways in which medicine and illness are subjectivized as well as narrativized in the literary novel, the study will explore the complex combinations of cognition, empathy and affect, while also studying how those operate along the broader narratives of masculinity, medical science and terror. The analysis in this chapter seeks to confirm the argument that “non-neural factors have an effect on neural factors, and vice-versa, since the system in question is brain-body-environment and is organized dynamically across time.”<sup>8</sup>

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enact, embody and extend the convergence of cognitive science, phenomenology and an existentialist awakening.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 198.

<sup>8</sup> Shaun Gallagher, “Scanning the Lifeworld”, *Critical Neuroscience*, 91.

## 5.2 Consciousness, Medical Science and the Literary Narrative in *Saturday*

Commonly classified as a “neuro-novel”<sup>9</sup>, McEwan’s *Saturday* (2005) is a narrative that takes as its central theme the ambivalence that the normative medical gaze learns through its existentialist enquiry about how matter becomes conscious. *Saturday*, set in post-9/11 attack and pre-Iraq invasion, is a complex literary text which examines current ambivalent attitudes in medical science, masculinity and the politics of affect and affective identities. A novel “*about* prejudice, misunderstanding and over-interpretation in an increasingly paranoid London,”<sup>10</sup> McEwan’s *Saturday* depicts the dual potential of a work of literature to comment profoundly on the political condition of its times as well as to probe deep into a more holistic idea of human consciousness. The narrative does these by exploring issues around the epistemology of emotion, empathy and affect. It juxtaposes historical and intertextual axes<sup>11</sup> along which various models of knowledge are reified, refuted and embodied through narratives of conflict, confrontation and cognition.

The role of medicine in constructing the social subject has a long established history. Medical anthropology, in particular, has focussed on the ontology of medical science as it has been appropriated by the status quo in informing as well as effacing politically motivated discourses on subject formation and coercion.<sup>12</sup> However, what

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<sup>9</sup> See Marco Roth, “The Rise of the Neuronovel”, *n+1* 8 (September 2009): n.pag. Web. 16 July 2012. I owe this reference to Dr Peter Howarth.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate, *The New Atheist Novel: Fiction, Philosophy and Polemic after 9/11* (London: Continuum, 2010) 30.

<sup>11</sup> It may be argued that the meta-fictional self-reflexive awareness of McEwan’s narrative – its clear and deliberate allusions to Joyce’s short story “The Dead” and Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* – is itself an enactment of the human mind’s capacity to be conscious of its own epistemology. Such capacity allows the self-reflective human mind to be mapped onto the ontology of consciousness itself. It thus enacts V.S.Ramachandran’s definition of consciousness as that quality which informs the perceived incompleteness of one’s own brain in a philosophical sense; compared to the perceived completion of the brains of the observed others. See Ramachandran, *Consciousness and the Physical World*, 142-43.

<sup>12</sup> In addition to Foucault’s works on the immediate and discursive sociology of medicine and medical politics as embedded in everyday culture, one could look at the manner in which medical science was appropriated as an excuse for eugenics and racial hygiene, most immediately exemplified during the rise of Fascism and Nazism and continued with convenient classifications during colonial conquests and control. See John M. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews: A History* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System* (New York & London:



is often under-studied in these researches is the manner in which medicine can also be gainfully looked at not just in terms of a ‘gaze’ but also as “a medium of [phenomenological] experience, a mode of engagement with the world [. . .] [as] a dialogical medium, one of encounter, interpretation, conflict, and at times transformation.”<sup>13</sup> In focalizing its narrative through the middle-class Western-liberal neurosurgeon Henry Perowne – as he moves from the logical certainties in correspondence to his liberal middle-class bio-political privilege to an epistemological ambivalence – McEwan’s *Saturday* extends that tradition of literary narrative that seeks to see the human mind in all its cognitive uncertainties and indeterminacies. It ends with the existentialist insight into ambivalence and the phenomenological epiphany that the only certainty is that of the *affective now*, which is the unique privilege of the self-reflective mind. *Saturday* does this directly by bringing medical science in proximity to the affective power of poetry, at a time of ideological indecision in the political scene.<sup>14</sup>

McEwan’s narrative, which is pitched at a time of political confusion and disturbed identity, also explores the problem of how we locate agency, intentionality and free will as those emerge at the interfaces of consciousness, political presuppositions and the philosophy of biology. *Saturday* does this through orchestrating a convergence of narratives drawn from phenomenology and neuroscience. Thus the question regarding what constitutes consciousness emerges in McEwan’s novel against a backdrop of a medical narrative that is informed and further ironized by its political setting where “consumers of violence as spectacle, adepts of proximity without risks, are schooled to be cynical about the possibility of

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Routledge, 1992). For a direct depiction of how medicine and medical politics were strategically and discursively dialogic with the politics of coercion and classification during colonial eras, see David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and Jock McCulloch, *Colonial Psychiatry and ‘the African mind’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Byron J. Good, *Medicine, rationality, and experience: An anthropological perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 86.

<sup>14</sup> The bridge between the literary and the medical is powerfully voiced in McEwan’s *Atonement* as well where Robbie Turner who studies literature before deciding to take up a career in medicine acknowledges the privileged position that can be arrived at through a meeting of medical science and the literary narrative. Thus Robbie acknowledges that “Birth, death and frailty in between. Rise and fall—this was the doctor’s business, and it was literature’s too.” Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001) 93.

sincerity.”<sup>15</sup> McEwan’s personal view on the value of poetry and its potential influence on science are perhaps best stated in his direct reference to the tenet of natural selection that becomes an extended metaphor for scientific certainty:

Scientific method, scepticism, or rationality in general, has yet to find an overarching narrative of sufficient power, simplicity, and wide appeal to compete with the old stories that give meaning to people’s lives. Natural selection is a powerful, elegant and economic explicator of life on earth in all its diversity, and perhaps it contains the seeds of a rival creation myth that would have the added power of being true – but it awaits its inspired synthesiser, its poet, its Milton.<sup>16</sup>

In acknowledging the elegance of natural selection, McEwan also emphasizes the vital value of the phenomenological frame that is perhaps best voiced in poetry. Essentially a novel about the changing human mind, *Saturday* enacts the move from the arrogance of rational scientific certainty<sup>17</sup> to an affective oriented epistemology grounded in the recognition of uncertainty and indeterminacy, where wonder at the magnificence of the human mind displaces medical knowledge about the function of the brain.<sup>18</sup> The narrative negotiates between different orders of signification – medical, social and political – through the presentation of its protagonist’s attempt to arrive at an epistemic reconciliation of the various systems of knowledge. Such narrative negotiations offer rich analysis of the self that seeks to bridge scientific and philosophical modes of response and interpretation, supporting David Lodge’s view

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<sup>15</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2003) 99.

<sup>16</sup> McEwan, “End of the World Blues”, 360.

<sup>17</sup> This is evinced in *Saturday* in Henry Perowne’s assertion of the knowledge of neural nets in the hard-wired brain as interchangeable with concepts of mind. The Neo-Darwinist narrative of evolution and human system negates any agency in its absolute belief in the system of random selection.

<sup>18</sup> The Neo-Darwinism upheld by the neurosurgeon Perowne as a commonplace in modern medical science, is increasingly interrogated by his encounter with the epiphanic experience which seems to curiously correspond to the medical notion of epigenetics that sees the relationship between DNA, RNA and protein as more dialogic than one-dimensional, as upheld by the proponents of genetic determinism. Instead of looking at the human genetic structure as essentially pre-programmed by the DNA (which operates by pure random chance and selection), epigenetics corresponds the philosopher’s position in biology that gains the knowledge of indeterminacy (one with which Perowne ends in McEwan’s *Saturday*) in the face of “epistemological or methodological pluralism” that demonstrates “that there is no unique method for investigating all the many different things there are in the world.” John Dupré, *Processes of Life: Essays in the Philosophy of Biology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 5.

of the literary novel as “man’s most successful effort to describe the experience of individual human beings moving through space and time.”<sup>19</sup>

The protagonist of *Saturday* is the neurosurgeon Henry Perowne – a man who repairs brains and is thus ceaselessly attached to the material world – an unreliable observer who believes “that the supernatural was the recourse of an insufficient imagination, a dereliction of duty”<sup>20</sup> and thus decries magic realism in literature as kitsch. McEwan’s novel emerges as a satire of some versions of Neo-Darwinism and neural determinism that suggest that “we are born selfish,”<sup>21</sup> that generosity and altruism must be learned through effort to go against the natural genetic propensities and that the mind “is packed with high-tech systems each contrived to overcome its own obstacles.”<sup>22</sup> Instead, what is offered in *Saturday* is the interchange between phenomenology and neuroscience that articulates an existentialist ambivalence about the claims and possibilities of scientific knowledge. McEwan’s story depicts the slippery mutability of fact and fiction, knowledge and faith, and curiously connects personal and political narratives of conflict and cognition.

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<sup>19</sup> David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> McEwan, *Saturday* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005) 67. Further references to this work will be made parenthetically as *SD*.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) 3. Dawkins’s notion of genetic determinism has come under critique from various biologist and medical philosophers. Denis Noble, among others, sees Dawkins’s selfish gene more as a metaphor than an empirical hypothesis. Taking a stance that is more in correspondence with the contingency principle of epigenetics than the deterministic principle of Neo-Darwinist medicine, Noble affirms that the DNA determinism is erroneous precisely because genes are functionally informed by the RNA and protein and not by the DNA alone. Together the RNA, the DNA and protein constitute what Noble classifies as the semantic system within which the DNA code operates like a word. See Noble, *The Music of Life: Biology Beyond Genes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 17-22. Likewise, evolutionary biologists have also criticised the genic selectionism proposed by George Williams and Dawkins for its effacement of environmental influences and external changes upon the organism. The context-dependent nature of the relationship between genotype and phenotypes is highlighted by these thinkers as opposed to the deterministic principle proffered by the Neo-Darwinists. See Marjorie Grene and David Depew, *The Philosophy of Biology: An Episodic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 247-89. Dawkins’s view of the non-natural quality of altruism has also attracted critique from philosophers such as Thomas Nagel who had contended instead that there can be such a thing as pure altruism that is rational as well as intuitive inasmuch as it operates on the principle of “direct influence of one person’s interest on the actions of another, simply because in itself the interest of the former provides the latter with a reason to act.” Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) 80. Nagel’s theory throws interesting light on the nature of empathy that will be taken up later in this chapter.

<sup>22</sup> Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (London: Penguin Books, 1998) 4.

With its focalized narrative that is both unreliable and self-reflexive, *Saturday* constitutes a “postmodern work of realist fiction that, focalized through an intelligent though at times obtuse character, is concerned with depicting how an embodied, socially embedded, story-loving consciousness shapes everyday human acts of perception.”<sup>23</sup> In looking at the way in which medical science can un-learn its privileged knowledge and instead look at the phenomenological space as the site of intentionality that is informed by experiential feelings,<sup>24</sup> *Saturday* investigates the interfaces between physical world and the phenomenological frame, between the analytical and the existentialist realms, at a political moment of ideological indecision. More significantly, and at a more intertextual level, such an investigation locates McEwan in line with the tradition of Modernist writing he so conspicuously alludes to thematically as well as stylistically, in his role as “the one contemporary literary writer who has most extensively and directly engaged with cognitive neuroscience [and] has also tended to perpetuate the myth of the modernist ‘inward turn’.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Jane F. Thrailkill, “Ian McEwan’s Neurological Novel”, *Poetics Today* 32.1 (Spring 2011): 171-210; 176. I owe this reference to Dr Marco Bernini.

<sup>24</sup> Matthew Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being: Phenomenology, Psychiatry and the Sense of Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 30-31.

<sup>25</sup> Patricia Waugh, “Thinking in Literature: Modernism and Contemporary Neuroscience”, *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicizing Postwar and Contemporary Fiction*, ed. David James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 78.

