

**Surviving Our Paradoxes:
The Psychoanalysis and Literature of Uncertainty**

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March 2002

– Abstract –

This thesis explores the importance of tolerating and facilitating uncertainty as it is recognised by British Independent and Kleinian psychoanalysis and contemporary British magic realist fiction. In Part I, I offer some theoretical investigations, arguing that postmodern and some psychoanalytic discourses, namely Lacanian psychostructuralism, remarkably fail to address the challenges facing subjects in late-twentieth, early twenty-first century consumer culture. In their inability to tolerate paradoxes and uncertainty, these discourses *objectify* the subject, through processes of depersonalisation, derealisation and desubjectification. To redress these problems, I offer the work of British psychoanalysts, specifically, that of D. W. Winnicott and Melanie Klein and her followers. These perspectives, I argue, better serve the contemporary subject by recognising the importance of paradox and helping develop facilitating environments for the realisation of creative experience.

In Part II, I examine how the play of paradox is fostered in contemporary British magic realist fiction. Specifically, I look at how these narrative strategies attempt to move away from the vicissitudes of internal and external, certainty and uncertainty, reason and unreason, to negotiate a Winnicottian third, potential space. The conceptualisation of such a space, I believe, offers a place from which we can begin to dialogue, to draw ourselves out of the oppositional dialectics that have plagued the bourgeois subject. I believe that in the novels of writers such as Jeanette Winterson, Joanne Harris, John Fowles, John Murray and, most especially, Angela Carter, we can find alternatives to bourgeois conceptions of reason and rationality, alternatives that are not based on the paranoid-schizoid, primitive processes and depersonalisation necessitated by the Enlightenment and capitalism but instead upon, in Kleinian terms, depressive ambivalence and the recognition of whole-objects.

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– Acknowledgements –

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the shaping of my ideas expressed here, some of whom I will doubtlessly forget to acknowledge and others who might be surprised at my gratitude. I would particularly like to thank, in no particular order: my friends, colleagues and the faculty in the Department of English Literature and at the Centre for Psychotherapeutic Studies at the University of Sheffield – especially Ian Munday, Jamie Clarke, Sean Homer, Jo Nash, Caroline Tapping, Kate Dorney, Jo Rendell, Kevin Smith (tech and academic support), Richard Harris and Neil Roberts.

I want to thank my family, especially my brother Robert, my father, Bill, Geoff and Carole Dredge and my mother, Vivian, for her continued support.

I am grateful to my excellent supervisors. Professor Robert M. Young has not only been incredibly influential in shaping my thinking, but also in helping me learn to organise and express my thoughts more coherently and creatively. Dr. Sue Vice has been invaluable throughout my years in Sheffield; she has provided not only intellectual stimulation and ideas, but has also guided me through the writing (and endless rewriting) of this thesis and so many aspects of my academic life.

Finally, my partner Sarah, for love, proofreading, ideas and always challenging my assumptions.

Instructions from the manual
could not have been much more plain
the blues are still required
the blues are still required again
past territorial piss-posts
past whispers in the closets
past screamin' from the rooftops
we live to survive our paradoxes

Men here of the secret
they pass in upholstered silence
they only exist in crisis
they only exist in silence
past territorial piss-posts
past whispers in the closets
past screamin' from the rooftops
we live to survive our paradoxes
we'll live to survive our paradoxes

The Tragically Hip, "Springtime in
Vienna"

— Introductions and Rationale —

“Life consists entirely of uncertainties,” I said.
 “No, my friend, it does not; who could survive if it did?”
 [...]

 “I have come to rob you of the certainty, the guarantee,
 the safety you so greatly prize,”
 “Satan’s work!”

(Madsen 1995, 263-4)

Life, explains David Madsen’s gnostic dwarf above, consists entirely of uncertainties. But this fact is denied by the 15th century Inquisitor who is the dwarf’s nemesis. The work of exposing these illusory certainties, robbing us of the imaginary defences and guarantees and making us confront our paradoxes – the work of psychoanalysis – is the work of Satan. Paradoxes put us in the uncomfortable position of not knowing what we think, or how we feel. We are faced with the proposition of “both-and” rather than “either-or” (see Murray 1996, 61). Instead of yes or no, love it or hate it, paradoxes force us to answer “maybe” or, worse, “I don’t know.” We tend to prefer whenever possible, therefore, the eradication of paradox and the resulting comfort that we find in the illusion of certainty that exists in binary thinking. And there are many discourses and institutions in our culture that help us on our way to this anaesthetised comfort, including, I argue in this dissertation, capitalism, postmodernity and some forms of psychoanalysis itself. But we are seduced into this repose at the expense of experience.

Perhaps more than for other psychoanalytic schools, paradoxes are at the heart of both the clinical experience and psychological theory of British Kleinian and object-relations psychoanalysts. Melanie Klein highlights the importance of moving from the paranoid-schizoid position, where paradoxes stir up anxiety so intolerable that we defend ourselves by splitting, denial and violent attacks, to the depressive position that, despite its name, is a more contented state of object-relating, when we can accept and survive the paradoxes presented by objects, the world and ourselves. Wilfred Bion, a prominent Kleinian, and W. R. D. Fairbairn, a

member of the Middle Group or Independent School of British psychoanalysis, further explain how we use our intellectual prowess as a defence mechanism to combat the more uncomfortable aspects of objects or ideas that present us with irreconcilable conflict. Donald W. Winnicott demonstrates that paradoxes can have positive value, and thus emphasises that we need to learn how to tolerate these conflicts, to “survive our paradoxes.” Without paradox, he says, we cannot have experience, or cannot experience a life, either as individuals or as a culture.

One of the central paradoxes of psychoanalysis that always seems to sit uncomfortably with psychoanalytic practitioners, theorists and critics alike is psychoanalysis’s discursive status. Is it a science? or is it a narrative practice? If it is a science, what is the object of our inquiry? The drives? The unconscious? The ego? Language? Affect? Surprisingly, or perhaps not, this dilemma is not often addressed by psychoanalysts or those literary and cultural critics who utilise psychoanalysis in their own analyses. Freud himself was famously schizoid in this regard. He desperately wanted psychoanalysis to be a science, distinct from narrative practices, and it would seem that he generally considered his theoretical invention worthy of such a status. And yet, he always seems to have been aware that the practice of psychoanalysis and its theories made such an identification unlikely, if not impossible. For example, in the “Prefatory Remarks” to his case study of “Dora,” Freud discusses the difficulty in presenting the material in an acceptably scientific way. He believes, however, that “the publication of the case in a purely scientific and technical periodical should [...] afford a guarantee against unauthorized readers” and discourages those who would read his narrative “as a *roman à clef* designed for their private delectation” (1905b, 37). Quite literally at the opposite end, in the “Postscript” to this same case study, Freud delves into the importance of the *transferences* in analytic practice, the presence of which he would later claim “put our scientific pretensions to shame” (1916-17, 493). In the Dora postscript, Freud admits that the failure of the analysis was largely due to his own inability to be truly objective, to identify and master the transferences that Dora brought with her into the consulting room (see 1905, especially 160-1). But Freud took great pride in this unscientific component of psychoanalysis, and he used it to differentiate

psychoanalysis from other medical practices. By making the transferences an essential ingredient in psychoanalysis, he banished the possibility of its acceptance as a discourse that is predicated upon knowable, quantifiable *certainties*. At the very outset of his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud explained that while most medical techniques are introduced to patients in such a way as to “minimize its inconveniences and give him confident assurances of the success of treatment,” with psychoanalysis there are no such certainties provided; the analyst should, in fact, explain that the path they are embarking upon is difficult and likely to unhinge whatever certainties the analysand maintains (1916-17, 39).

If we follow the lineage of the Ur-father we see this fundamental paradox dealt with by his descendants in a whole range of ways. Freud's progeny are still undecided as to their status. Today, we find some people for whom psychoanalysis is, undisputedly and unproblematically, a science like physics or chemistry. We find others who, following the apparent postmodern eradication of metanarratives, are incapable of attributing any scientific status to psychoanalysis whatsoever. There are literary critics that insist, despite Freud's protestations, that the case study of Dora is simply a story, a narrative to be read like any other. Some of these literary critics, however, are paradoxically attracted to psychoanalysis for the very reason that it offers scientific certainties in a field – literary studies – that is notoriously short on objective positions from which to speak. (This was, at any rate, what I think first attracted me to psychoanalysis during my undergraduate studies.) The psychoanalysts of the British school, by and large but not without exception, seem not to be too greatly troubled by psychoanalysis' uncertain status. Others, however, such as Jacques Lacan, regard as paramount the need for psychoanalysis to be recognised as a science. But this, I will argue, is not only a betrayal of Freud's own conception of psychoanalysis, but – and this is the more serious accusation – the drive to scientisation ultimately damages the subjects that psychoanalysis purports to help.