### 5.3 *Saturday* and the Irony of Information

Appropriating the high-Modernist architectonics of the one-day structure, McEwan's *Saturday* incorporates within it several frames of reference and narrative voices. The extra-diegetic gaze of the narrator ironically presents the unreliable intra-diegetic gaze of Perowne. This narrative frame upholds the ambivalence of Perowne who moves from his status as a sure scientist to a more ambivalent location that ironically informs the understanding of self-reflective consciousness and agency. This allows the narrative overall to synthesize a new position combining phenomenology with cognitive science, a possibility only hinted at the end of *Saturday* rather than straightforwardly articulated. The resemblance with earlier Modernist texts is further extended by the phenomenological frame that problematizes the politics of knowledge whereby characters awaken to the inadequacies of informative and cognitive control.<sup>26</sup> Like the unnamed "boss" in Mansfield's "The Fly" who begins with his firm and robust location in the normative masculinist narrative of health and social success and is then increasingly cut down into a pathetic figure who awakens to the knowledge of his lack and loss, Perowne in McEwan's *Saturday* starts as a medical scientist at the peak of his health and career and ends with the uncomfortable awareness of the uncertainties of the medical narrative in the face of the sheer unmappability of the phenomenological experience of being human. This transformation has its immediate political correlates and is achieved through a subversively ironic mode that is sustained throughout the course of the narrative, from Perowne's euphoric illusion on seeing the metropolis as a grand success and a biological masterpiece, to his final awareness that London is, like Baghdad, a city waiting for its bombs.

At the diegetic level *Saturday* carries parallels with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which too rehearses questions concerning the poverty and inadequacies of logic to know the 'other' and is similarly framed by multiple levels of gaze: from

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<sup>26</sup> *Saturday* makes explicit references to Joyce's "The Dead", a story which, like Mansfield's "The Fly", engages with the epistemology of nervous knowledge that emerges as apart from immediate information and where the phenomenological moment is subversive inasmuch as it destroys the comfort of certainty. Like Gabriel in "The Dead", Perowne in *Saturday* starts as a robust social success and ends as an awakened character pathetically framed in the irony of his own knowledge of lack.

that of the unreliable intra-diegetic protagonist to that of the extra-diegetic observer. Like *Heart of Darkness*, *Saturday* reflects on a political moment where a new dominant power seeks to justify its neo-imperial invasions by alluding to humanitarian ideas and ideals. Like Conrad's novella, McEwan's novel is about the cracking up of the ostensible certainties of medical and political science and the "loss of narratorial authority undermines any comfortable or simple reading of the novel, while capturing the post-9/11 climate of anxiety."<sup>27</sup> As in *Heart of Darkness*, *Saturday* constitutes the politics of decoding signs through a mode that combines collective panic and private hysteria. However, unlike *Heart of Darkness* where the protagonist's decoding of a shower of arrows occurs through a delay due to the dislocation from the normative cognitive culture, *Saturday* shows such culture itself as a traumatophilic condition informed and endorsed by popular media. Such condition is a compound of the political and the medical conditions of an age that consumes trauma through televised screens where the deluge of images of horror paradoxically numbs the necessity to react.<sup>28</sup>

The unreliability of Perowne's cognitive framing of events is juxtaposed consistently and ironically with the supposed certainty of his medical knowledge and social success. Perowne's god-like gaze on the city as a massive "success, a brilliant invention, a biological masterpiece" (SD 5) is almost immediately undermined by his mistaken perception of threat. Crucially, the novel opens with Perowne's Western-liberal, middle-class and hysterical assumption that the sign of a burning cargo plane in the sky is a sign of a terrorist event. Perowne's assumptions are positioned, post-9/11:

It's already almost eighteen months since half the planet watched, and watched again the unseen captives driven through the sky to the slaughter, at which time there gathered round the innocent silhouette of any jet plane a

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<sup>27</sup> Sebastian Groes, "Ian McEwan and the Modernist Consciousness of the City in *Saturday*", *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Continuum, 2009) 104.

<sup>28</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 96. It is interesting at this point to read Stephen Kern's historical analysis of the first global catastrophe that was disseminated across the planet with live messages, the sinking of the Titanic on 15 April 1912, an event that can be considered as the first example of collective consumerist traumatophilia that proceeded with a combination of hysteria and sensation as the live updates of the sinking ship was beamed across the Atlantic world with SOS messages. See Kern, *The Culture of Time and Place 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) 314.

novel association. Everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed. (*SD* 16)

The narrative's description of the spectacle of terrorism as a consumerist package seen repeatedly corresponds closely to Žižek's analysis of watching the September 11 attacks as a voyeuristic experience that uncannily and unashamedly appropriates the grammar of the postmodern reality TV show operating purely on its selective concealment of hyper-reality. Thus Žižek affirms:

When, days after September 11 2001, our gaze was transfixed by the images of the plane hitting one of the WTC towers, we were all forced to experience what the 'compulsion to repeat' and *jouissance* beyond the pleasure principle are: we wanted to see it again and again; the same shots were repeated ad nauseam, and the uncanny satisfaction we got from it was *jouissance* at its purest.<sup>29</sup>

The consumption of the spectacle of trauma as commodity creates a cognitive culture which operates by association and ascription, whereby the 'Other' is focalized through fear as well as reified through repetitions. *Saturday* depicts this cognitive principle at work, as the neurosurgeon who decodes the degenerative disease by analysing "a muscular restlessness that will one day [. . .] become athetoid, plagued by involuntary, uncontrollable movements" (*SD* 93) makes a mistaken analysis of the spectacle in the sky whereby he decodes the sign of the burning cargo plane heading towards Heathrow as a terrorist attack. Perowne's middle-class liberal assumptions are in close correspondence to his medical discourse of determinism and both are interrogated and rendered inadequate in the course of the novel. Thus the burning aeroplane eventually becomes an innocuous accident, despite the alleged presence of a copy of the Koran in the cockpit and the neural determinism read by Perowne as the inevitable degenerative fate of Baxter is resisted in his implicit claim

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<sup>29</sup> Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 11-12. In her analysis of the images of human beings falling from the North Tower of the World Trade Center in September 11, 2001, Susan Lurie studies how the ontology of horror shifts from the anonymous victim to that of the spectator who turns to the shuddered consumer in "the trauma of spectatorship." Lurie, "Falling Persons and National Embodiment: The Reconstruction of Safe Spectatorship in the Photographic Record of 9/11", *Terror, Culture, Politics: Rethinking 9/11*, ed. Daniel J. Sherman and Terry Nardin (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006) 46.

to life in responding to Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach", a poem about human and cultural uncertainty occupying the original Darwinian threshold-moment of liminality and doubt.<sup>30</sup>

In *Saturday* the bio-political gaze of optimization and mappable meanings is eventually undermined through the subtle counter-narrative of phenomenological experience that extends into an existentialist awakening. The opening of McEwan's novel depicts the medical gaze assured of its scientific certainties, embodied most immediately by the protagonist Henry Perowne. Thus, Jane Macnaughton argues:

When we follow Henry Perowne into his workplace, and especially into the operating theatre, it seems that we are no longer viewing the world through his eyes, but through the eyes of the admiring bystander. The descriptions of the operations undertaken are textbook: nothing ever goes wrong, medicine is like magic, wonderful and strange.<sup>31</sup>

The fatality of the neurodegenerative condition in the novel – the Huntington's disease that consumes Baxter in the medical eyes of Perowne – is spelt out by the rhetoric of neuroscience in all its deterministic logic. Thus Perowne's thinking voice informs the reader:

The truth, now demonstrated, is that Baxter is a special case – a man who believes he has no future and is therefore free of consequences. And that's simply the frame. [. . .] *It is written*. No amount of love, drugs, Bible classes or prison sentencing can cure Baxter or shift him from his course. It's spelled out in fragile proteins, but could be carved in stone, or tempered steel. (*SD* 210)

The medical information about the fatal genetic coding that Baxter contains is ironically described with metaphors and similes that accord with current theories in medical humanities that medicine itself is "infused with metaphor and codes" that

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<sup>30</sup> For Arnold's problematic location as an intellectual and poet in an age of Darwinism, see Joseph Carroll, *Literary Darwinism: Evolution, Human Nature and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 3-14.

<sup>31</sup> Macnaughton, "Literature and the 'good doctor' in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*", *Journal of Medical Ethics: Medical Humanities* 33 (2007): 70-74; 72.



are structurally similar to the grammar of poetry itself.<sup>32</sup> The inscription of degeneration appears through a genetic alphabetism that Perowne decodes immediately and unequivocally through his neuro-scientific gaze. It may be viewed as analogous to the Neo-Darwinist notion that “what lies at the heart of every living being is not fire, not a warm breath, not a spark of life. It is information, words, instructions.”<sup>33</sup> However, the complexity of McEwan’s novel lies in the manner in which ‘information’ – that DNA code of classic genetics – is ironized through a phenomenological process that offers a richer culture of cognition than that of any scientifically systematized bio-political gaze. The epistemic emphasis is thus shifted from one of scientific or genetic determinism to one of a phenomenologically complex affective-cognitive enactment of agency and intentionality. Crucially, the genetically degenerate Baxter recognizes something in a nineteenth-century lyric that the scientifically trained Perowne cannot, for all his knowledge of the genetic codes that determine neural character and behaviour.

The triumph of *Saturday* lies precisely in the admission and articulation of ambivalence by Perowne “the professional reductionist [who] can’t help thinking it’s down to invisible folds and kinks of character, written in code, at the level of molecules” (*SD* 272). The genetic alphabetism that Perowne initially subscribes to in *Saturday* corresponds to the Neo-Darwinist idea of the extended phenotype of “replicating molecules ganged up in cells [. . .] competing with each other for space and for the chemical resources needed to build copies of themselves”.<sup>34</sup> Perowne’s notion that “There is much in human affairs that can be accounted for at the level of the complex molecule” (*SD* 91) also appears analogous to Dawkins’ statement that “DNA is ROM. It can be read millions of times over, but only written to once –

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<sup>32</sup> Dr Sam Guglani, *Poet in the City*, <http://vimeo.com/60546826>. Web. 4 March, 2013. In conversation with the poet Jo Shapcott, the oncologist Guglani, (who also is the curator of Medicine Unboxed, an NHS initiative in England supported by the Wellcome Trust) agrees that poetry allows a privileged access into the human mind and gives a truer picture of human emotions and thought processes than MRI scans do. In a similar vein, the medical anthropologist Byron J. Good contends that “the language of medicine is hardly a simple mirror of the empirical world. It is a rich cultural language, linked to a highly specialized version of reality and system of social relations, and when employed in medical care, it joins deep moral concerns with its more obvious technical functions.” *Medicine, Rationality and Experience*, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986) 112.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Extended Phenotype: The Gene as a Unit of Selection* (Oxford: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1982) 252.

when it is first assembled at the birth of the cell in which it resides.”<sup>35</sup> However, as Patricia Waugh argues, Dawkins’ idea of the self as a combination of endlessly self-enhancing genes that can be “endlessly written, reprogrammable, downloaded, deferred, reiterated and decentred” also contains “the substantial characteristics, plot function and unique point of view of a character in a fast-paced novel.”<sup>36</sup> The Neo-Darwinism that Perowne subscribes to is described in all its determinism:

It’s a commonplace of parenting and modern genetics that parents have little or no influence on the characters of their children. You never know what you are going to get. [. . .] what really determines the sort of person who’s coming to live with you is which sperm finds which egg, how the cards are shuffled, halved and spliced at the moment of recombination. (SD 25)

Perowne thus first appears in the novel assuming the Neo-Darwinist position that is certain of its randomness principle and its irrefutable genetics of determinism based on cellular combination, one that leaves little room for legacy, agency or external intervention.<sup>37</sup> His subsequent move through empathy and epiphany, to an increased

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<sup>35</sup> Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, 117. The genetic determinism subscribed by Dawkins has been attacked by philosophers of biology who contend its mathematical indifference to environmental changes and instead propose that, far from being DNA-centric alone, the cellular structure is determined by an active interchange among RNA, DNA and protein, a theory that informs the basis of epigenetics. Possibly the severest critique has come from Stephen Jay Gould whose publicly polemical position in relation to Dawkins’s selectionist idea of the extended phenotype and its deterministic behaviour is based on Gould’s notion of evolution as a complex process of assimilation and adaptation and not purely on selection alone. For a short yet interesting study of the Dawkins vs. Gould debate, see Kim Sterelny, *Dawkins vs. Gould: Survival of the Fittest* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> Waugh, “Science and Fiction in the 1990s”, *British Fiction of the 1990s*, ed. Nick Bentley (New York & London: Routledge, 2005) 61. It is interesting to compare Waugh’s analogy with the idea propounded by the medical anthropologist Byron Good who contends that medicine must appropriate the discourse of *heteroglossia* as propounded by the literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. Medical analysis, Good argues, must assume the vocabulary of “the interpretive tradition, conversant with critical theory” in order to address the core issues in its discipline. *Medicine, Rationality and Experience*, 63. In a similar vein, John Dupré – classifying himself as a philosopher of biology in his support for epigenetics against Neo-Darwinism – rejects the one-dimensionality of Dawkins’s genetic determinism and affirms how evolution cannot be reduced to “a sequence of time slices”, advocating instead an epistemological plurality that points to “the deep impossibility of separating ‘nature’ from ‘nurture’ in the explanation of development”. Dupré, *Processes of Life: Essays in the Philosophy of Biology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 16.

<sup>37</sup> Denis Noble critiques Dawkins’s ultra-Darwinist DNA-centric model of genetic evolution and affirms instead the infinitude of genetic patterns and how those can be influenced by the experiences of previous generations as well as by the organism’s interactions with the immediate environment. Noble, *The Music of Life*, 19. The genetic transfer of the effect of experiences undergone by previous generations into their progeny underlines the fundamental argument of epigenetics, which has revealed empirical evidence of such genetic inheritance, as evinced in the work done on trauma survivors and their grandchildren. Especially pertinent is the medical study done by Marcus Pembrey

awareness of the unique epistemology of the mind in relation to the materiality of the brain, constitutes the combination of medical science and poetry with the backdrop of political changes. It is this uniqueness of multiple points of view along with the epistemology of the cognitive character that emerges in McEwan's *Saturday* as subversive to the neural determinism and the certainty of scientific logic, in a novel that eventually upholds "art's crucial role as a collective vehicle for self-reflection and as a shared source of cultural identity."<sup>38</sup>

In its move from the certainties of neural determinism and degeneration to the possibilities of affect, from the brain and its hard-wired neural networks to the mind that constitutes a unique self that can respond uniquely to art through an heightened awareness of emotion and empathy, *Saturday* enacts the transition from the reductively empirical realms to that of the complexly epistemological. The novel also depicts how each realm ought to inform the other in a culture of the complicity

[. . .] between the discourses of ultra-Darwinism, biotechnology and postmodernism which, between them, seem to have constructed primal myths of the pre- and post-human as a means of both articulating and displacing anxieties about who we are at the beginning of the twenty-first century.<sup>39</sup>

In locating the epistemology of the sentient self through its responsiveness to a lyric – Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" – that is itself born of the emotional crisis wrought by the original Darwinian moment, *Saturday* showcases how the affective identity that Darwin himself had recognized in his last major work which was on emotions<sup>40</sup> can transcend the reductionist discourses of current Neo-Darwinian

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in the small Swedish town of Överkalix, as demonstrated in the BBC documentary *The Ghosts in Your Gene* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehwFVgQ82ZY>. Web. 4 March 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Merlin Donald, "Art and Cognitive Evolution", *The Artful Mind: Cognitive Science and the Riddle of Human Creativity*, ed. Mark Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 4-5.

<sup>39</sup> Waugh, "Science and the Fiction of in the 1990s", 76.

<sup>40</sup> In his 1872 work on emotions in animals, Darwin had delineated three different principles of emotions and emotional changes: the principle of associated habits, the principle of antithesis and the principle of actions arising directly and corresponding to the function of the nervous system that operates, as Darwin affirms, free from the function of free will and inherited habit. However, as Darwin goes on to illustrate, these distinctions often blur away in the face of affect and emotions, and certain habits which are at first performed consciously, can with habit become a part of the natural

science that builds its empire through a mathematical model and a politics of genetic combinations.<sup>41</sup> The movement of Perowne in *Saturday* from the medical dogma of a determined and recordable cellular self to the idea of a unique self that is mutable and contingent while being free from the reductionism of science, raises important questions about the nature of empathy and agency that perhaps only a literary narrative can uphold, through its self-reflexive use of language and its narrative capacity for problematization. Crucially, Perowne's epistemic shift – through observing Baxter's personal reception of Arnold's lyric – from medical reductionism to epistemological ambivalence, seems to endorse the argument that science cannot negate the need for contingency and messiness that characterise human circumstances and relationships.<sup>42</sup>

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nervous reflex, so much so that those are subsequently performed without conscious awareness. Under those circumstances, “the sensory nerve cells excite the motor cells, without first communicating with those cells on which our consciousness or volition depend.” Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1873) 5. Cited in Randolph R. Cornelius, *The Science of Emotion: Research and Tradition in the Psychology of Emotions* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996) 26.

<sup>41</sup> In pitting the phenomenological moment in its resistance against the politics of proportions that is readily appropriated by masculinist science and logic, *Saturday* bears interesting parallels with Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* that contains the characters Mr Ramsay and Lily Briscoe pitted against each other. While the former embodies masculinist mathematical principle in his love for proportions and quantifiable matter, the latter represents the artist who can transcend the same through inhabiting the phenomenological frame.

<sup>42</sup> Waugh, “Science and Fiction in the 1990s”, 65.

#### 5.4 Empathy, Agency and Affect in *Saturday*

The locations of affect and empathy in *Saturday* correspond closely to the works of psychologists who contend that “affective feelings convey, in an embodied form, information about the interface between oneself and one’s environment.”<sup>43</sup> The epistemology of empathy and emotional intelligence in McEwan’s novel is thus positioned as one of epistemic excess in relation to the rationale of classic biomedical science. Empathy emerges in the novel as a medical as well as a political condition, especially given its subtexts of political terrorism and war. McEwan himself places a high premium on empathy as a significant quality of humanity, one that he locates as a lack in the political context of terrorism. Referring to the 9/11 attackers, the author of *Saturday* argues:

Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality. The hijackers used fanatical certainty, misplaced religious faith and dehumanizing hatred to purge themselves of the human instinct for empathy. Among their crimes was a failure of the imagination.<sup>44</sup>

McEwan’s interpretation of empathy as an act of imagination whereby one perceives the pain in the other is, however, actually corroborated by the discoveries in social neuroscience that confirms that “Finding out how individuals perceive others in pain is [. . .] an interesting way to decipher the underlying neural mechanisms of empathy.”<sup>45</sup> Empathy, which in *Saturday* is located at the level of literary as well as political narrative, is anticipated by Daisy’s emotional reaction on reading *Jane Eyre*

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<sup>43</sup> Carol L. Gohm and Gerald L. Clore, “Affect as Information: An Individual-Differences Approach”, *The Wisdom in Feeling: Psychological Processes in Emotional Intelligence*, ed. Lisa Feldman Barrett and Peter Salovey (New York & London: The Guilford Press, 2002) 91.

<sup>44</sup> Ian McEwan, “Only Love and Then Oblivion. Love Was All They Had to Set Against Their Murderers”, *The Guardian* 15 Sept. 2001. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/15/september11.politicsphilosophyandsociety2>. n.pag. Web. 15 Feb. 2013. McEwan’s notion of empathy is strikingly similar to the one offered by Susan Sontag a year later as she analyses the images of war horror in Virginia Woolf’s *The Three Guineas* and affirms that “Our failure is one of imagination, of empathy: we have failed to hold this reality in mind.” *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Jean Decety and Philip L. Jackson, “A Social-Neuroscience Perspective on Empathy”, *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 15.2 (April 2006): 54-58; 55.

as she weeps under a tree by the dovecote “not for the story but because she had reached the end and emerged from a dream to grasp that it was all the creation of a woman she would never meet” (*SD* 133).

In their essay entitled “The Neurology of the Narrative”, Kay Young and Jeffrey Salver argue:

When we choose to be in the company of narrative by reading a novel or seeing a film, the narrative sets itself off as narrative, not as part of our lives; we stand in relation to it as audience to its “performance” as an aesthetic work. However, the storytelling we experience as an event in life can lose its appearance as narrative by virtue of its integration in life.<sup>46</sup>

*Saturday* seems to break the borderlines between the affect inside the ‘story’ produced by the literary artefact and the reader’s own understanding of the selves of the characters through her empathetic encounter within a phenomenological frame. Crucially, Daisy weeps not for the characters or their vital lives in *Jane Eyre* nor for the story the novel contains but for the author who made meaning out of the matter, thus anticipating Perowne’s curiosity in the operation theatre to know how matter becomes conscious. Like Baxter’s empathy towards the lyrical content in Arnold’s “Dover Beach” that arises out of the possibility of re-union, Daisy’s emotional response to *Jane Eyre* is premised on the necessary experience of liminality induced by the literary work of art. The emotional response emerges in itself as the ability through which the agency of the unique self is subjectivized in a way medical science cannot map. In positioning a neurosurgeon at the complex crossroads of agency and empathy, McEwan’s novel enacts modern neuroscience’s investigations into the epistemology of intentionality, the key quality for the creative writer for whom, without any agency or free will, there would be no narrative or storytelling.<sup>47</sup> The issue of agency in *Saturday* is in close yet complex correspondence with the structures of empathy in the novel, evinced spectacularly in the political scene by the

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<sup>46</sup> Young and Salver, “The Neurology of Narrative”, *SubStance* 30 (2001): 72-84; 72.

<sup>47</sup> For an analysis of agency and how that corresponds to a break away from the neural determinism of ultra-Darwinist medical science, see Nancey Murphy and Warren S. Brown, *Did My Neurons Make Me Do It? Philosophical and Neurobiological Perspectives on Moral Responsibility and Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 277.

massive public protests against the Iraq War and privately by Baxter's affective association with Matthew Arnold's lyric of loss and love.

McEwan's reading of terrorism as a failure of imagination is an interpretation that operates at several levels: the political, the cultural and the medical. McEwan's argument carries special significance in the scene in *Saturday* where, moved by empathy-inducing effect of Arnold's poetry, Baxter abandons his original plan of attacking Perowne's family, much to the consternation of his associate Nigel. Baxter's intrusion into the happy familial space of the Perownes and the subsequent violence and humiliation that he orchestrates can be interpreted as a metonymic substitute for the political act of terrorism that operates on a retribution principle. Baxter's attack of the white middle-class space of the Perownes is thus structurally similar to the retaliation of the wronged subject who is essentialized due to his fearful 'Otherness'. However, what disturbs the pure narrative of violence – after Baxter had knocked down a bleeding Grammaticus and ordered Daisy to undress at knifepoint – is the emergence of empathy through poetry, through Daisy's reading of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach". Thus when Baxter admits that he has *changed his mind*, the meaning is metaphorical as well as neurological, thus corroborating the close proximity and correspondence between matter and metaphor in McEwan's novel.<sup>48</sup>

Baxter's altered emotions and emergence of empathy offers interesting readings in relation to the notions of modern neuroscientists and philosophers of mind who contend that emotions that move the mind "consist of (mostly unconscious) images (layered neurobiological maps) of juxtaposed self and object, the latter acquiring affective valence with its association with its affect upon the self

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<sup>48</sup> It is interesting to compare Baxter's transformation under the influence of art in *Saturday* to that undergone by the Stasi (the secret police in Communist Germany) agent Gerd Wiesler on listening to a piano sonata in the 2006 German film *Das Leben Der Anderen* (*Lives of Others*) directed by the debutant filmmaker Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck. In an analysis that bears resonance with the section on empathy in this chapter, Diana Diamond studies *Das Leben Der Anderen* and affirms that Wiesler's transformation appropriates the 'embodied simulation' that experimenters have attributed to the behaviour of mirror neurons. Diamond, "Empathy and Identification in von Donnersmarck's *The Lives of Others*", *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 56 (2008): 811-832. I owe this reference to Professor Judith Buchanan.

map.”<sup>49</sup> McEwan’s narrative challenges the neural determinism of human emotions by juxtaposing the sentient subject with the affective object in a way that breaks away from the neat narrative of medical decoding. Thus, although the neurosurgeon Perowne can medically explain Baxter’s shift of mood as the “essence of a degenerating mind, periodically to lose all sense of a continuous self” (*SD* 223), he cannot comprehend the intentionality of the feeling self, and more importantly, how the same is moved by the affect that arises from poetry. In responding to the art of poetry and in connecting to a nineteenth century poet’s lyric about human emotions, the untutored Baxter shifts from a position of violence to one of empathy. In the process, he asserts his claim to life with the ability to enact the dual function of consciousness: the urge to assert the concern of the self, and connect to other selves while improving the art of life.<sup>50</sup> It is this condition that the neurosurgeon Henry Perowne recognizes, despite his inability to comprehend the manner of Baxter’s empathy with Arnold’s poetry, and this constitutes the moment in McEwan’s novel when phenomenological insight begins to mix with the medical gaze of neuroscience.