In Part I of this thesis, I begin with an analysis of the contemporary subject and its environment, both of which are vaguely described as “postmodern.” I proceed to explain why I feel that the psychoanalytic model presently dominating

literary and cultural criticism, that is, Lacanian psychostructuralism, is largely inadequate to redress the specific conflicts and crises that this subject endures. I argue that Lacanian theory, by taking solace in the certainty offered by the signifier, does not enable us to negotiate the paradoxes that are necessary for experience. In contrast to this, I offer some ideas presented by British psychoanalysis, those Kleinian and (primarily, in this study) Winnicottian concepts that encourage us to tolerate uncertainty and show us how to live to survive our paradoxes. In the second half of Part I I re-examine subjectivity, language and, finally, literature through the lens of British psychoanalysis. But I am often asked if we really need more psychoanalytic visions of language, literature and subjectivity. Do we not already have tried, tested, and some would say, well-worn psychoanalytic conceptions of these issues? But Lacanian psychostructuralism and a peculiarly Lacanian Freud enjoy a status in the humanities that I find leaves many of their basic assumptions unchallenged. The introduction of a competing psychoanalytic perspective, therefore, might seem unnecessary, or merely doctrinal nit-picking. But I need to make it clear that my objections to Lacanian thought in literary and cultural theory are not mere academic exercises. It will also become clear that I do not wish merely to alter some of Lacan's initial premises, but through British object-relations radically to review our conceptualisations of psychoanalysis and, consequently, how we use psychoanalysis to conceive of the subject and culture.

I offer here some initial investigations into how we may conceive of a Winnicottian and Kleinian approach to language and literature not as an end in itself but as a means to redress the contemporary crises of subjectivity, crises that I feel not only have literary and cultural theorists thus far *failed* to address but may have implicitly – and sometimes explicitly – provoked and perpetuated. As opposed to orthodox Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, the work of Winnicott and Klein has until recently been left relatively unexplored in literary and cultural studies. Perhaps it is not surprising that Lacan is the psychoanalyst of choice for so many literary scholars, as Lacan's sweetly scented signifiers tempt us with the elevation of language to the most privileged place in subjective experience,¹ while Winnicott and Klein threaten to inflict narcissistic injury by not privileging language to the same

extent and therefore force us to confront uncomfortable but necessary uncertainties in our conceptions of the subject. I hope that some of the unique contributions to literary and cultural studies that object-relations can offer will become evident throughout this thesis, but it might help to bear in mind the following points. First, and most fundamentally, I maintain Winnicott's insistence upon the *primacy of being* over knowing. Winnicott's maxim, "After being – doing and being done to. But first being" (1971, 85) is the guiding principle that infuses everything that follows, and this reversal of the orthodox psychoanalytic project reveals to us new and better ways of examining subjective experience. For Winnicott, the subject comes into being through experience that is *creative*, understood not solely as the gift of artistic genius but a potential means of relating to the world in everyday experience. This creativity can be found in the productive negotiation of paradoxes that are characteristic of what Winnicott calls the *potential spaces* of subjective experience, those liminal areas that deny the opiate solace of dualist binaries that are constructed as defences against the uncertainty that accompanies almost all human experience. These spaces are not simply metaphorical but *real* and material; they are the intersubjective locations of culture where we find creative articulations of language, literature and our own idiomatic voices. And finally, I insist throughout that these issues have material consequences and political implications in our cultural, socio-political and economic environments.

I will then explore the possibilities for object-relations approaches to language, strategies that I think present us with an understanding of language as embodied, inscribed on the psyche-soma and idiomatic to subjective experience. Such languages are thus potential tools to be used in helping us to survive the paradoxes between union and separation, internal and external worlds, subject and object, and thus lead us to realise subjective being. Finally, I offer an conception of literature as a liminal experience in a potential space of play, an investigation I will take up in the second part of this dissertation when I examine contemporary British "magic realist" fiction and the attempts to negotiate the paradoxes to be found there. I will also explore alongside these new psychoanalytic approaches to language and literature the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, who I believe similarly sees language and

literature as a place “in between” reader and writer. I think that by bringing Winnicott into dialogue with Bakhtin we may achieve a better understanding of how subjects use language, how we experience literature, what processes are involved and what possibilities literature offers for the creative, re-ontologising play of subjects.

In Part II, I move from psychoanalysis that recognises the productive and creative potential of paradox to literature that explicitly fosters such uncertainty, providing us perhaps with those objects and spaces that allow us to revel in productive paradoxes. Many of the texts I examine in Part II have in no small way helped to shape the theoretical ideas that I present in this study, and so, rather than regarding Part II as an illustration of a theoretical model in some linear progression from thesis to object of analysis, this chapter should, rather, be regarded as something to be read *alongside* the theory, not imposed onto it from without. While choosing to focus on this mode² of literature has the advantage of providing a stark illustration of the theory I wish to present, I do recognise that I open myself to the accusation that these ideas may only be applicable to this specific literary genre. This is a criticism I must accept for now, though I believe that the parameters I set for what may be included in this category are wide enough to permit the exploration of a variety of literary styles and strategies. I do not know at this point if what I say in Part II will prove true for all forms of literature; but I must also admit that I am not overly concerned that it do so. I am not interested in presenting a meta-theoretical, objective methodology for all literature, understanding that not only is such a task impossible but that such a project itself kills the very kind of pluralism and dialogue that is essential to the kind of creative play that I seek to foster. I must leave it to future study to consider other literary genres and cultures.³

More specifically, I have chosen to structure these analyses around magic realist texts that originate in Britain. The reasons for this are straightforward: with the increasing proliferation of magic realist texts in contemporary literature throughout the world, it would be impossible to consider all relevant texts here. While it would doubtless be a valuable exercise to note the similarities between Gabriel García Márquez and Angela Carter and Arundhati Roy, it would be careless

and irresponsible not to acknowledge simultaneously the important differences, the specific battles that they are waging, the specific discourses to which they are responding and the specific traditions with which they play. I will focus here therefore upon a few British authors who utilise this tradition: John Fowles, Sarah Waters, Joanne Harris, Patrick McGrath, John Murray, Jeanette Winterson, D. M. Thomas (occasionally), J. K. Rowling (with many reservations), but most especially Angela Carter, in particular, her works *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman* (1972) and *Nights at the Circus* (1984) which I think most closely share my concerns.⁴ Of course, the status of any of these authors as “magic realist” is contestable. Carter was suspicious of the term applied to her work because she rightly perceived herself to be reacting to different social forces than those that produced García Márquez (see Haffenden 1985, Peach 1998), and Sarah Waters, while comfortable with the term “gothic,” does not consider herself to be explicitly “magic realist.”⁵ This hesitancy to identify oneself as magic realist I suspect comes from a general resistance to classification, but there is also I think a genuine respect for the socio-political conditions that define magic realism’s perceived origins in Latin America. As I do not want this to become an exercise in formalist literary criticism, I will not here become mired in the minute of what constitutes a “magic realist” or “fantastic” text, as for example Todorov so painstakingly does, although I do offer some ideas as to what I think characterises this mode at the beginning of Part I. Certainly, there are some texts I discuss here that I know already may not be deemed *properly* magic realist by most definitions, but with my own desire to proliferate and sustain irresolvable paradoxes, it would be hypocritical of me to insist on resolving categorically what does and does not qualify for inclusion.

I believe that magic realism, as a mode of literature, can be historically and ideologically located. For some (for example, Zamora and Farris), magic realism is the dominant tradition of literature, dating back to the epics and pastorals of the Greeks, and is continued throughout the middle ages and European Renaissance, eclipsed only temporarily by the “mimetic constraints of nineteenth- and twentieth-century realism” (Zamora and Farris 1995, 2). For others (for example, Monleón), the fantastic is a specific tradition enabled by the dominance of Enlightenment

rationality and therefore exists only from the 1760s to the 1930s (Monleón 1990). While it is probably true that some elements of what we would today call “magic realism” are to be found in a range of epochs and cultures, my study needs to focus on those specific socio-political and historical considerations of magic realism as it is manifest in contemporary British literature. Just as magic realism has developed in Latin American, Indian and African literature as a response to the tyrannies of imperialism (new and old) and the imposition of an objectivist cultural and literary ideal, I find that unique traditions have arisen in Euro-American literature to respond to specific cultural practices that threaten to deny subjective creativity. The use of magic realism to respond to (post)colonialism in developing nations is mirrored by the use of magic realism in industrialised Western nations to respond to (post)modernism and its discourses, including capitalism, patriarchy, homophobia, racism and religion.