The role of the fictional narrative as inducing empathy in human mind is the core issue in the narrative of cognition in *Saturday*, operating through dual cognitive frames: Baxter’s phenomenological association with the emotional reverberation of Matthew Arnold’s lyric, and Perowne’s existentialist awareness of ambivalence that is born of his experience of witnessing Baxter’s embodied dialogue with poetry. Just as Baxter’s phenomenological experience of the lyric re-minds and re-connects him to his past, Perowne’s recognition of Baxter’s association provides him with a unique insight into the wonder of the human mind whose agency and intentionality cannot be explained by the neuroscience he knows and practises.<sup>51</sup> Empathy in the

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<sup>49</sup> Heidi Morrison Ravven, “Spinozistic Approaches to Evolutionary Naturalism: Spinoza’s Anticipation of Contemporary Affective Neuroscience”, *Politics and the Life Sciences* 22.1 (March 2003): 70-74; 73.

<sup>50</sup> These are the two functions that the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio classifies as the simple and complex functions of consciousness of the conative self which may be defined as the “irresistible urge to stay alive”. *The Feeling of What Happens*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> As Gillian Beer argues in her analysis of the open fields of epistemic encounters, association through language contains the connection with the communal as well as the extension of the unique; “Working with, and within, language is to work with a medium inevitably imbued with the communal past, drenched with what has been. In language others are always implicit, others who have used the same terms in different conditions. [. . .] Science always raises more questions than it contains and



novel is thus not simply a literary motif or poetic trope but a cognitive response to the voice of the other that the sentient self can establish a dialogue with, through the moving mind that exists as an epistemic excess to the materiality of the hard-wired brain. Poetry in the novel thus emerges as a voice that speaks to the medically degenerate, as Baxter – the baddie from the street who happens to embody “biological determinism in its purest form” (*SD* 93) – is moved by Daisy’s reading of Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach”, as it makes him think about where he grew up. The significance of the lyric as a construct that communicates the qualia of consciousness has been corroborated by neuroscientists and literary writers alike. The method of the lyric in constructing the qualia has been classified as unique inasmuch that it uses “language in such a way that the description of qualia does not seem partial, imprecise, and only comprehensible when put in the context of the poet’s personal life.”<sup>52</sup> The location of the self in language thus emerges through a process of empathy, and the lyric renders the process unique by its focalized and poetically formalized configuration of language. Baxter’s response to the lyric in *Saturday* is a complex combination of empathy and emotion that facilitates the uniqueness of the sentient self and its agency, resisting the reification desired by the bio-political gaze.<sup>53</sup>

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writers and readers may pursue these in directions that go past science.” Beer, *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 7-8. As medical practitioners increasingly come to assert “Whatever our thoughts about literature enabling empathy, there is no doubt that literature can stimulate the imagination and can sharpen interpretive skills, important for doctors who have to make sense of patients’ stories.” Jane Macnaughton, “Literature and the ‘good doctor’ in Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*”, 70. Macnaughton’s analysis of the significance of story-hearing as part of medical treatment places special importance on the role of the anecdote as an epistemological device in medical practice. Instead of downplaying the fictional quality of anecdotes, Macnaughton emphasizes the dramatic quality in anecdotes that heightens the human condition in medical treatment. Thus, “by virtue of being dramatic, short, and therefore memorable, they [anecdotes] have an impact upon the education of physicians and even, occasionally, upon political decisions.” Macnaughton, “Anecdotes in Clinical Practice”, *Narrative Based Medicine: Dialogues and discourse in clinical practice*, ed. Trisha Greenhalgh and Brian Hurwitz (London: BMJ Books, 1998) 210.

<sup>52</sup> David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel*, 11-12.

<sup>53</sup> As modern neuroscience informs, the empathy of the human imagination is premised on a degree of neural mimicry as such process entails simulation of the other’s perspective using one’s neural machinery. The neural mechanism that governs empathy also constitutes the areas in the brain that inform emotional evaluations. The neuroscience of empathy and imaginative transposition of subjects assert that such behaviour uses neural circuits common to and shared between people and enacts a process of pure imagination. Jean Decety and Philip L. Jackson, “A Social-Neuroscience Perspective on Empathy”, 54-58. The equation of empathy and imagination in neuroscience immediately supports McEwan’s interpretation of terrorism as an act that entails a failure of imagination.

Mixing the solidity of his medical gaze with his subjective knowledge of the phenomenological experience of Baxter that he himself cannot define, Perowne is quick to classify it as Baxter's implicit claim to life, despite his degeneration. Thus he comes to realize:

Some, nineteenth-century poet [. . .] touched off in Baxter a yearning he could barely begin to define. That hunger is his claim on life, on a mental existence, and because it won't last much longer, because the door of his consciousness is beginning to close, he shouldn't pursue his claim from a cell, waiting for the absurdity of his trial to begin. (*SD* 278-79)

This reading of McEwan's *Saturday* offers a complex model of consciousness in a brain notionally degenerating in the eyes of medical science. It is one that emerges as a dual function of the construction of a new order of sentient selfhood (Baxter *changes his mind* on hearing the lyric) as well as an ability to connect to another voice through empathy (Arnold's poem reminds Baxter of the space-time in which he grew up). It is this dialectic of self-ing the poetic image and imaging the poetic self that informs Baxter's unique understanding of Arnold's lyric, itself a poem about the doubt of man in the face of the original Darwinian moment that corroded religious faith in the nineteenth century with the new discoveries in natural, biological and social science.<sup>54</sup>

The dialogic location of "Dover Beach" in the political context of *Saturday* is significant, as the Iraq War the novel is set right ahead "can be seen as the moment of truth when the 'official' political distinctions are blurred"<sup>55</sup> and ideological expectations are problematized.<sup>56</sup> The narrative in *Saturday* evokes the classic Arnoldian image of ignorant armies clashing by night with its subtexts of the Taliban and the Iraq crisis where the angry youth of the middle-East "are fighting over

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<sup>54</sup> James Longenbach illustrates how Matthew Arnold emerged as perhaps the first intellectual figure appearing in English public discourse as a pronouncer of cultural apocalypse and finality, to be taken up and extended later by what Frank Kermode classified as modernist myths of ending enacted in works such as Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Longenbach, "Matthew Arnold and the Modern Apocalypse", *PMLA* 104.5 (October 1989): 844-59.

<sup>55</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (London: Verso, 2004) 28.

<sup>56</sup> The Iraq War unsettled many political presumptions and many from the notionally left-wing (Christopher Hitchens himself being a classic case in point) were in favour of the decision taken by the Bush administration (notionally categorized as right-wing imperialism) to attack Iraq and dissolve the Saddam regime. Likewise, many figures from the notionally right-wing ideology (the American Conservative William F. Buckley Jr. and in England Peter Hitchens being prime examples) were against the war and saw the invasion as a gross impeachment of humanitarian values.

armies they will never see, about which they know almost nothing” (*SD* 190). *Saturday* thus offers a complex combination of social, emotional and medical situations through which emotions operate. As a fictional narrative about the human mind and its complex emotions, McEwan’s novel testifies to the analysis of empathy that is agreed upon by some leading tenets in brain science as well as the phenomenological study of the human mind. In the process, it asserts that the phenomenological frame can fruitfully inform the social neuroscience of cognition and also contribute towards a critical theory of communicative action.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Shaun Gallagher, “Scanning the Lifeworld”, 91.

## 5.5 The Politics of Panic in *Saturday*

The Neo-Darwinism at play in *Saturday* is in close correspondence to the middle-class liberal politics of the Western world that effaces difference in favour of dominant notions of reason and progress.<sup>58</sup> Thus the satire against some tenets of Neo-Darwinism that *Saturday* enacts also extends into an exposition of the inadequacies of the Western liberal notions of control and containment. McEwan's novel constitutes a subversive frame whereby Baxter the marginalized figure first appears to Perowne "on the edge of vision" (*SD* 83). Perowne half-perceives Baxter's presence after the first confrontation under his main window, lurking as a threat to the robust ontology of Perowne's Western liberal middle-class privilege.<sup>59</sup> It is important, while analysing the postcolonial presence in *Saturday*, to look at the historical frames it evokes and revisits in its debates on what constitutes culture and anarchy. Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach", a poem that is read out by Daisy to Baxter and which enacts the transformation in the latter, is more than a mere sub-textual presence in *Saturday*. McEwan's choice of poem is significant in the light of

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<sup>58</sup> This is immediately evinced by the intellectual and personal bonhomie among the leading figures of Neo-Darwinism and Neo-Conservatism such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, who, with all their subversive notions about medical science and culture, eventually embody the robust and arrogant ontology of Western liberal common sense and elegant design that is quick to classify any dissident voice as terrorism or quackery. Thus people such as Sam Harris, Hitchens, and Salman Rushdie who classified themselves as the '9/11 Liberals' were unanimous in their critique of Islam as the breeder of terrorism.

<sup>59</sup> The medical condition and debates on medical politics in McEwan's narrative appears to augment the postcolonial presence in *Saturday*, whereby the body of the degenerate exists as a threat to the dominant discourse of bio-politics that Perowne embodies. In his analysis of illness narratives, Arthur W. Frank classifies the 'post-colonial voice' in the narrative of illness broadly as one that refuses to be reified by the culturally dominant grammar of science. Frank argues that the post-colonial desire of assertion "is acted out less in the clinic than in stories that members of the remission society tell each other about their illnesses." Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 13. Frank describes the term "remission societies" as the invisible community of people who are "effectively well" but can "never be cured" (8). Baxter in McEwan's *Saturday* exemplifies the member of such society with his combination of invisibility (his condition is not physically manifested at an immediate level and hence he can 'appear' as a normal functioning citizen) and incurability (the Huntington's disease he has is incurable by his contemporary medical science). The remission society as classified by Frank corresponds to a location that exists – in its aporetic quality (and hence the post-colonial incommensurability that Frank ascribes to the term) – as an excess in relation to the bio-political gaze.

the debates around Neo-Darwinist medical politics that *Saturday* depicts with its questions about consciousness.

The Arnoldian notion of culture was an “*internal* condition” that transcended the “animality” of man “in the ever-increasing efficaciousness and in the general harmonious expansion of those gifts of thought and feeling that which make the peculiar dignity, wealth and happiness of human nature.”<sup>60</sup> Such teleology, based on the politics of communal and collective harmony and the possibility of the desired destination, was immediately subverted by the Darwinian notion of natural selection – by which “the innumerable beings on the face of this earth are enabled to struggle with each other, and the best adapted to survive”<sup>61</sup> – that left little room for free will, faith and agency. Indeed Arnold’s “Dover Beach” may be read as the resistance offered by poetry against the “bleached-out physical conception of objectivity”.<sup>62</sup> The self-reflexive quality of Arnold’s poem is illustrated in its evocative imagery that depicts the corrosion of faith with the rise of Darwinism even as it proclaims the possibilities of poetry, empathy and love.<sup>63</sup>

The drama of scientific certainty and subjective faith that operates along political praxis as well as the human body is revisited in McEwan’s *Saturday*, a novel that also depicts contemporary panic of terrorism and the imminence of Iraq-invasion. The cognitive networks in the novel bridge the personal and the political consciousness through mistaken identities – Perowne mistakenly considers the Russian cargo plane on fire as a terrorist attack and the Prime Minister Blair takes Perowne to be a painter and congratulates him on his art – conflicts, and affective reconciliations. Peter Childs underlines this dual concern in McEwan’s novel as he argues:

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<sup>60</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. Jane Garnett (Oxford: Oxford Classics, 2006) 36.

<sup>61</sup> Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Natural Means of Selection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979) 10.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 16. Arnold’s notion of culture as a structure of aesthetic and ethical values that is driven towards goals of progress and perfection was under obvious attack from Darwin’s theories of evolution that “develops towards no specific goal, and the values of any given culture are relative to a specific adaptive situation.” Joseph Carroll, *Literary Darwinism: Evolution, Human Nature and Literature*, 3.

<sup>63</sup> See M.W.Rowe, “Arnold and the Metaphysics of Science: A Note on ‘Dover Beach’”, *Victorian Poetry* 27.2 (Summer 1989): 213-17.