Doctrine and Identities: A Note on Psychoanalytic Schools

In this study, I will be referring to a variety of psychoanalytic schools, and this will necessarily entail reproducing doctrinal ideas and identifications using a larger brush than I would like. I will doubtless miss some nuances that distinguish schools of thought, or individuals within certain schools. For example, my reader will immediately notice that though I refer to “British psychoanalysis,” Anna Freud and her followers are glaringly omitted. This is not meant to diminish the immensely important contributions that this school has made; its battles with the Kleinian group during the Controversial Discussions of the early 1940s helped distinctive Kleinian and Independent voices to emerge, and enriched the culture of British psychoanalysis (see Grosskurth 1986; Hinshelwood 1991, 253-5). This omission is due simply to my preference for Kleinian and Independent thought. I do not rule out dialogue with the Anna Freudians, and only some of object-relations criticisms of “orthodox” or “classical” psychoanalysis apply to this school.

This brings me to another clarification. When I refer to *orthodox*

psychoanalysis, I am referring to psychoanalysis that is primarily governed by the tenets of classical Freudian thought – including, for the most part, the Lacanian school. Critics and colleagues object to my identification of Lacan as “orthodox,” but for semantic reasons only (for example, “Lacan isn’t *orthodox*, he’s very original...”), and this might seem an odd term to apply to a man excommunicated from the International Psychoanalytic Association. But this label is justified when one considers the fundamental assumptions of psychoanalysis’ various schools. The most obvious difference between what is referred to as orthodox psychoanalysis and object-relations lies in the former’s focus upon the nature of the *drives* and the latter’s focus upon the *object* upon which the drive is directed. “In orthodox Freudianism the object is merely the vehicle for the instinct on its way to discharge” (Young 1996c). The drives that lie at the heart of classical psychoanalysis’ biologism – a biologism that Lacan was trying to eschew – are recast in his psychostructuralism as drives in the service of symbolic determinism. While Klein adhered to the theory of drives, she never imagined these drives to exist independently, unattached to objects (Bott-Spillius 1983, 327). I should note for the record that Lacan disapproved of a revisionist re-branding of “classical” psychoanalysis as “orthodox” as he saw it as a pejorative word that denigrated those who were true to Freud’s true message (see Lacan 1953, 7), though as I will discuss, his own loyalty to Freud is doubtful. Despite the obvious and usual obstructions to clearly demarcated boundaries, I accept these as useful starting places to identify the unique nature of object-relations psychoanalysis.

There are some that now question – not without just cause – whether Klein can be properly considered an object-relations theorist; her emphasis on the death drive making such an identification difficult.⁶ Orthodox psychoanalysis, however, tends to see the subject as first and foremost pleasure-seeking, while object-relations theorists, following Klein’s lead, eponymously regard the subject to be object-seeking. This marks a fundamental shift from the biology that governs much early psychoanalytic explorations, and in turn implies a shift from a focus on the subject itself and its intrapsychic forces to a focus on the subject’s relations with others.

In addition to this distinction, I consider at least two other fundamental

assumptions. First, orthodox or classical psychoanalysts generally believe in *primary narcissism*, the initial stage of development where the infant does not recognise objects external to itself, takes its own ego as the object of libidinal love and believes in a fusion between itself and its mother.⁷ The Kleinian and object-relations schools, on the other hand, believe that the infant is *object-seeking from birth*. Many find that this is Klein's most fundamental theoretical difference from orthodox psychoanalysis and ego-psychology, although only British-school theorists seem to recognise this difference (see Mitchell 1981; Segal 1983; Bott-Spillius 1983, 328-9; Hinshelwood 1991, 354-60). This issue of primary narcissism marks not only an important theoretical division, but is also indicative of an even more fundamental ideological divide, and one that I think has radical consequences for how orthodox and object-relations psychoanalysis conceive the subject. Second, another criterion upon which I think we can distinguish object-relations from orthodox psychoanalysis is perhaps less doctrinally inscribed but I think represents a much more significant difference in approaching the psychoanalytic scene itself. Freud, working within nineteenth-century rationalism, initially conceived of psychoanalysis as the "talking cure" – the idea being that if one could translate that which is unconscious into consciousness, one could cure an analysand through Enlightenment (see, for example, Freud 1916-17, 486). For Lacan, similarly, analysis is *prise de conscience* – the act of becoming aware – whereby in articulating unconscious desire, words magically relieve the subject of whatever ails it. Although I do not think that Freud's vision of psychoanalysis was limited to this first notion of a cure, this is the rationalist, Enlightenment conception of psychoanalysis that Lacan seizes upon, and I find that this limited conception of psychoanalysis is shared by almost all orthodox approaches. Object-relations theorists accept that this is *one* strategy by which they can help their analysands, but are not limited by this narrow conception, emphasising instead the benefits of containing, facilitating, nursing, holding, *in addition to* interpretation. I do not want to discuss this at length here, as I will return to this issue later in the first section and in the second when I examine how this purely rationalist approach to subjectivity is challenged by contemporary psychoanalysis and literature alike.

Finally, I must also admit here to sometimes negotiating a path between Klein and Winnicott that purist disciples of either theorist may find problematic. Although I primarily employ Winnicott in this study I do not see myself as exclusively “Winnicottian,” whatever that means. There are times when I idiomatically use Kleinian terminology and concepts that Winnicott himself found (at best) unhelpful and (at worst) inaccurate and ideologically suspect. I mention this not in a self-important attempt to highlight original thinking but so as to anticipate in advance any doctrinal inconsistencies that some may perceive in this study.

Endnotes

1. See Minsky (1998).

2. Discussing Todorov, Rosemary Jackson states that “It is perhaps more helpful to define the fantastic as a literary *mode* rather than a genre, and to place it between the opposite modes of the marvellous and the mimetic. The ways in which it operates can then be understood by its combination of elements of these two different modes...” (32; see also the discussion of the fantastic as a genre in Cornwell 1990 34-41 and especially 140-59). I tend to accept Jackson’s identification, but as I will repeatedly express with regards to the pedantic semantics that tend too often to dominate discussions of the fantastic, I do not wish to become entangled in haggling over such terms. As will become clear below, I like the identification of the fantastic as a mode between others that is impossible – and undesirable – to pin down.

3. Others, however, have applied Winnicott’s notion of the potential space to other periods and genres of literature, for example, Shakespeare (Schwartz), Romantic poetry (Turner) and twentieth century modernist and postmodernist fiction (Schwab).

4. I am not alone in reading Carter through the lens of British psychoanalysis; Linda Ruth Williams (1995) and Linden Peach (1998) both find it advantageous to read Carter through Winnicott and Klein rather than the orthodox Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic models.

5. In conversation. 22 Oct. 2001.

6. Stephen A. Mitchell (1981), for example, sees Klein as a transitional figure “straddling Freudian drive theory and relational concepts” (391), offering Fairbairn as the “purest and most comprehensive” object-relations theorist. See also Hinshelwood 1991, 367-73.

7. Green explains that there are different types of “primary narcissism”:

Sometimes he [Freud] refers to *absolute* primary narcissism as the reduction of tension to the zero level in accordance with the Nirvana principle; sometimes he refers to the result of the passage from autoeroticism to the subject’s unification.

(Green 1986, 97)

My meaning of primary narcissism here corresponds to the second of Freud’s conceptualisations.

— PART I —

Theoretical Investigations

What's Wrong Now? Postmodern Subjects

[...] there is a great but abstract world, where people are out of contact with each other, egoistically sealed-off from each other, greedily practical; where labor is differentiated and mechanized, where objects are alienated from the labor that produced them. It is necessary to constitute this great world on a new basis, to render it familiar, to humanize it.

(Bakhtin 1981, 234)

Who's/Whose Postmodern?

The problem of postmodernism – how its fundamental characteristics are to be described, whether it even exists in the first place, whether the very *concept* is of any use, or is, on the contrary, a mystification – this problem is at one and the same time an aesthetic and a political one.

(Jameson 1991, 55)

“Postmodernism” is not a term I like using. I am becoming increasingly suspicious of it – for reasons that should become clear below – and I sometimes feel as though I use it merely as a convenient shortcut for a complex subject and environment. But, following Jameson, I find that I cannot *not* use the term. As my own starting point for thinking about contemporary culture and art, it has informed so much of my thinking with regard to the ideas I am trying to convey here. There are doom-sayers in every culture, proclaiming this or that to be a threat to whatever myths that society treasures the most; in our culture, it is “the subject” that has assumed this privileged place of cherished, and therefore endlessly persecuted, artefact. Having said that, I *do* believe that in our contemporary society we face a specific set of challenges to our experience as subjects, but I do not want to make the error of confusing and conflating the manifestations of severe psychopathology with general cultural malaise.

I am not sure whether the term “postmodern crises” is an accurate description of the contemporary threats to subjectivity. Part of this uncertainty stems from the fact, of course, that everyone seems to have their own conceptualisation of “the postmodern.” I cannot pretend here to present a version of postmodernism that will satisfy everyone, but I wish to highlight certain features of our contemporary society that for me constitute the postmodern. First, when I refer to postmodernism, I am referring primarily to cultural, not solely aesthetic, phenomena. When I speak of postmodern I am not referring to only the death of metanarratives, pastiche, self-reflexivity, irony, simulacra, ahistoricity, or the myriad of other age-old literary devices that are sometimes said to be postmodernism, although these I think emerge in response to the cultural milieu. My postmodern – which is not to exclude others¹ – is the postmodern that is concerned only with surfaces, where meaning is unattainable or unnecessary, where the play of signifiers is privileged over the signified, and representation is an end in itself. This postmodern is the marketplace of the *brand*, not of *things* but of *images*, where we invest our libidinal and emotional energies in the logo, the commodity, the word. This is the postmodern of late-capitalism, but whereas Jameson finds that the postmodern cannot have come about without some fundamental mutation in the sphere of culture (1991, 47-8), I wish to demonstrate that the postmodern subject does not mark a radical break from its ancestors but is the inevitable child of bourgeois capitalism, the Enlightenment and Cartesian reason. I also do not like the term “late capitalism” – as Eagleton says, we really have no idea how developed capitalism is at this point (1996, 90) and I, for one, do not want to tempt fate. (Perhaps the terms “consumer” or “postindustrial” society are more appropriate; see Jameson in Lyotard 1979, *xvii*.) Also like Eagleton, I see the culture and products of our capitalism – including, I will suggest, some postmodern theory – as a “wholly reified, rationalized, administered regime” (Eagleton 1990, 369).

My conceptualisations of postmodernity are also informed by the clinical perceptions of many object-relations analysts, though none that I have found refer explicitly to “postmodernity” – rightly, they are likely to be wary of conflating their clinical perceptions of specific analysands with cultural epidemics, and though I

offer their case studies as examples of the postmodern malaise, I need likewise to proceed with caution. Although they differ in terminology, contemporary object-relations psychoanalysts generally find the traditional pathologic categories – neurosis, psychosis, hysteria – inadequate to describe the analysands that they find on their couch.² By this I do not mean that we have seen the “end of the bourgeois ego, or monad,” and therefore the “end of the psychopathologies of that ego” (Jameson 1991, 15). Rather, I think, there has been a change in the *conceptualisations* of the self since the inception of psychoanalysis. I do not subscribe to the idea that we have seen the end of the bourgeois self, the death of the isolated, complete individual and the birth of a fragmented being: it is more likely that, theoretically, we have come to appreciate how the self always has been fragmented, although I suspect that most contemporary capitalist subjects are as likely to be enchanted by the thought of their own individual autonomy and completeness as their ancestors were two hundred years ago. There *have* been changes in the capitalist mode of production, and therefore in the conception and constructions of self, but I find that too many postmodern critics overestimate how different a creature the contemporary, “late capitalist” subject is from the bourgeois, nineteenth century or modernist “monad.”

Instead of neurotics and psychotics, we find analysands diagnosed as suffering from a “borderline” state, that is, possessing symptoms characteristic of both of these traditional categories – though as Didier Anzieu points out, this label is ironic given that the most common feature of such subjects is an absence of borders or limits (1989, 7; see also Green 1986, 30-83).³ Other object-relations analysts describe many analysands who are seen to be victims of pathological defensive splitting – of sign from referent, signifier from signified, if one wants to use this terminology, but this splitting is only symptomatic of a more fundamental splitting of subject from object, of psyche from soma, of what it means to *know* from what it means to *be*. Winnicott offers a starting place for conceiving of these psychic processes: three anxieties associated with insecurity (1952) arising from problems with the earliest developmental processes. Taking his cue from Klein, Winnicott identifies three early processes that are essential to the development of subjectivity:

integration, personalisation and realisation – the last of these Winnicott seems least able to label and spends the most time trying to understand (see Winnicott 1945). Failures or difficulties in any of these processes lead to deep-seated conflicts and anxieties throughout life. *Disintegration* or *unintegration* involves a lack of boundaries, a poor relationship between the self and the environment and the inability to distinguish between the two, the inability to tie oneself together, the “feeling that the ego is in bits” (Klein 1946, 10) due to excessive splitting. This does *not* mean that Winnicott, Klein or object-relations theorists in general see the subject as “unified” in a sense opposed by postmodern enthusiasts of the fragmented self. Writers from other psychoanalytic schools are too quick to leap to this assumption, gleefully thinking that they have caught object-relations in a pre-postmodernist episteme⁴ or as endorsing the bourgeois monadic self (see, for example, Lacan 1953 and Lowenstein 1994). Anzieu, in his excellent examination of *The Skin Ego*, perceives his analysands to be lacking boundaries, limits and “livable territories” in their embodied experiences of themselves, thus leading to a threat of disintegration (1989, 8). Ian Craib (1989) points out that unintegration also hinders the ability to relax, “which in infancy depends upon the presence and safety of environment supplied by the mother” (161), which is also related to Winnicott’s conception of the “capacity to be alone” (1958). And, as Walter A. Stewart reports, “a definition of boundaries of the subject is essential for all later discussion” (1964, 171) of the subject, of a self or selves – indicating that before we can be neurotic, or psychotic, or hysterical, that we must address this more fundamental issue of boundaries. *Depersonalisation* – another increasingly common diagnostic category⁵ – describes the lack of a relationship between the psyche and soma, which we can also relate to subjects who are *disaffected* (McDougall 1989, 93), unable to realise embodied experience. Such subjects thus rely upon only a false-entity mind-psyche that enters into a world of objects which demands compliance from the subject. Analysands lack emotional engagement with their environments, and complain of a general sense of *non-being*, of existing merely as empty objects – or signifiers – in a world of meaningless objects.⁶ Bion describes such analysands as automatons, unable to establish relations with others; “he feels able only to establish the counterpart of a

relationship in which such sustenance can be had as inanimate objects can provide” and in analysis “he can have analytic interpretations that he feels to be either flatus or contributions remarkable for what they are not rather than for what they are” (1962, 12).

Finally, Winnicott describes “the feeling that the centre of gravity of consciousness transfers from the kernel to the shell, from the individual to the care or the technique” (1952, 99). As with the corresponding developmental process, it is on this third anxiety that Winnicott focuses most of his attention, and again a suitable label seems to elude him. As Winnicott eventually labelled the process “realisation,” we may call this failure *derealisation*, though I also often employ the term *desubjectification* here, as I regard the movement of attention, or the centre of gravity, from the individual to the technique to be an *objectification* of the subject, where the structure becomes more important than the self, the relations between signs or commodities more important than the relations between subjects or producers.⁷ Such subjects have no sense of themselves as *real*, again not in a Lacanian conception of what is “real,” but having no sense of themselves as *subjects*, beings with internal life, living in a responsive external world; there is “nothing at the centre,” nothing but a void, only emptiness and hunger (Winnicott 1986, 49-52). Desubjectification implies the consistent negation of the creative element and the imposition of a discourse, or any system, that demands compliance from the subject. The failure of this developmental process can be seen implicitly to inform much of Winnicott’s identifications of psychopathology, not only the fundamental issue of creativity and compliance but also the distinction between the true and false selves.

The “Normal” Postmodern Analysand

Many contemporary object-relations psychoanalysts have noted the appearance of these or similar anxieties in their analysands. Christopher Bollas and Joyce McDougall, for example, independently describe the *normotic* and the *normopath*,

abnormally normal analysands who are characterised by “the numbing and eventual erasure of subjectivity, in favour of a self that is conceived as a material object among other man-made products in the object world” (Bollas 1987, 135). Bollas notes that “We are attending an increasing number of disturbances in personality which may be characterised by partial deletions of the subjective factor” (1987, 135); he cites “blank selves,” “blank psychosis” and “organising personalities” as cousins of the normotic, “who has been successful in neutralising the subjective element in personality” (136). In a rare explicit psychoanalytic reference to the social mode of production that would doubtlessly satisfy even Jameson, Bollas regards the normotic to be “a commodity object in the world of human production” (136), like Bion’s depersonalised analysand who cannot relate to others but only to inanimate objects. Such an individual is more concerned with systems than the self and complies with the discourses thrust upon him, perhaps, as I suggest later, like the subject conceived by psychostructuralism. McDougall adds that normopaths are entirely concerned with surfaces, resisting all attempts to analyse meaningfully “anything to do with their inner psychic world, insisting on external reality as the only dimension of interest” (McDougall 1989, 93). Subjective meaning for the normotic and the normopath is only ever temporarily lodged in an external, foreign object, objects that cannot be introjected and cannot contain or express meaning for the subject.⁸ For Bollas and McDougall, as for Bion’s automaton, analysis is characterised by an erasure of meaning, an attack on any connection with the analyst.