From one perspective *Saturday* is a book about the ‘war on terror’ that, in terms of international politics, has replaced the Cold War McEwan looked at in his mid-career novels, but from another perspective it is fundamentally and principally about consciousness.<sup>64</sup>

The merit of *Saturday* as a novel lies primarily in the ways in which it brings the two perspectives into unison in the fictional space of embodied emotions and real political moments. With its probe into the content of consciousness and its curiosity about how matter becomes conscious, *Saturday* is “apologetically anchored [. . .] in the material world”<sup>65</sup> of real historical events and times. The Modernist ‘one-day’ in McEwan’s novel is the historically and politically significant February 15 2003, the day when a mass of marchers gathered in London to protest against the war on Iraq, emerging as “UK’s biggest ever demonstration with at least 750,000 taking part” with contingents arriving “in the capital from about 250 towns and cities in the UK.”<sup>66</sup> Thus the medical and philosophical debates about what constitutes human consciousness and what brings meaning out of matter, exist simultaneously in McEwan’s novel with its real political time when the term terror “has become shorthand for Islamic fundamentalism, Al-Qaeda, suicide bombers, burkas, uranium enrichment, and other threats emanating from the Muslim-majority world.”<sup>67</sup>

While Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* is about the anxiety at the prospect of lenient immigration laws and the attempt to address the same through a pseudo-terroristic act that intends to induce pure fear without human loss, McEwan’s *Saturday* is about the fear of the threat that is operative in the political “elsewhere” as embodied by the ‘Other’ (the reader notices how Saddam and Baxter are described using similar physiognomic features by Perowne). Like *The Secret Agent* that presents the autistic Stevie as the unmotivated agent of terrorism and the politics of violence, *Saturday* presents Baxter with his Huntington’s disease as the fearful figure in whom ‘Otherness’ is embodied through entropy. It is interesting to do a comparative study of Baxter and Saddam as these two figures emerge in Perowne’s

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<sup>64</sup> Peter Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 150.

<sup>65</sup> Christopher Hitchens, “Civilization and its Malcontents”, *Atlantic Monthly* 295.3 (April 2005): 107-08; 108.

<sup>66</sup> “Million’ march against Iraq War”, BBC News, 16 February 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/2765041.stm>. Web. 26 March 2013.

<sup>67</sup> Vron Ware, “The White Fear Factor”, *Terror and the Postcolonial*, ed. Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010) 99.

interpretative frames. Saddam in Perowne's imagination "gives the impression of an overgrown, disappointed boy with a pudgy hangdog look, and dark eyes a little baffled by all that he still can't ordain" (*SD* 38) thus bringing the notional body of terror in an uncanny proximity to the body of confused cognition. Likewise, in his "swift transition from one mood to another, without awareness or memory, or understanding of how it seems to others" (*SD* 95), Baxter not only embodies a neurodegenerative disease where the narrative of the body is perpetually interrupted,<sup>68</sup> but also appears to appropriate the behaviour of "an 'irrational' fundamentalist who, unlike the Communists, lacks even an elementary sense of survival and respect for his own people".<sup>69</sup> While both embody the 'Otherness' that is feared in its potential for destruction (Baxter with his threat of violence in the street and Saddam with his supposed reign of terror and alleged nuclear missiles), they are also connected in their imminent decadence from the same potential through interventions from Western hegemonic traditions of power and culture.<sup>70</sup>

The politics of terror in *Saturday* inhabits many levels, with the white middle-aged Londoner Perowne emerging as nostalgic for the IRA and its cause for a united Ireland while describing Islamic fundamentalism as "the purity of nihilism" (*SD* 33). The easy alliances in the middle-class Perowne's imagination between Al Qaeda and Saddam's regime in Iraq appears to appropriate the conventional Western view of relating "al-Qaeda's militancy to Islamic insurgency in Iraq and elsewhere in order to assert that 'radical Islam' had spread into a consolidated 'ideology' to rival that of communism in the Cold War".<sup>71</sup> On a medical level, *Saturday* is about the "wonders it [medical science] performs, the faith it inspires, and against that, its slowly diminishing but still vast ignorance of the brain, and the mind, and the relation between the two" (*SD* 85-86). Thus McEwan's novel is rendered more complex by the way evolutionary neuroscience and philosophical ambivalence about the content of consciousness mix with "the chaotic confusion of the elite"<sup>72</sup> in the face of an international war. The vocabulary through which the real political space of

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<sup>68</sup> Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, 89.

<sup>69</sup> Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle*, 13-14.

<sup>70</sup> As Žižek contends in his logical analysis of the Iraq War, the American military was aware that the Saddam era was coming to an end anyway and would decline by default and thus the attack may be interpreted as actually directed against the truly fundamentalist regime that would follow Saddam. *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle*, 18.

<sup>71</sup> Alex Houen, "Sacrificial Militancy and the Wars around Terror", *Terror and the Postcolonial*, 113.

<sup>72</sup> Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle*, 173.

the Western metropolis is described is focalized through the gaze of the neurosurgeon Perowne “insufficiently alive to his involvement in the world.”<sup>73</sup> This happens at the beginning of the novel and immediately brings the biological and the political realms in close and problematic proximity, ironically cognized by Perowne as a grand success of liberal democracy and medical mastery:

Standing here, as immune to the cold as a marble statue, gazing towards Charlotte Street [. . .] Henry thinks the city is a success, a brilliant invention, a biological masterpiece – millions teeming around the accumulated and layered achievements of the centuries, as though around a coral reef, sleeping, working, entertaining themselves, harmonious for the most part, nearly everyone wanting it to work. (*SD* 5)

The euphoric vision of the Western metropolis as the centre of civilization and a grand bio-political masterpiece is echoed also in the lyrics of Theo’s blues-song performed at Notting Hill that seeks to seduce the loved ones away from despair and invites them to the City Square. Both Theo’s song and Henry’s vision seek to recreate “the city as an aestheticized site in which the strictures of modernist urbanity give way to a kind of utopian self-fulfillment made possible by contemporary life.”<sup>74</sup> However, what complicate the political context of the novel and make it more directly germane to the issues taken up in this thesis, are the modes of deviance and dissident identities that map the mutable metropolis. Thus the greyness of London’s Charlotte Street with its ill-fitting windows reminds the neurosurgeon Perowne (seated in his silver Mercedes) of Communist Warsaw. In a similar cognitive economy, the figure of Saddam evokes parallels with Hitler, Stalin and Mao in Perowne’s imagination.

The metropolis of London appears as an ideational construct in both *Heart of Darkness* and Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* and both Conrad’s Marlow and Woolf’s Peter Walsh embody the strategic and masculinist attempts to reify the city through dominant notions of progress and civilization.<sup>75</sup> Both Woolf and Conrad’s novels

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<sup>73</sup> Peter Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 146.

<sup>74</sup> Lynn Wells, *Ian McEwan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 122.

<sup>75</sup> Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* affirms that what redeems the nihilism of the imperialist machinery is the “idea” of it all, one that can possibly justify the materiality of the act. Of course Conrad’s novel situates Marlow in an ironic light with its unreliability and the novel itself at the end emerged as the failure of the ideational frame that is paradoxically embodied most immediately by Marlow himself. Likewise, Peter Walsh in Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* embodies the ironic position in his attempt to glorify the post-War metropolis as a space for masculinist progress and possibilities even as he quickly discerns the decadence in the signs and bodies around. Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* and Perowne in *Saturday* may be compared as embodying the existentialist knowledge of ambivalence that emerges



showcase how such attempts are coded with the cultural and masculinist vocabulary of the day. McEwan's *Saturday* presents conflicts between differing notions of what constitutes civilization and its discontents, and dramatizes different codes of masculinity as embodied by Perowne and Baxter. In his privileged position as a white middle-class professionally successful Londoner, Perowne appears to enjoy immunity from the threats of the "people [who] remember their essential needs and how they're not being met" (*SD* 62). In her analysis of the postcolonial presence in *Saturday*, Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace suggests that McEwan's novel emerges as "mostly devoid of London's vibrant multicultural scene, the ongoing legacy of the empire whose demise has been much lamented."<sup>76</sup> In presenting the middle-class Perowne as someone who appears comfortably cut off from the anxieties of mutable identities across the metropolis, McEwan manages to make the novel more insidiously political with the ironic insulation of the protagonist, his medical gaze, and his inadequate understanding of the human consciousness as well as of the contemporary political scene.

Perowne's stance on the Iraq-War and the marginalized presence of London's non-white multicultural population in his imagination<sup>77</sup> are both premised on a desire for harmony with a code of life that corresponds most closely to Western liberal middle-class values. The international and national discourses of domination that are embedded in the novel are synchronised with the political unconscious of fear and the strategies of 'Other'-ing. Writing from post-Iraq War era and commenting on the threat of non-white immigrations in the Western metropolis, Vron Ware argues:

As the military occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan become ever more questionable and more futile, political discourse in the UK repeatedly directs public attention to the potential disruption that "immigrants" represent to some imagined harmonious British way of life. Led from above, these

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out of their witnessing of epiphany. Marlow sees Kurtz articulating the horror of imperialism and Perowne sees Baxter deconstruct the dogma of rational science and liberal politics in an age of neo-imperialism, through his empathetic connection with poetry.

<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace, "Postcolonial melancholia in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*", *Studies in the Novel* 39.4 (Winter 2007): 465-80; 465.

<sup>77</sup> As the omniscient narrator informs, Perowne notices two West-Indians and three Middle Easterners "who might be Turks" (*SD* 145) in the square near his house and had automatically assumed that they were drug dealers before his son Theo corrected him with the fact that the group sells cheap flight tickets and bootleg CDs. The patronizing gaze that Perowne projects towards this group is expressed in his apologetic location in relation to them and his desire that "One day he'll buy something from them" (*SD* 146).

successive official scoldings, warnings, and threats, combined with ever-stricter immigration control in the name of “fairness”, only serve to reinforce the borders held in place by intransigent racism and the “white fear” it feeds off.<sup>78</sup>

The insidious fear of the attack of the ‘Other’ that *Saturday* dramatizes is done through a complex combination of admission and absence. Thus Perowne sees and is aware of the presence of the multicultural populace around him but they almost always exist in the margins and never enter the centrality of his symbolic register. This is emblemized at a broader political level by the ambivalence around the Iraq War and embodied on an immediate level by Baxter “who comes to represent the unruly other whom Perowne must restrain for the sake of general order.”<sup>79</sup> Baxter’s intrusion into the solid Western bourgeois familial space of the Perowne household may be interpreted as the retaliation of the social and political ‘Other’, paralleling “the looming international threat of Islamist militancy, as demonstrated by the 9/11 attacks that serve as the novel’s historical backdrop, and which the imminent invasion of Iraq in the text is ostensibly meant to contain.”<sup>80</sup> The threat that Baxter embodies is thus personal as well as political and it is tempting to read him as a Caliban figure that is potentially subversive (the analogy is further informed by Baxter’s attempted rape of Perowne’s beautiful poet-daughter) but eventually overpowered by the machinery of European medical science.<sup>81</sup>

Embodying an order of masculinity physically as well as discursively different from that of Perowne with his short stocky frame, “thick eyebrows and dark brown hair razored close to the skull” (*SD* 87-88), Baxter also contains a “secret shame” (*SD* 94) of the knowledge of his hereditary disease, that, once exposed, compromises his masculinity before his cohorts. It threatens exclusion in a way similar to the manner in which the birthmark of Flory does in Orwell’s *Burmese Days*. The nervous condition he embodies that is invisible as well as incurable by

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<sup>78</sup> Vron Ware, “The White Fear Factor”, 110.

<sup>79</sup> Lynn Wells, *Ian McEwan*, 117.

<sup>80</sup> Lynn Wells, *Ian McEwan*, 112.

<sup>81</sup> The Caliban figure is politically significant in the post-colonial narrative, not only due to the threat against colonial hegemony that it embodies but also due to the manner in which the threat is enacted through the excess of the earthly body, as against the more intellectual presence of the Ariel-archetype. However, as Gayatri Spivak astutely warns as the critic of post-colonial reason, the postcolonial should not take Caliban as the ultimate model of subversion and the desire to *become* Caliban is always characterized by the crisis that stems from the fact that Caliban is “a name in a play, an inaccessible blankness circumscribed by an interpretable text.” Spivak, *A Critic of Postcolonial Reason*, 118.

contemporary medical science connects Baxter also to Septimus in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* whose 'nervous' crisis of the self is also and similarly accompanied by an increasing inability to feel.<sup>82</sup> The political menace that Baxter comes to embody in *Saturday* is corroborated in Lee Siegel's view of the figure as

[a] kind of echo of the hatred and anger of the disenfranchised, militant, impoverished Third World. Certainly he poses to Henry the ethical challenge presented by poor, starving countries to the affluent West [. . .] He also poses to the suddenly vulnerable Henry a threat of annihilation similar to the threat made against the West.<sup>83</sup>

Baxter is a disturbing post-colonial presence that is perceived by the middle-class Perowne through the frame of criminology by default. He drives a series five BMW that Perowne "associates for no good reason with criminality, drug-dealing" (*SD* 83). Baxter may thus be interpreted as the threat to the structures of denial – the strategic avoidance of conspicuous consumption whereby the professional classes mark themselves off from the 'vulgar' nouveaux riches – through which Western middle-class privilege promotes and perpetuates itself. He is the suddenness in the street that can subvert the comfortable complacency that Perowne embodies. In shifting Perowne's attention from the brain to the mind, Baxter paradoxically emancipates him from his bio-political fixation with empirical matter and educates him in the knowledge of his lack. However, as the perceived pathological presence (both medically and politically) suited to subvert dominant notions of politeness and progress, Baxter is essentially emasculated and overpowered by the machinations of medicine and poetry. Even his captivation by Daisy's recitation of Matthew Arnold's poetry (which is functionally and structurally analogous to Henry's recitation of medical knowledge earlier in the day) is premised on the power to arrest, overwhelm and capture. Both Perowne's medical science and Arnold's poem recited by the Oxford-educated Daisy correspond to the high-points in science and culture through

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<sup>82</sup> The inability to feel compromises the location of the self as evinced in the works on brain damage patients by Antonio Damasio. As Perowne's medical voice later informs in *Saturday*, Baxter's neurodegenerative condition will be accompanied by a gradual disappearance of emotions. Both *Mrs Dalloway* and *Saturday* showcase how the culturally constructed codes of masculinity appear under the reifying gaze of medical science but what distinguishes McEwan's novel is the way the medical gaze in itself is subsequently subjectivized through a phenomenological frame of affect and empathy.

<sup>83</sup> Leo Siegel, "The Imagination of Disaster", *The Nation* 280.14 (April 11, 2005): 33-34; 34. Siegel's reading corroborates the interpretation of Baxter as a Caliban-figure controlled and eventually castrated by the magic of Perowne's medical science.

which Baxter may be controlled and coaxed away from deviance and drafted back into the dominant order.

The mode in which Baxter's mind is eventually contained by the arresting powers of the high-British literary tradition and medical rationalism is in close correspondence to the desire of imperial control and hegemony in the neo-imperial cosmos that is presented and ironized in McEwan's novel.<sup>84</sup> However, what further complicates *Saturday* is the privileged position that Baxter comes to assume in the eyes of Perowne at the end of the novel, as he emerges as the subject who awakens Perowne to his own subjective intentionality and agentic awareness. Apart from the ambivalence about medical and existentialist knowledge Baxter causes in Perowne, there is also the associated political shift as London changes in Perowne's imaginative register from a city of promises and biological successes to a space waiting for its bombs, like many other cities of the world.

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<sup>84</sup> Lynn Wells, *Ian McEwan*, 121.

## 5.6 Masculinity and Masculinist Performance in *Saturday*

The first encounter in *Saturday* between Perowne and Baxter emerges as a dramatic *ante bellum* that is heavily coded with masculinist vocabulary. The performative masculine rituals that immediately set off after the car crash are focalized through Perowne's mind:

He is cast in a role, and there's no way out. This, as people like to say, is urban drama. A century of movies and half a century of television have rendered the matter insincere. It is pure artifice. Here are the guys, the strangers, whose self-respect is on the line. Someone is going to have to impose his will and win, and the other is going to give way. (SD 86)

Perowne's awareness of the performative quality and the rituals of the situation that demands a drama is strangely close to the imperial masculinist codes that needed to be performed by Orwell's narrators and narrating self in the colonial contact-zone. The knowledge, that he cannot escape from the pre-set codes corresponding to the culture of confrontation in an urban space, places Perowne in close proximity to the narrator in Orwell's essay "Shooting an Elephant" who realizes, to his horror, that he must subordinate his human will and agency to the pre-set imperial identities. The colonial codes that inform Orwell's experiences in Burma appear as structurally and functionally analogous to the complex urban rituals in the post-colonial imperial metropolis where multiculturalism is simultaneously celebrated and marginalized<sup>85</sup> through the "fantasy about the collective mediated by the narratives and discourses provided by the state, commerce and mass media."<sup>86</sup>

The event of Perowne's car crash and the actions following it are carefully narrated with detailed delineation of the differences between the Western liberal middle-class gentility that Perowne embodies and the deliberate dislocation from the same in Baxter, who appears dressed in "trainers, track-suits and hooded tops – the currency of the street, so general as to be no style at all" (SD 84-85). The urban

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<sup>85</sup> Elizabeth Wallace, "Postcolonial Melancholia in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*", 467.

<sup>86</sup> Sebastian Groes, "The City in *Saturday*", 112,

drama of anger and assertion contains its unique logic and economy of expectations and Perowne finds himself paradoxically inconvenienced by the fact that his car is not visibly blemished by the crash as “In immediate, tactical terms, this seems to leave him as a disadvantage. He had nothing to show for his anger” (*SD* 84). Baxter meanwhile picks his “BMW’s shorn-off wing mirror, turning it over the way one might a dead animal” (*SD* 84), thus immediately gaining a significant score over Perowne in the abruptly erupted urban drama of discontent the two men find themselves in. The scoring pattern continues as Baxter offers Perowne a cigarette that the latter refuses, thus revealing himself as “not man enough to smoke, or more essentially, to offer gifts” (*SD* 87). Perowne’s assiduous attempt not to emerge as passive also fails in the face of Baxter’s brushing away of formal politeness as he ignores the “Mr” with which Perowne prefaces his address. Baxter’s “sloping shoulders, and the built-up trapezoids suggest time in the gym” and “There’s also tightness in the fabric round the biceps” further indicating his masculine muscles conducive to confronting the masculinist code of conduct among the ones “who live beyond the law” (*SD* 88). The drama of domination vacillates between the realm of the body and that of language as Perowne adds a strategic “indeed” as he attempts to inform Baxter of the latter’s careless drive out of the lane without looking. The use of ‘indeed’ “entails decisions; he isn’t going to pretend to the language of the street. He’s standing on professional dignity” (*SD* 89). Perowne’s strategy of asserting his status through language fails to impress Baxter who gangs up with Nark and Nigel and seek physically to dominate Perowne with “manoeuvrings [that] are clumsily deliberate, like an ill-rehearsed children’s ballet” (*SD* 90). The genteel codes of insurance exchange and logical argument that Perowne counts on quickly disappear at the prospect of physical assault whereby “honour is to be satisfied by a thorough beating” (*SD* 93).

What rescues Perowne from the certainty of physical domination and defeat in the street-fight with Baxter and his cronies is his superior medical knowledge through which he cognizes the nervous condition Baxter embodies with “small tremors that never quite form an expression” (*SD* 93). Anticipating the dementia and miserable end that Baxter’s sickness will eventually lead him to, Perowne mentally visualizes “how the brilliant machinery of being is undone by the tiniest of faulty cogs, the insidious whisper of ruin, a single bad idea lodged in every cell, on every

chromosome four”(SD 94). In subjecting and scanning Baxter’s body under his metonymic medical gaze in which “to be flexible, the body has to be a kind of machine”<sup>87</sup>, Perowne essentially transforms “Baxter the person into Baxter the series of symptoms [. . .] which recaptures the pure disruption of Baxter back into the ordered, safe world of Perowne.”<sup>88</sup> In blurting out his diagnosis of Baxter’s Huntington’s disease, Perowne effectively seeks to emasculate him with his medical gaze in order to tip the scales back to his side in this ritual battle of masculinist power. In voicing the possibility that Baxter’s father carried the degenerative gene that has contributed to his current neurological condition, Perowne hits where it hurts the most, opening the gap between the male body and its masculinist identity. As the secret shame of Baxter is exposed, the scales veer back on Perowne’s side in the urban drama of confrontation. The episode is elaborately described using the vocabulary of power embodied by Perowne’s privileged medical knowledge with which he effectively emasculates Baxter before his mates. In performing his role as the medical scientist with privileged vision Perowne “has the impression of himself as a witch doctor delivering a curse” (SD 94). He thus merges medical science and magic into a discursive construct that constitutes classification, interrogation and domination.

The position of power that Perowne immediately ascends to reveals itself in the “vague, febrile movement” that Baxter makes to restrain his companions and the exchanges that ensue merge the metaphor of magic with the rationale of medical science:

When Baxter speaks at last, his voice is different, cautious perhaps.  
‘You knew my father?’

‘I’m a doctor.’

‘Like fuck you are, dressed like that.’

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<sup>87</sup> Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, 88.

<sup>88</sup> Robert Eaglestone, “Contemporary Fiction and Terror”, *Terror and the Postcolonial*, 366. Eaglestone’s essay takes a completely contrasting view to the one articulated in this chapter in stating that McEwan’s *Saturday* shows art as ineffective on the face of terror and Baxter’s change on hearing Daisy read out Arnold’s “Dover Beach” works not so much as a transformation wrought by a work of literature as a ruse and a technê “like a good squash stroke or deft surgical cut with nothing irreplaceable and uniquely literary about it” (364). Such a view, although valid, appears to miss the crucial questions on consciousness that McEwan’s novel asks, questions that do not compromise the political issues in the novel but rather accentuate those through the merging between the political and the phenomenological realms as this chapter has attempted to show.

‘I’m a doctor. Has someone explained to you what’s going to happen? Do you want me to tell you what I think your problem might be?’

It works, the shameless blackmail works. Baxter flares suddenly. ‘What problem?’

And before Perowne can reply, he adds ferociously, ‘And you’ll shut the fuck up.’ Then, as quickly, he subsides, and turns away. They are together, he and Perowne, in a world not of the medical, but of the magical. When you’re diseased it is unwise to abuse the shaman. (*SD* 94-95)

The positions of power quickly change and Perowne moves toward the dominant role in the drama with his combination of medical knowledge and strategic exploitation of Baxter’s vulnerability. In combining “modern scientific mastery with atavism”<sup>89</sup>, Perowne holds Baxter in thrall with the sudden and seemingly inexplicably acquired information about his family and their genetic disease.

The spell that Perowne casts on Baxter in this urban drama of masculinist domination proceeds with a strategic combination of disclosure and shock appearing to appropriate Michael Taussig’s account of the visceral nature of faith and scepticism:

The real skill of the practitioner lies not in skilled concealment but in the skilled revelation of skilled concealment. [. . .] The mystery is heightened, not dissipated, by unmasking and in various ways, direct and oblique; ritual serves as a stage for so many unmaskings. Hence power flows not from masking but from unmasking, which masks more than masking.<sup>90</sup>

Perowne’s medical magic that combines the empirical gaze with uncanny knowledge seeks not to mask but unmask to a sudden and startling degree in its bid to unnerve Baxter in the urban drama where “nothing can be predicted, but everything, as soon as it happens, will seem to fit” (*SD* 87). Before long Baxter finds himself possessed by the power of Perowne’s medical control that further reifies him with his interrogation about his past, family and education. In

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<sup>89</sup> Lynn Wells, *Ian McEwan*, 118.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Taussig, “Viscerality, Faith and Scepticism: Another Theory of Magic”, *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment*, ed. Brigit Meyer and Peter Pels (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003) 273.



consolidating his medical gaze with questions about the history of Baxter's family and education, Perowne unleashes an arsenal of ideological apparatus and enacts what Foucault describes as the "collective system of hygiene and scientific technique of cure made [notionally] available to individual and family demand by a professional corps of doctors qualified and, as it were, recommended by the State."<sup>91</sup> As Baxter accepts "Perowne's right to interrogate" after "they've slipped into their roles" (*SD* 96), the ontology of masculinity shifts from the physical body to that of the power embodied by medical knowledge. In offering Baxter the contact of a colleague who "could make things easier" (*SD* 96) for him, Perowne symbolically returns Baxter's earlier masculinist offer of a cigarette. This also attempts to further Perowne's medical spell on the sick with the utopian promise wrought through the construct of the clinic that allows an "exact superposition of the 'body' of the disease and the body of the sick man"<sup>92</sup> in the process enacting the "notion that one can improve – control – a deviant subpopulation by enumeration and classification."<sup>93</sup>

As the Prospero-figure with his superior magic that can dominate the powerfully subversive physicality of the deviant body, Perowne perceives "the vaguely ape-like features" (*SD* 98) of Baxter the Caliban-figure that show signs of returning to violence. The spell of medical magic begins to wane and Baxter realizes "he's been cheated of a little violence and the exercise of a little power, and the more he considers it, the angrier he becomes" (*SD* 98). But the emasculation wrought by the medical gaze cast by Perowne had nearly completed its course and as Baxter seeks to summon his supporters back to gather force and retaliate, they move away, thus formally finishing the masculinist drama of power with Baxter's spectacular and humiliating defeat. The description is deliberately couched with metaphors of war that bring Baxter close to the imminent fate of Saddam again as the body of potentially fearful 'Other'-ness that is eventually controlled and castrated:

The general has been indecisive, the troops are deserting, the humiliation is complete. Perowne too sees his opportunity to withdraw. [. . .] As he starts the engine he sees Baxter in his rear-view mirror, dithering between the departing factions, shouting at both. [. . .] He sees his racket on the front seat

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<sup>91</sup> Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, trans. C. Gordon (Brighton: Harvester, 1980) 174.