Waging Battle Against the Shadows of Old Enemies: The Failure of Postmodern Discourses

Postmodernism describes not only a cultural phenomenon but also a particular critical environment, or “theoretical discourse,” to borrow Jameson’s term, including certain imaginings of post-structuralism. But postmodern theory, I suggest, has remarkably failed to address the crises of subjectivity experienced in the postmodern world. In fact, this theoretical postmodern has consistently exacerbated

these problems by accepting and perpetuating the fetish of the signifier, the focus upon solely epistemological concerns and limited conceptualisations of subjectivity. Of course, not all critical theory in literary or cultural studies *needs* to redress these crises, but I find that too many contemporary critics claim that they are writing about the subject but are, instead, focussed only upon the ideas to which they have sworn greater loyalty. It is my belief that the inability of postmodern theory to redress the crises of the subject is fundamentally due to the strategic defence mechanisms and ideological assumptions it shares with postmodern culture. Part of my suspicion of the term and concept of postmodernism lies in the fact that the postmodern is only ever perceived in terms of *epistemological* crises – a perception that derives from the single-minded rationality of Enlightenment thinking that perpetuates the *ontological* crises that I think, with Winnicott, are increasingly the real threat posed to subjectivity.

There is an interesting correlative here between the worlds of academia and contemporary corporate capitalism. Since the 1980s or thereabouts, it seems that capitalism's increased emphasis upon the brand, the signifier of the commodity rather than the commodities themselves and their production has been mirrored in academia's own emphasis on identity, on the signifiers of the self rather than the subject. In *No Logo* (2000), Naomi Klein offers a history of recent academic protest, from the death-of-the-author, transgressive, anti-authoritarian 1960s, to the "ID warriors" and "political correctness wars" of the 1980s and 1990s, to what she regards as a new critique of twenty-first century capitalism that rebels against the brand and tries to re-position human beings at the centre of global politics – whether this latest phase actually germinates or withers in the pod remains to be seen. Neither Klein nor I (nor Eagleton) wish to denigrate any of the advances made by the movement towards a more inclusive or "politically correct" language and representation – that is best left to the backlash from the right – but I think we should ask: to what extent do these identity wars – still the main thrust of a great deal of critical theory – reflect the corporate obsession with the signifier, the brand? Klein investigates how in the 1980s the issue of representation was "no longer one tool among many, it was the key" (2000, 108) and this, Klein suggests, is when an

important transformation occurred: images and symbols, “mirrors and metaphors,” the lens through which we regarded ourselves and our political struggles, became confused with, or at least more important than, reality itself:

So outraged were we media children by the narrow and oppressive portrayals in magazines, in books and on television that we convinced ourselves that if the typecast images and loaded language changed, so too would the reality [...]

The more importance we placed on representational issues, the more central a role they seemed to elbow for themselves in our lives – perhaps because, in the absence of more tangible political goals, any movement that is about fighting for better social mirrors is going to eventually fall victim to its own narcissism.

(N. Klein 2000, 108-9,124)

Just as corporations relentlessly seek to promote the identity of the brand, a brand that is emptied of any depth or real signification, reflecting only itself, literary criticism has focussed so intently upon the sign or the signifier that these have come to overshadow, and sometimes replace, the referent or the subject. Since the 1980s, the period of Jameson’s late-capitalism, successful corporations have sought to produce brands, not products, moving from a “commodity marketplace” to an “image-based” one.⁹ “Brands, not products!” became the rallying cry for a marketing renaissance led by a new breed of companies that saw themselves as ‘meaning brokers’ instead of product producers” (N. Klein 2000, 21). And since the 1980s, postmodern politics in academia have been more focussed upon the image, in naming and the symbolic process that we use to identify ourselves at the expense of the subject itself. Like the corporations, it seems as though postmodern academia is trying to free itself from the “corporeal world of commodities, manufacturing and products to exist on another plane” (22). What we have failed to notice, Klein suggests, is that these battles for representation are easily accommodated by corporate capitalism that is itself more interested in marketing and manipulating signs. “Identity politics weren’t fighting the system, or even subverting it. When it came to the vast new industry of corporate branding, they were feeding it [...] the

victories of identity politics have amounted to a rearranging of the furniture while the house burned down” (113, 123).

Terry Eagleton similarly notices failures in our Post-Modern (insisting upon the institutionalising capitals) discourses, including deconstruction, post-structuralism, certain shades of post-colonialism and post-feminism and the “cult of otherness” (2001, 19). In one of his scathing polemics in *The London Review of Books*, this time (1999) against Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s discursive strategies – primarily, what he sees as the deliberately alienating and obscure prose of deconstruction and post-structuralism – Eagleton finds that such discursive practices are a symptom of a “politically-directionless” (read: American, liberal) Left. Thus, without a major political outlet, postmodern theory adopts a self-reverential outlook; it becomes “unpleasantly narcissistic,” as Eagleton claims, and becomes a symptom of the Reason it pretends to battle (1996, 7; 1999, 4). Eagleton finds that many of (American) postmodernism’s victories are hollow: their ahistorical sense of self-importance leading to “a certain chronic tendency to caricature the notions of truth adhered to by its opponents, setting up straw targets of transcendently disinterested knowledge in order to reap the self-righteous delights of ritually bowling them over [...] For nobody who had read a government communiqué can be in the least surprised that truth is no longer in fashion” (1990, 378-9). Or as he phrases it in an 1985 article in *The New Left Review*, “Postmodernism [...] commits the apocalyptic error of believing that the discrediting of this particular representational epistemology is the death of truth itself, just as it sometimes mistakes the disintegration of certain traditional ideologies of the subject for the subject’s final disappearance” (1985, 70).

Eagleton also rips into Post-Modernism for what he regards to be typically American, liberalist, have-my-capitalism-and-my-conscience-too pseudo-leftists, who have found “a way of being politically radical without necessarily being anti-capitalist [...] Like much cultural theory, it can allow one to speak darkly of subversion while leaving one’s actual politics only slightly to the left of Edward Kennedy’s” (1999, 6) – damning words indeed. Postmodern theory, Eagleton finds, “is all rather closer to Walter Pater than to Walter Benjamin” (1985, 69). The

ceaseless bombardment upon metanarratives has had its positive impact, Eagleton finds, but has become “a convenient doctrine for those who dislike what the system does while doubting that they will ever be strong enough to bring it down” (1999, 6). Eagleton, like Naomi Klein, finds that Post-Modernism manifests itself in a misguided elevation of representation. “The post-structuralist emphasis on ‘subject-position’ is oddly akin to the existentialist obsession with authenticity: what matters is less what you say than the fact that *you* are saying it” (1999, 6).

Eagleton, like Jameson, sees postmodernism as a “logical” response to the type of capitalism to be found in our age. Eagleton, however, further emphasises how postmodern theory also grows out of – and is, in some way, *complicit* with – this mode of production. Postmodern theory, Eagleton finds, thus makes a “theoretical virtue out of historical necessity” (1996, 16), triumphantly endorsing a move to schizoid, decentred subjects that are a cultural and economic inevitability – rather like welcoming the Second Coming only after the dead are rising from their graves. Postmodern theory is not, therefore, a *response to* a particular brand(ing) of capitalism, but an *extension of it*. For Eagleton, postmodernism forgets that “the hybrid, plural and transgressive are *at a certain level* as naturally coupled with capitalism as Laurel is with Hardy” (1996, 39). Postmodernism is not, therefore, merely “some sort of theoretical mistake. It is among other things the ideology of a specific historical epoch in the West” (1996, 121). In their book on global capitalism, *Empire* (2000), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri similarly claim that postmodernism and postcolonial theory are *symptomatic* of the shift in power and economic relations that characterises capitalism today. In this sense, they see postmodernism as being on par with Islamic, Christian and Nationalist fundamentalism, the difference being that postmodernism appeals to the winners in the game of global capitalism, fundamentalism to its losers (150).¹⁰ Like Naomi Klein, Hardt and Negri feel that postmodernism has failed to identify the “real enemy” and, in the process, is too easily assimilated by capitalism:

the postmodernist and postcolonialist theorists who advocate a politics of difference, fluidity and hybridity in order to challenge the binaries and essentialism of modern sovereignty have been

outflanked by the strategies of power. Power has evacuated the bastion they are attacking and has circled around to their rear to join them in the assault in the name of difference [...] This new enemy not only is resistant to the old weapons but actually thrives on them, and thus joins its would-be antagonists in applying them to the fullest.

(Hardt and Negri 2000, 138)

Eagleton and Hardt and Negri all rain on the postmodern parade in ironic celebration of its radical opposition to the bourgeois Enlightenment. “A long time ago,” Eagleton sardonically historicises, “we fell into an obscure disaster known as Enlightenment, to be rescued around 1972 by the first lucky reader of Ferdinand de Saussure” (1996, 23). Hardt and Negri deflate the belief that “Enlightenment is the problem and postmodernism is the solution” (2000, 140), claiming that postmodernism is only a skirmish against the “tradition of modern sovereignty” – not an insignificant endeavour, they concede – rather than an all-out war against all facets of Enlightenment and modernity. Postmodernism becomes very confused, Hardt and Negri find, when it looks to liberate us from the contemporary manifestations of power because they cannot recognize these for what they are, as they are fighting along side each other. “Postmodernists are still waging battle against the shadows of old enemies” (142). “The structures and logics of power in the contemporary world are entirely immune to the ‘liberatory’ weapons of the postmodern politics of difference” (142), Hardt and Negri suggest, because we fight alongside them using the same weapons: the politics and economics of difference and demographics. To signal how well postmodernists are faring in this global struggle, Hardt and Negri conclude that “postmodern theories focus their attention so resolutely on the old forms of power they are running from, with their heads turned backwards, that they tumble unwittingly into the welcoming arms of the new power” (142).