<sup>92</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 3.

<sup>93</sup> Ian Hacking *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 3.

beside him. This is surely the moment to slip away, while the possibility remains that he can still rescue his game. (*SD* 98-99)

The masculinist energy and unrest that Perowne attracts through his confrontation with Baxter stay with him as he walks into the squash game with Jay Strauss, his American colleague, “a powerful, earthbound, stocky man, physically affectionate, energetic, direct in manner – to some of his English colleagues” (*SD* 100-01). The squash match between the two men becomes an automatic extension of the drama in the street with Perowne now assuming the baddy’s role with his illogical arguments and abuses. The episode is also significant politically inasmuch as it situates Perowne in a more ambivalent position about the Iraq War in relation to the arrogant American notion that “Iraq is a rotten state, a natural ally of terrorists, bound to cause mischief at some point and may as well be taken out now while the US military is feeling perky after Afghanistan” (*SD* 100). The squash game that emerges as another masculinist affair between two men furious to win is a complex extension of the urban drama that Perowne had won earlier. Soon the match becomes a war that foregrounds the bodily desire and primal urge to dominate:

Both men raise their games. Every point is now a drama, a playlet of sudden reversals, and all the seriousness and fury of the third game’s long rally is resumed. Oblivious to their protesting hearts, they hurl themselves into every corner of the court. [. . .] There’s nothing at stake – they’re not on the club’s squash ladder. There’s only the irreducible urge to win, as biological as thirst. (*SD* 113)

In their biological desire for victory in the squash game that “becomes an extended metaphor of character defect” (*SD* 106), the two men – who, appropriately enough, professionally embody the arrogant certainties of medical science – appear to enact what the Neo-Darwinian natural scientist defines as “the war of attrition” where “*both* contestants pay the price but only one of them gets the goods.”<sup>94</sup> *Saturday* is

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<sup>94</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 76. It is also interesting to study Perowne’s militant behaviour and shameless petulance during the squash game with what Dawkins classifies in the same book as “dominance hierarchy”(82) whereby memory of previous fight results increasingly determine an individual’s propensity and desire for victory. In carrying the taste of the victory over Baxter,

remarkable in the way it brings together primal propensities for domination, self-preservation and victory in the twenty-first century metropolis. It also problematizes the economy of power and masculinity at various political levels of exchange, as men fight with each other and as nations prepare to war with ignorant armies and weapons of mass destruction that threaten *in absentia*.

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Perowne seeks to perpetuate the pleasure by converting the squash game into a war that directly involves the body, its functionality and the masculinist prestige associated with the same.

## 5.7 *Saturday* and the epistemology of the Epiphany

The epiphanic moment in *Saturday* occurs not in the space of the subconscious but amidst the medical materiality of the operating theatre where the brain and the mind meet through a combination of medical gaze and phenomenological insight as Perowne embarks on operating on the unconscious Baxter:

For all the recent advances, it's still not known how this well-protected one kilogram or so of cells actually encodes information, how it holds experiences, memories, dreams and intentions. He doesn't doubt that in years to come, the coding mechanism will be known, though it might not be in his lifetime [ . . . ] But even when it has, the wonder will remain, that mere wet stuff can make this bright inward cinema of thought, of sight and sound and touch bound into a vivid illusion of an instantaneous present, with a self, another brightly wrought illusion, hovering like a ghost at its centre. Could it ever be explained, how matter becomes conscious? (*SD* 254-55)

Perowne's phenomenological awareness of the complexity of the human brain, and how that connects to the mind that enacts the unique self, breaks away from his erstwhile bio-political gaze and anticipates the existentialist ambivalence with which *Saturday* ends. As the ghost in the machine, the human mind transcending the neural nets in the brain emerges as essentially unmappable by the medical gaze. The cinema of thought enacted by the self-reflective mind is situated at an epistemic excess in relation to the cellular reductionism of medical science. The science itself contains the possibility of dangerous dogmatism with its deterministic explanations of the laws governing human purposes.<sup>95</sup> Moving away from the determinism of such a medical gaze, Perowne's phenomenological insight into the complexity of consciousness and the philosophical enquiry about how matter becomes conscious instead connect to a sense of wonder about the majesty of the mind's unique agency, a wonder that he acknowledges will remain, despite the discoveries medical science may achieve in the future.

In his elucidation of wonder about the human mind as it is born out of the neural brain, Perowne, the professional reductionist, comes – unbeknownst to

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<sup>95</sup> Waugh, "Science and Fiction in the 1990s", 65.

himself – to articulate how existentialist feeling of the highest order is a phenomenological category of knowledge.<sup>96</sup> In realizing the limitation of the strictly scientific frame and acknowledging its determinism as a dogma, Perowne moves from the physical to the phenomenological, where the epistemic moment informs existentialist ambivalence. The ambivalence that he experiences contributes to a deeper understanding of the ontology of the human mind and an existentialist understanding of human self, agency and intentionality in relation to subjective feelings. More significantly, moving away from the ironic unreliability that had characterized him as a sure scientist with arrogant medical knowledge throughout the narrative, Perowne’s in-sight into an epistemological ambivalence invests him with the privileged frame of humility that the philosopher possesses with the subjective marks of affective awareness.<sup>97</sup>

In his ambivalence, Perowne eventually comes to inhabit a dialectic of ignorance and understanding that moves away from his previous scientific arrogance and looks instead at a deeper philosophical frame that investigates the limits of bio-scientific knowledge.<sup>98</sup> The acknowledgement of blank spaces in scientific knowledge paradoxically informs Perowne’s increased awareness of the epistemology of the sentient self and its intentionality that had been brought to light before him by Baxter’s connection with the lyric and his subsequent epiphany in the operation theatre. Perowne’s phenomenological in-sight into Baxter’s brain thus seeks to look beyond matter in its philosophical questions about human life and consciousness. In the process he realizes that the transition from matter to meaning

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<sup>96</sup> Matthew Radcliffe, *Feelings of Being: Phenomenology, Psychiatry and the Sense of Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 56. Perowne’s wonder about how matter becomes conscious corresponds to the issues that concern philosophers of cognition today and in particular to the stance taken by Thomas Nagel whose critique of the empirical euphoria of neuroscience about its claims to know all about the brain advocates instead a shift to an understanding of the human being as “as a single subject of experience and action” rather than a prototypical entity that is random yet scientifically quantifiable. Nagel’s view eschews the medical metonymic gaze (one that had been previously used by Perowne in the novel to reify Baxter) and instead sees a “type of self-understanding [that] may encounter limits which have not been generally foreseen: the personal, mentalist idea of human beings may resist the sort of coordination with an understanding of humans as physical systems, that would be necessary to yield anything describable as an understanding of the physical basis of mind.” Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 147.

<sup>97</sup> William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979) 63.

<sup>98</sup> Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 3.

constitutes not just neural mechanism but the active agency of the feeling and living self that is unique in its self-reflexive location in the broader narratives of language and culture. The inward cinema that brings meaning out of matter and consciousness out of a semi-solid mass is thus invested with a complex self-reflexivity that is simultaneously aware of its subjective situatedness and operative presence.<sup>99</sup> In an interesting way, there is thus a structural and functional similarity between the epistemology of the self-reflective mind and the unfurling of the literary narrative self-reflexively embedded in language.<sup>100</sup>

As Perowne gazes into the gap between the mind and brain, he inhabits the threshold moment where change in knowledge takes place through an epiphany, enacting consciousness' gaze into its own self-revealing interiority. In trying to figure how the matter of Baxter's brain becomes conscious mind, Perowne in essence looks into his own. It is at this point that the novel brings together intentionality and agency in a cognitive connectedness. In the process, the 'Other' (as embodied by Baxter) is interiorized through inquisitive empathy that breaks the barriers between the material and the phenomenological realms, the empirical and the emotional states of being.<sup>101</sup> In using the medical gaze while evaluating empathy, McEwan's novel approximates what philosophers of mind classify as "POSE, or the Problem of the Other's Subjective Experience, a problem at the heart of novelists' imaginative representations of others' minds, motivations and sensations."<sup>102</sup> In its movements between the aesthetics of affect and social cognition, McEwan's novel underlines the epiphanic quality of existentialist experience and shows how the ambivalence born out of the process can inform the humility that characterises true

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<sup>99</sup> Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012) 11.

<sup>100</sup> This connection between the mind and the narrative which operate with self-reflexive awareness of their own epistemological processes has also been demonstrated in the first chapter on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

<sup>101</sup> As neuroscientists study the cognitive role of the emotions it is increasingly revealed that "much can be learned by studying how the brain processes stimuli and controls objectively measured responses in emotional situations." LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*, 304. Moreover, as Damasio contends in his work on feelings, the borderlines between subjective entities and empirical observations blur away during medical analysis and "Subjective entities require, as do objective ones, that enough observers undertake rigorous observations according to the same experimental design". *The Feeling of What Happens*, 309.

<sup>102</sup> Suzanne Keane, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)14.

philosophical understanding. The complexity of *Saturday* lies in its depiction of the manner in which such an understanding also extends into an un-learning of interpellated political knowledge.

The smug satisfaction with which Perowne had woken up in the morning and seen the city as a biological masterpiece is now permanently disturbed and Perowne's vision of the metropolis that is his home is significantly altered as "London, his small part of it, lies wide open, impossible to defend, waiting for its bomb, like a hundred other cities" (*SD* 276). The self-reflexivity of human consciousness, like that of the literary narrative itself, is flagged up again as the thoughts of the sleepy Perowne are on sleep itself which is cognized as "a material things, an ancient means of transport, a softly moving belt, conveying him into Sunday" (*SD* 279).<sup>103</sup> McEwan makes unmistakable intertextual references to "The Dead" at this point and Perowne's awareness of his subjective change from the position of certainty to contingency – he "feels skinny and frail in his dressing gown, facing the morning that's still dark, still part of yesterday" (*SD* 275)<sup>104</sup> – is not dissimilar to Gabriel Conroy's realization of himself as "a nervous well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealizing his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror."<sup>105</sup> The liminal temporal zone between yesterday and tomorrow that Perowne perceives himself inhabiting symbolically informs his existentialist transition from certainty to ambivalence. The elegance in description at this point in *Saturday*, if suggestive of Perowne's changed consciousness from the metonymic to the metaphoric realm, is also indicative of the uniqueness of the commonplace as the perceiving subject ultimately drowns in its own stream of senses. In its self-reflective epiphany that situates the epistemology of the self within its phenomenological frame, *Saturday* concludes with "a reminder of

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<sup>103</sup> It is interesting to compare Perowne's sensibility to that of Gabriel in Joyce's "The Dead" as the latter perceives that his "own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world". Joyce, *Dubliners* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2004) 233.

<sup>104</sup> It is interesting to compare Perowne's sense of the blurring borderlines between past and present with the modern neuroscientific notion that the immediate present as inhabited by the subject also involves memory and thus the past informs the present directly in the subjective perception of the self. See LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*, 278.

<sup>105</sup> James Joyce, "The Dead", 229.

the mind's capacity to move between many worlds, but where the ordinary, sensory world carries the paramount demand for assent to it as the 'real'."<sup>106</sup>

*Saturday* ends with a literal stream of consciousness as Perowne savours the scent and the warmth of his wife, gets comfort from "her beloved form, and draws closer to her"( *SD* 279), preparing to sleep. As the feeling subject dissolves away to sleep with a final affirmation of being alive to emotions, it also concedes the loss of another sentient day and the imminent move towards nothingness, thus furthering the dialectic of attainment and loss that McEwan's novel dramatizes. As *Saturday* ends with Perowne's consciousness, and as language melts into the purity of the senses, the narration communicates an awakening of affect that connects to the agency of the feeling human self. Thus Perowne metaphorically wakes up to a heightened self-reflective subjectivity while literally moving into sleep. The only certainty that Perowne appears to arrive at with his newly acquired knowledge of (medical and political) ambivalence is the affirmation of the affective now, the phenomenological moment that occupies and informs the epistemology of the unique feeling self. Perowne's subjective awareness of his own sentience as he drifts into sleep corresponds to "a mind with an autobiographical self capable of guiding reflective deliberation and gathering knowledge."<sup>107</sup> In his movement from "ignorance and innocence to knowingness and self,"<sup>108</sup> the neurosurgeon Perowne approximates the epistemology of emotions that constitutes the feeling self through a process in which the self is embodied, enacted and extended not as "a detached intellectual act but a way of cognitively *grappling* with the world."<sup>109</sup>

Emotions emerge in *Saturday*, not only as a cognitive quality that cannot be mapped by the machines in Perowne's operation theatre, but also as an evaluator of values through which human judgements are made through a process "in which we acknowledge our neediness and incompleteness before those elements that we do not

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<sup>106</sup> Patricia Waugh, "Thinking in Modernism", 79.