Naomi Klein, Eagleton, Hardt and Negri do not wish to paint all contemporary theory with such damning broad brushstrokes – postmodernists are not just the “lackeys of global capitalism,” clarify Hardt and Negri (138). But there are numerous instances of the corporate obsession with brands mirrored in our elevation

of the disembodied signifier in postmodern theory, where signifiers are transformed from a tool of subjective communication to the totality of the subject itself. Just as global capitalism keeps us in a world of brand names and meaningless commodities, we come to live in the symbolic order where everything and everyone is a signifier, and affect is relegated to that which we cannot represent, that which we cannot put a label on. This is not to say that postmodern academia has been a conscious co-conspirator in furthering the development of contemporary global capitalism,¹¹ nor does it mean that these movements in academia or capitalism have only begun since the 1980s, as some wrongly accuse Klein's economic analysis of not sufficiently historicising the development of capitalism.¹²

These political, economic and philosophical developments can be traced back to eighteenth-century discourses of capitalism and Enlightenment, if not earlier. Marx's concept of *fetishism* applies not only to the practices of capitalism in the last two hundred or so years but also increasingly to our conception of the subject-as-sign. As with religion, the brand, the signifier, "the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race" (Marx 1867, 165). Marx argues for a society in which the "social relations between individuals in the performance of their labour appear [...] as their own personal relations, and are not disguised as social relations between things, between the products of labour" (Marx 1867, 170); both capitalism and our theoretical strategies increasingly confuse this relation, inverting it, substituting the relationship between things, between signifiers, for the real relations that exist between people. We need to examine to what extent, in Robert Young's words, the subject has been de-ontologised in favour of the ontologisation of the signifier (1989).

Postmodernism also over-estimates how its own tenets have seeped into culture as a whole. While reading postmodernists' observations on the death of the metanarratives expressed by an academic and artistic elite, one cannot but notice that metanarratives continue to proliferate and maintain as firm a grip upon Western culture as ever before. "For every post-structuralist fastidiously sceptical of truth," Eagleton observes, "there are millions of ordinary folk out there for whom seeing is

believing” (2000b, 34). Religion has had to concede its monopoly as the unchallenged metadiscourse, but it is still there and now shares hearts and minds with science, capitalism, pharmaceutical-psychiatry, individualism, and an almost endless list of such upstarts. An American President cannot get elected without openly worshipping God, or at least the religious right that represents him, and in Ontario, the Conservative Party swept to power in two successive elections, seducing the majority of voters with their no-nonsense appeal to the unassailable metanarrative of Common Sense (a cause also briefly taken up by William Hague’s Conservatives in 2001 British general election, and also something which implicitly, I think, underlies the appeal of George Bush, Jr.). Postmodernism itself may not be immune to the charms and promises of such transcendental certainty; while declaring the death of metanarratives, postmodern culture and theoretical discourses alike have not given up the quest for such metanarrative to call their own. Eagleton finds that the anti-foundationalism of Post-Modernism has become itself the central organising principle, now occupying “the lofty transcendental place vacated by previous candidates for the job, such as God, *Geist* or Reason” (2000, 10).

Thus, postmodernism does not mark as radical a break in human thought as we might hope. The Impossibility of the Metanarrative is the new metanarrative, and a convenient one for capitalists on both the left and right. As I shall demonstrate with regard to transgression in Part II, universal particularism is no effective response to universal universalism. Eagleton is frustrated by his Post-Modern enemies’ (this time, Stanley Fish and, it seems, most American academics) failure “to grasp that such a militant particularism is just the flipside of the vacuous universalism it deplures, rather than a genuine alternative to it” (2000, 11). Eagleton quotes Peter Osborne, who pointed out that “the narrative of the death of metanarrative is itself grander than most of the narratives it would consign to oblivion” (1996, 34). Jameson similarly remarks how theory “has seemed unique, if not privileged, among the postmodern arts and genres in its occasional capacity to defy the gravity of the zeitgeist and to produce schools, movements, and even avant-gardes where they are no longer supposed to exist” (Jameson 1991, xvi); critical theory has constructed against its own better judgement, in other words,

metanarratives that tell us that such discourses are untenable. It is symptomatic that Lacanian ideas are so widely assimilated by so many contemporary critics of all schools both in the UK and North America – from Juliet Mitchell to Judith Butler to Jameson and even Eagleton – despite being prescriptive and dogmatic, while British psychoanalysis, particularly the Independent school, which is explicitly determined to remain unswayed by doctrinal authoritarianism, is largely ignored in postmodernism theory. Flax, who extols the decentring, positive aspect of postmodernism, correctly finds that “object-relations theory is more compatible with postmodernism than Freudian or Lacanian analysis because it does not require a fixed or essentialist view of ‘human nature’” (1990, 110), although I would say that at least implicitly all versions of psychoanalysis posit some conception of human nature, though this need not necessarily be as bad a thing as postmodernism suggests. What is dubious is the way in which the concept of an essential human nature is maintained by stealth: although part of Lacan’s appeal in the postmodern environment lies in his apparent social constructivism, he does posit his own brand of human nature, as I will demonstrate below.

But what alternative do we have? Many seem to appreciate these problems of (post)structuralist, postmodern critical theory without uncovering the underlying trouble or envisioning an alternative “way out.” For example, I agree with Jameson that “postmodernism is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process” (1991, x) and that postmodernist theory is a symptom of late capitalism. But whereas Flax, Jameson and others regard postmodern theory to be those discourses that radically seek to abandon the very concept of “truth,” I find that many of those postmodern discourses seek to ground an objective approach to subjectivity in language, in the rationality of the subject, following the lead of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss and Lacan, who are themselves only following in the thoroughly Enlightened footsteps of Descartes (again, as I explain below). For instance, in the generally astute “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” Jameson acknowledges that postmodern “depthlessness” finds its prolongation in contemporary theory, but later, in the same sentence, follows Lacan’s depthless, wholly linguistic conceptualisation of schizophrenia (1991, 6). Or, again to pick unfairly on Jameson, he recognises the

“waning of affect” in postmodern culture (1991, 10), but nevertheless follows a psychoanalytic conceptualisation of the subject which excludes affect, the emotions, and examines only representation, the signifier, the image. This depersonalising tendency of postmodern theory can be seen most often and evidently in the work of Jacques Lacan, who draws together two of literary and cultural studies’ favourite sons in the monstrous hybrid of psychostructuralism.

People Aren't Words: Critiques of Lacanian Psychostructuralism

X (aged 9): Daddy, what is analysis? What do you do with your patients?

Y (his brother, aged 11½): Analysis is... analysis. Just like you do logical analysis or grammatical analysis at school, well, Papa does the same thing with his patients.

X (peremptorily and rather indignantly): Oh, no! People aren't words!

(conversation between a psychoanalyst's sons; from Green 1973, xiv)

It remains to me to prove to you whether or not this notion can be developed into a concept capable of scientific use, that is to say, capable of objectifying facts of a comparable order in reality, or, more categorically, of establishing a dimension of experience whose objectified facts may be regarded as variables.

(Lacan 1966, 8)

[...] it is a hallmark of madness when an adult puts too powerful a claim on the credulity of others, forcing them to acknowledge the sharing of an illusion that is not their own.

(Winnicott 1951, 231)¹³

With my interest in psychoanalysis, I am most familiar with those approaches to contemporary literature and culture that employ Lacanian perspectives, and I might seem to single out unfairly this school of thought for criticism. I do recognise that Lacanians have provided many interesting and sometimes important readings of literature. However, the ubiquity of Lacanian concepts in our (postmodern) theoretical discourses and the manner in which his terms and ideas have been taken up in our everyday discursive language necessitates, I think, some unrepentant criticism. I would eventually like to construct a more dialogic debate between Lacan and object-relations approaches to literary and cultural studies, but I fear that right now Lacan's voice is too loud, too overpowering in this space for play. To me, it seems as if we have aligned ourselves with Lacan's scientisation of psychoanalysis in order to claim a positivistic status for our own literary and cultural analyses.

Despite our collective efforts, psychoanalysts, linguists and literary critics share some persistent, niggling problems: Prematurely declaring the death of the metanarrative, we live in a culture that cherishes the promises such discourses offer.