<sup>107</sup> Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, 307.

<sup>108</sup> Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 4.

<sup>109</sup> Robert C. Solomon, "Emotions, Thoughts, and Feelings: Emotions as Engagements with the World", *Thinking About Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions*, ed Robert C. Solomon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 77. It is interesting to compare Solomon's idea of cognitive grappling with Frederick Jameson's notion of cognitive mappings of the human subject in the culture of capitalism. Jameson's theory of location will be looked at in the conclusion of this thesis.



fully control.”<sup>110</sup> In appearing to move from pure biology to phenomenology (a move symbolically signified by the transition from the scientific to the subjective realm), the narrative that informs Perowne’s knowledge and subsequent articulation of ambivalence also voices the philosophical affiliation of modern cognitive science. It is one that reinforces its claim to truth not by an additional baggage of medical data but by inhabiting “a sense of reality that is not accessible to the standpoint of empirical science.”<sup>111</sup> In its depiction of epiphany, McEwan’s *Saturday* exhibits the legacy of the high-Modernist narrative but complicates it further by showing the convergence of the medical and the existentialist realms focalized through the philosophical awakening of a neuroscientist. Such a convergence offers a fuller understanding of human agency and intentionality in a world of political change and of the contingent threat of terror. Perhaps Perowne’s final affirmation of feeling as he moves into sleep<sup>112</sup> comes closest to his understanding of the existentialist question that he had articulated earlier while looking at Baxter’s brain. It thus posits the unique agency of the emotional self as the response to a question born out of a philosophical enquiry in the medical operation theatre, about how matter becomes conscious.

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<sup>110</sup> Martha Nussbaum, “Emotions as Judgements of Value and Importance”, *Thinking About Feeling*, 184.

<sup>111</sup> Matthew Ratcliffe, “Understanding existential changes in psychiatric illness: The indispensability of phenomenology”, *Psychiatry as Cognitive Neuroscience: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed Matthew R. Broome and Lisa Bortolotti, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 241.

<sup>112</sup> Perowne’s concluding thoughts are about his awareness of his own feeling self: “There’s always this, is one of his remaining thoughts. And then: there’s only this” (*SD* 279).

## Conclusion

I began my study with a novel about the political moment of the late nineteenth-century British imperialism and end by looking at a novel about the neo-imperialist moment before the 2003 Iraq War. The medical culture with which this thesis began was one overdetermined by Darwinism and its political extensions. The final chapter investigates the neo-Darwinist culture of twenty-first century medical science, where bio-political hegemony enmeshes with capitalist coercion by transforming patients into consumers.<sup>1</sup> Throughout this work, the male body under the bio-political gaze has been viewed as a metonymy of the subject and its agency cut down by strictures of cultural and corporeal control. I tried to investigate the manners in which the bio-political realm constructs its irrefutable authority by an apparently seamless logic that sanctions privilege and manufactures consent. Such an authority emerges in my research as an extension of ideological consistency through which the “specific unpredictability of thought and action” is effaced.<sup>2</sup>

In essence, I have tried to trace the ontology of the self that metamorphoses from being a consumer to becoming an outsider. Such a transformation, enacted by the male protagonists in the selected literary texts, has been interpreted as a painful process of emotional awakening as well as political un-learning. This thesis has tried to show how learnt bio-political knowledge is disrupted in literary texts during personal moments of panic that connect to states of self-censorship and auto-critique.<sup>3</sup> Such moments reveal the constructed quality of masculinity, socially sanctioned emotional behaviour, and political identity, while allowing the feeling self to interrogate the schism between ideology and intentionality. This, in turn, articulates the disassociations between the agency of individuation and its erstwhile intersubjective associations.<sup>4</sup> I hope to have investigated such disassociations, by interpreting subjective experiences in literary texts that foreground masculine selves politically and privately changed by emotions, cognitions and affect.

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<sup>1</sup> Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself*, 9-40.

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 1994) 350.

<sup>3</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010) 401.

<sup>4</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 189.

As opposed to the seamless structures of control enacted under the auspices of a socially sanctioned hegemonic gaze, the literature of bio-political panic is constituted by self-reflective introspections, ambivalence and epistemological interruptions. Those interruptions, as I have attempted to show, problematize representations in language and social performance, in enacted and embodied states. The interrupted states can thus trigger processes of un-making which constitute an inexpressibility that can potentially extend onto political consequences.<sup>5</sup> What emerges throughout my thesis is the unique cognitive and ethical ability of the self-reflexive literary narrative in articulating ambivalence, empathy and hermeneutic turns that disturb politicized presuppositions of knowledge.<sup>6</sup> By interpreting textual representations of masculinity crisis, and by reading those with certain tenets of medical science, this research hopes to have shown how the human subject breaking away from the interpellated bio-political identity enacts the active agency of recognized subjectivity. Such a break is best articulated in moments of panic that contain inconsistency, incommensurability and incomprehension, in opposition to standardized materialized discourses and their economy of expectations. When that economy is interrupted through self-doubt and ambivalence, what emerges is a human subject who is both unique and an anathema to normative gender, social and political performances. The uniqueness of agency, as my research has tried to show, is best articulated by experiential moments of subjective change. This has been a study of the changing human subject in literature, and of the altered order of representation that accompanies the process.

I hope to have revealed how the borders between internally moving emotions and external materiality, between naturalized discourse and its disruption, can be best interrogated by the feeling self in nervous conditions. Nervousness has thus been analysed as an embodied state that can interrogate, disrupt and deconstruct dominant ideologies of social, political and bodily behaviour. Such a deconstruction

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<sup>5</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 19.

<sup>6</sup> See Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). In his work on the unique subject in literature, Paul Ricoeur defines the literary narrative as “a vast laboratory in which we experiment with estimations, evaluations and judgements of approval and condemnation through which narrativity serves as a propaedeutic to ethics.” *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 115.

extends onto the affective politics of representation in language and in embodiment, as I have tried to demonstrate in this work. The uncertainty and aporetic quality embodied by masculine nervousness have been shown to accommodate the ambivalence that straddles private emotional and public political realms, supporting the principle thesis of my research that phenomenological and existentialist experience can crucially inform political subversion at the subjective level. Nervousness, as experienced by Conrad's melancholic imperialist adventurer, Woolf's traumatized First World War soldier, Orwell's guilty colonial officer and McEwan's bewildered Neo-Darwinist neurosurgeon, emerges as a self-reflective process of subjective enquiry that cannot completely articulate itself in language or through the body. Indeed, language and the body emerge as political sites in my study in their abilities to accommodate and exhibit the interruptions that challenge dominant orders of representation.

The nervousness experienced by the male protagonists in the selected literary texts instantiates an epistemic rupture that situates the subject against inherited ideologies of political and bodily behaviour. It thus offers examples of the crisis of representation in the realm of language, body and the self. This research on masculinity and bio-political identities in literary narratives has further tried to corroborate the claim made by current neuroscientists and philosophers of mind alike: that the sense of agency contributes towards uniformed embodied experience.<sup>7</sup> Agency and embodiment therefore emerge as vital factors in the subjective awareness that interrogates dominant political and social behaviour. My study of literary narratives of nervousness and nervous conditions has tried to show how expected social and political behaviour may be problematized by different orders of agency and embodiment. Nervousness thus crucially connects the bodily and epistemic realms that are investigated as being dialogic in my research on bio-political panic. This thesis has looked at medical theories in modern cognitive science as well as philosophy of mind, to try to do a fuller study of the complexly changing human subject in a politically charged space.

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<sup>7</sup> Manos Tsakiris, Simone Schütz-Bosbach, Shaun Gallagher, "On agency and body-ownership: Phenomenological and neurocognitive reflections", *Consciousness and Cognition* 16.3 (September 2007): 645-60; 659-60.

Focusing on European imperialism, masculinity and nervous conditions, I have tried to investigate political definitions of illness, power and privilege. The political moments investigated in this research include late nineteenth-century European imperialism in Africa, First World War, British colonialism in South-East Asia, and post-9/11 tension before the Iraq War. Conrad, Woolf, Orwell and McEwan are literary writers deeply aware of (and in the case of Orwell, personally and politically involved in) the dominant bio-political discourses of their days and their writings often exemplify the ambivalences they personally perceived as socially situated creative and feeling subjects. This research has been an investigation of such situatedness and of how that can be re-configured in complex literary narratives through textual representations of subjectively moving experiences constituting guilt, shock, shame and affect.<sup>8</sup> The *nervous negotiations* in the literary narratives posit significant questions about the nature of language and representation, and the self-reflective literariness of the texts chosen in this study highlights the same through their nervous and unreliable male protagonists. The literary representations of the emotional experiences that inform embodied subjectivity in *Heart of Darkness*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *Burmese Days*, and *Saturday*, illustrate literature's unique ability to politicize the phenomenological frame and thus depict how the existentialist experience can become truer than the *facticity of the objectively real*. Such depictions see the human subject breaking away from consuming grand narratives of medical and political knowledge, and instead emerge as a nervous ruptured self, who painfully un-learns the ideologies that had earlier interpellated him. The representations of these characters in the texts studied thus show how human agency may be recovered by the feeling and questioning masculine subject in a changing political space.

By focusing on literary representations of the masculine subject and his body of pain under the dominant political and medical gaze, I hope to have affirmed the significance of literature for a fuller understanding of freedom and agency, in the private as well as political realms. In my interpretations of selected texts, I have tried to explore how embodied experience and medical knowledge can be linked through literary narratives about rediscovering unique subjective identity. I have attempted to

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<sup>8</sup> These appear as the primary emotions that enact the changes experienced by the male protagonists in *Heart of Darkness*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *Burmese Days* and *Saturday* respectively in the chapters studied in this thesis.

study the subjective ambivalence in the interstitial spaces between hard fact and felt knowledge, an ambivalence that extends onto an existentialist and epistemic enquiry. I hope to have shown how medical and political ideologies are materially constructed as well as experientially interrogated. In my research on how phenomenological and existentialist experiences can enact political subversion through re-awakened agency, I have tried to study the private changing mind in the public political space. My work thus upholds the philosophical idea that “man not only has the capacity of beginning but is the beginning himself”<sup>9</sup> and has tried to arrive at the thesis that to be fully and uniquely human is to be in doubt, ambivalence and pain.<sup>10</sup>

By focusing on the location and articulation of agency in the literature of bio-political panic, this study hopes to have contributed in a small way to a deeper understanding of subjectivity in a global capitalist world where “ultra-authoritarianism and Capital are by no means incompatible: [where] internment camps and franchise coffee bars co-exist”<sup>11</sup>, and where neo-liberalism is the benevolent face of capitalist realism. In its investigations of intentionality, masculinity and political identity in its chosen literary texts, this thesis will hopefully find resonance with debates about the dialectical relationships between real emotions and affective virtual spaces in the second decade of the twenty-first century. The issues of agency and politicized identity are particularly pertinent in political systems that appear to celebrate dissent and difference while actually systematising the same, where the most elementary position of the human being is as an object of biopolitics, with political and citizenship rights as “secondary gestures”.<sup>12</sup> In a world of capitalist sovereignty and a global society of control,<sup>13</sup> the haunting melancholia of Conrad’s imperial adventurer, the traumatic numbness of Woolf’s shell-shocked soldier, the personal purposelessness experienced by Orwell’s colonial officer and the existentialist ambivalence of McEwan’s medical practitioner, offer insights which emerge with renewed relevance. Likewise, the imperial, military, colonial and medical masculinities, as imperfectly enacted and embodied by the protagonists in the novels chosen, raise important issues about language, representation,

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<sup>9</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954*, 322.

<sup>10</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958) 200.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Ropley: O Books, 2009) 2.

<sup>12</sup> Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 95.

<sup>13</sup> Negri and Hardt, *Empire*, 326.

performativity and cognitive mapping of the self in the cultural logic of capitalism and its distributed memes.<sup>14</sup> In my modest philosophical enquiry, I hope to have offered a thesis that may connect to the ways we negotiate with our human identities in the hegemonic narratives of privilege today.

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<sup>14</sup> Frederick Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) 62.

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