Most discourses still at least unconsciously wish to offer certainties and unassailable objectivity. However, psychoanalysis and literary and cultural studies lack an invariable object that can be subjected to such scientific scrutiny, and we look enviously upon chemistry, physics or biology that *do* have such an object, and therefore reap the benefits of respectability, recognition and funding that a discursive status bestows. Freud, linguists and literary critics have all adopted a simulation of scientific methodology – Freud’s case studies, structuralism’s synchronic analysis, formalism’s archetypes, for example – but still lacked an acceptable clearly defined object. The subjective element of Freud’s analyses, the spoken word and storytelling always taint what seek to be objective, water-tight discourses. But Lacan declares that there is a foundation upon which we can erect such a discourse, an object that is shared by the linguist, the psychoanalyst and the literary critic: the signifier.

There are many places where I disagree with Lacan, varying in degrees of seriousness and severity: His theory offers only an *intrapsychic* picture of the subject, where that painted by object-relations is *intersubjective*;¹⁴ Lacan’s worldview is thoroughly patriarchal, however useful and interesting some feminist interpretations of his work have been (Julia Kristeva, for example); I find that his concepts of desire and lack serve to naturalise a capitalist conception of the subject; his belief in primary narcissism is unsupported by neonate studies. I will address these issues in what follows to an extent but here I want to focus on the aspect of Lacan’s thought that I think relates most directly to my conception of postmodern subjective experience, and which I think is most directly addressed by the authors I examine in the next section. I find that the Lacanian fetishism of language and the objectification of the subject – central to the Lacanian project as a whole – not only is incapable of redressing the crises of postmodernity but actively exacerbates and perpetuates the postmodern crises of subjectivity. How is it that language, a *tool* of human communication, becomes more worthy of our study than the subjects who fashion it for their use? I have tried to isolate this target as much as possible for the sake of maintaining focus in this limited space, though this issue is so fundamental to the difference between Lacanian and object-relations thought that other issues are

bound to enter this space.

Lacan's Scientisation of Psychoanalysis

[...] you will scarcely be able to reject a judgement that the philosophy of today has retained some essential features of the animistic mode of thought – the overvaluation of the magic of words and the belief that the real events in the world take the course which our thinking seeks to impose on them.

(Freud 1933, 201)¹⁵

If psycho-analysis is to be constituted as the science of the unconscious, one must set out from the notion that the unconscious is structured like a language.

(Lacan 1973, 203)

The most fundamental problem I have with Lacanian conceptions of psychoanalysis can be summed up by his insistence on examining the subject wholly on epistemological grounds, and thus conceiving of a subject that is desubjectified, reduced to a mere object of scientific study. This is necessitated by Lacan's desire for psychoanalysis to assume its place with biology and mathematics as a pure science; however, psychoanalysis has no object which can be subjected to scientific scrutiny, so Lacan, with a prestidigitation borrowed from Saussure, elevates language to this privileged place.

Saussure, in pulling an objective rabbit from a hat of infinite variation, offers hope to psychoanalysts and literary critics desperate for scientific legitimacy. But Saussure explicitly shows why and how he performs the trick, discussing the problems of creating a science of language at the outset of his *Course in General Linguistics* (1915):

Language at any given time involves an established system and an evolution. At any given time, it is an institution in the present and a product of the past. At first sight, it looks very easy to distinguish between the system and its history, between what it is and what it was. In reality, the connection between the two is so close that it is hard to separate them. Would matters be simplified if one considered

the ontogenesis of linguistic phenomena, beginning with a study of children's language, for example? No. It is quite illusory to believe that where language is concerned the problem of origin is any different from the problem of permanent conditions. There is no way out of the circle.

(de Saussure 1915, 9)

In this move, Saussure is determining what science would regard to be acceptable *primary qualities* of language, “qualities which can be treated mathematically and which are thought not to vary according to subjective bias” (Young 1990). This identification of primary qualities in scientific studies, Young tells us, originated with the Cartesian definition of matter in the seventeenth century and form the basis of contemporary scientific practice. Young cites a 1975 Royal Society document on *Qualities, Units and Symbols* which shows that modern science still uses the Cartesian criteria for matter, adding only a handful of new qualities to Descartes’ original length, breadth and height, such as electrical current and luminous intensity.¹⁶

Saussure admits, however, that his solution is an imperfect one.

So however we approach the question, no one object of linguistic study emerges of its own accord. Whichever way we turn, the same dilemma confronts us. Either we tackle each problem on one front only, and risk failing to take into account the dualities mentioned above; or else we seem committed to trying to study language in several ways simultaneously, in which case the object of study becomes a muddle of disparate, unconnected things. By proceeding thus one opens the door to various sciences – psychology, anthropology, prescriptive grammar, philology and so on – which are to be distinguished from linguistics. These sciences could lay claim to language as failing in their domain; but their methods are not the ones that are needed.

One solution only, in our view, resolves all these difficulties. The linguist must take the study of linguistic structure as his primary

concern, and relate all other manifestations of language to it. Indeed, amid so many dualities, linguistic structure seems to be the one thing that is independently definable and provides something our minds can satisfactorily grasp.

(Saussure 1915, 9)

Saussure's solution, therefore, involves a paring away of those elements of language that prevent language from being a pure object for a science of linguistics; he thus deals not with language, *langage*, but with *langue*, language that has been stripped of *parole*, the subjective and variable element of language, the study of which lies in the various domains of psychology, anthropology, prescriptive grammar and philology. This fictional entity of *langue* provided Saussure with a means to achieve many invaluable insights into how language may work, and, for subsequent structuralists and post-structuralists, how the myriad of signs within any closed, synchronically conceptualised system may relate to one another. However, this methodological fiction has taken on a life of its own, permeating and dominating the very fields that Saussure wished to exclude from his science so as to focus on a single aspect of the relations between signs. Rather than putting the psychological and anthropological analysis back into Saussure's findings, it seems as though psychology (Lacan) and anthropology (Lévi-Strauss) have instead taken Saussure's object to be their own, having fortuitously stumbled upon an object of study upon which to ground their science.

Lacan mourns the transformation that occurred in psychoanalysis around 1920, a symbolic date that marks a change in psychoanalysis in general but specifically and significantly in Freud's own thought, with the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, to a more humanist approach to subjectivity. Lacan perceives this change to be detrimental to psychoanalysis' status as a science:

The present disdain for research into the language of symbols – which can be seen by a glance at the summaries of our publications before and after the 1920s – corresponds in our discipline to nothing less than a change of object, whose tendency to align itself at the most commonplace level of communication, in order to come into line

with the new objectives proposed for the psychoanalytical technique, is perhaps responsible for the rather gloomy balance sheet which the most lucid writers have drawn up of its results.

(Lacan 1953, 34)

Lacan fears that psychoanalysis will not be accepted as a science because of the tendencies of contemporary (post-1920) technique. “If psychoanalysis is to become a science – for it is not yet one – and if it is not to degenerate in its technique – and perhaps that has already happened – we must get back to the meaning of its experience” (Lacan 1953, 30) by which, I take it, he means a return to Lacan’s mythical, pre-1920 Freud. Lacan no doubt sees psychoanalysis as being under threat in a secular culture that places “faith” only in the absolute certainties of scientific method, and certainly his fears are not without some foundation (see Young 1999). “Psychoanalysis has played a role in the direction [or ‘guidance’] of modern subjectivity, and it cannot continue to sustain this role without bringing it into line with the movement in modern science which elucidates it” (Lacan 1953, 46). But, Lacan asks, “Can [Freud’s] results form the basis of a positive science?” “Yes,” he answers, “if the experience is verifiable by everyone” (1966, 9). But how in psychoanalysis, which has always struggled in vain to construct a metapsychology upon which all practitioners can agree, are there experiences that can be verified by everyone? For Lacan the answer is simple – too simple: “Whether it sees itself as an instrument of healing, of formation, or of exploration in depth, psychoanalysis has only a single intermediary: the patient’s Word” (1953, 9). In a rare unguarded moment, Lacan admits that there is a “problem of grounding which must assure our discipline its place amongst the sciences: a problem of formalisation, in truth very much off on the wrong foot,” although this is also a warning against the “Romantic viewpoint” that Lacan sees as coming to dominate (British) psychoanalysis that does not concur with his privileging of language (46):

For it seems that, caught by the very quirk in the medical mind against which psychoanalysis has had to constitute itself, it is with the handicap of being half a century behind the movement of the sciences, like medicine itself, that we are seeking to join up with

them again.

It is in the abstract objectification of our experience on fictitious, or even simulated, principles of the experimental method, that we find the effect of prejudices which must first be swept from our domain if we wish to cultivate it according to its authentic structure.

(Lacan 1953, 46-7)

Lacan objects to psychoanalysis' exclusion from the brotherhood of sciences because it does not fit into a conception of science that "has become degraded [...] in the positivist reversal, which, by making the human sciences the crowning glory of experimental sciences, in actual fact made them subordinate to experimental science. This conception is the result of an erroneous view of the history of science founded on the prestige of a specialised development of the experiment" (1953, 47). The concept of what qualifies as a science Lacan sees as being hijacked by the nineteenth-century positivists and experiential methodology, so Lacan claims that he wants to set up a "new order of the sciences" which is actually a return to the "age old" scientific tradition established by Plato in *Theaetetus* (47). Theaetetus, Genevieve Lloyd explains, was a mathematician, a slightly younger contemporary of Plato (1979, 108). Both Theaetetus and Plato in his work *Theaetetus*, it seems,¹⁷ emphasises the need for *exact definitions* in logic and science (111).

Two ironic points need to be highlighted from this conception of psychoanalysis as a science and the setting up of Plato's *Theaetetus* as a methodological influence. First, the other psychoanalysts that Lacan derides for weakening the scientific status of their discipline, those who he sees as conspiring with the nineteenth century experimental method – he means American ego-psychology and British object-relations – are generally much less interested (especially in Britain) in securing a scientific status for psychoanalysis. Although Lacan accuses them of "objectifying experience," these analysts generally provide much more "evidence" for their conclusions, something glaringly missing in Lacan's writings. Compared with other psychoanalytic schools – and especially when regarded alongside Freud, Klein and object-relations – Lacan offers us very few case

studies. Nancy Fraser (1992) also finds that “Lacan himself was remarkably unconcerned with empirical confirmation and that recent research on the development of subjectivity in infants and young children does not support his views” (185). Lacan does not present his own case material, but endlessly re-reads Freud’s own case studies. But I am taking issue with Lacan’s methodology, his ideological assumptions and his rationale for constructing the subject as he does; like Fraser, I am not really concerning myself here with the issue of whether or not Lacan’s theory is actually *correct*, that is, an accurate picture of subjective development and experience. For that, I would have to bring empirical evidence that contradicted Lacan’s findings.

Second, despite wanting to reverse the tide of positivism, Lacan’s adopted methodology is actually the same as that of his nineteenth century forefathers. Lacan’s strategy is thoroughly consistent with those scientific practices established by Descartes in his identification and isolation of those primary qualities that will be the object of his study. Inspired by, and envious, of Lévi-Strauss’s use of linguistics to scientise anthropology, Lacan decides to adopt the “mathematicized form in which is inscribed the discovery of the *phoneme*” (1953, 47):

In our time, in the historical period that has seen the formation of a science that may be termed human, but which must be distinguished from any kind of psycho-sociology, namely, linguistics, whose model is the combinatory operation, functioning spontaneously, of itself, in a presubjective way – it is this linguistic structure that gives its status to the unconscious. It is this structure, in any case, that assures us that there is, beneath the term unconscious, something definable, accessible and objectifiable.

(Lacan 1973, 21)

Lacan regards language and the linguistic structure to be a valid primary quality, a suitably objective, definable, accessible means through which to examine the subject because it exists *before* the subject and independently of it. This gives Lacan the object he envied in the other sciences and mathematics: “The *primary* character of all symbols in fact brings them closer to those numbers out of which all the other are

compounded” (Lacan 1953, 59). And this object (“*Primary Language*” Lacan 1953, 57) must be kept sterile: The subject can play no role in shaping language – through emotional or creative input – because such influences would taint the purity of the scientific object.

Lacan’s rereadings of Saussure are an attempt to add more scientific weight to Freud’s at times frighteningly porous science. But in order still to brand his psychostructuralism “psychoanalysis,” Lacan has to show that his addition of Saussure into the Freudian mix is actually entirely consistent with Freud’s own intention. We find the claim repeated in Lacan’s writing that “what I have just said has so little originality, even in its verve, that there appears in it not a single metaphor that Freud’s works do not repeat with the frequency of a *leitmotif* in which the very fabric of the work is revealed” (Lacan 1953, 21-2) – a *highly* dubious claim and one that does not sit well with Lacanians’ claims that Lacan is a very original thinker. For some Lacanians, Lacan is the “founding theoretician of the post-Modern Age” and Lacan’s discoveries take precedent over Freud as it is Lacan, and not his psychoanalytic father, that heralds a new, specifically *Lacanian* episteme (Sullivan 1991, 36), another dubious claim that I will demonstrate to be unfounded.¹⁸ And because Lacan’s reading of Freud is limited to a handful of Freud’s (most early) works, often one finds that Lacan must present us with a wholly inaccurate picture of Freud, eliding differences between himself and his master, or repudiating Freud’s revisions of his own work. For example, in an attempt to justify his emphasis on the symbolic (vaguely social constructivist) when Freud focussed so much attention on the drives (mostly biologically determinate), we find Lacan making the outrageous claim that “In any event one had only to go back to the works of Freud to gauge to what secondary and hypothetical place he relegates the theory of the instincts” (Lacan 1953, 26). Another example shows Lacan calling for a revision of Freud’s 1925 essay, “Negation,” where Freud opens the door for the British focus upon affective processes and pathologising reified intellectual processes (see Lacan 1953 16, *n.* 39). In order to assert his allegiance to Freud, Lacan must also refute all other psychoanalysts’ claims to Freudian fidelity. Therefore, we find Lacan decrying psychoanalysis practised “in the name of the theory of the ego or of the technique of

the analysis in defences – everything, that is, which is the most contrary to the Freudian experience,” because, for Lacan, Freud’s only discovery was “that of the domain of the incidence in the nature of man of his relations to the Symbolic order” (1953, 38). Setting himself as the only true heir, he chastises other pretenders to the throne. Displaying no sense of irony or self-awareness, he warns that “Each analyst presumes to consider himself the one chosen to discover the conditions of a completed objectification in our experience, and the enthusiasm which greets these theoretical attempts seems to grow more fervent the more derelict they prove to be” (Lacan 1953, 54).

Despite some painstaking efforts, Freud seems much less concerned with the scientific status of psychoanalysis than some of his followers. According to Meira Likierman, “the supposed ‘dichotomy’ between the scientific and humanistic Freud is not a feature of the original” (1990, 117) and is, instead, a product of translating difficulties and squabbling disciples. It seems, however, that Lacan ignores those inconvenient places where Freud himself accepts psychoanalysis’ “weakness,” as Lacan labels the subjective millstones around psychoanalysts’ necks. Freud, remember, explains that the necessary involvement of the transferences “puts our scientific pretensions to shame” (1916-17, 493), and although Freud insists that his case studies not be read as narratives but as scientific documents to be kept from “unauthorised readers” (see his “Prefatory Remarks” to Dora, 1905b), his own language was much less scientific or alien than his official English translators would have us believe. Consider, for example, how Freud’s *Es/Ich/Überich*, literally meaning “it,” “I” and “over-I,” were rendered more scientifically acceptable by their classical translation as *id*, *ego* and *superego* (see Young 1985; Likierman 1990).¹⁹ These words, like Theaetetus’ mathematics and Lacan’s algebra, are chosen in order to fix upon them a meaning suitable to an authoritative discourse, to nail meanings down and to stop them escaping to be tainted by *unauthorised* users.

Both the strength and plague of science is that as “supposedly ‘neutral’ and objective, further questions about what might be masked by or foreclosed in this move are forestalled” (Flax 1990, 101). Psychoanalysis, as it is constructed here by these authoritarian, scientific impulses, also attempts to shed its own historical,

political, cultural and ideological contexts. This is dangerous, Young explains, because it “diverts our gaze so that we will not ask what forces in a society evoke a theory and into what cultural, political and ideological debate these scientific theory enter and what role they play” (1985), therefore reducing our ability to examine not only the discursive practice itself but the cultural environment from which it emerged. But with the full force of *two* sciences behind it, Lacan’s promise of a theory that puts our own object of study – language – at the very heart of what it means to be a human subject proves too tempting for literary critics to resist.

I also find that Lacan’s and postmodernism’s enchantment with Saussure’s creation is typical of the rationalist tradition from which they emerge and that, despite Lacan’s claims for a messianic salvation from such Enlightenment epistemologies (see, for example, Sullivan 1991; Lowenstein 1994), by employing Saussure he actually re-enforces the Cartesian subject split between mind and body, the individual and the social, language *as a system* from its use in *human speech*. This rationalist splitting is Vološinov’s objection to structuralism:

The idea of the *conventionality, the arbitrariness of language*, is a typical one for rationalism as a whole, and no less typical is the *comparison of language to the system of mathematical signs*. What interests the mathematically minded rationalists is not the relationship of the sign to the actual reality it reflects nor to the individual who is its originator, but the *relationship of sign to sign within a closed system* already accepted and authorised. In other words, they are interested only in the *inner logic of the system of signs itself*, taken, as in algebra, completely independently of the ideological meanings that give the signs their content.

(Vološinov 1973, 23)²⁰

Given this exclusive focus upon the sign, having eliminated the subjective referent as an inconvenient variable in an otherwise unassailable scientific formulation, the signifier comes dominate the signified, as it has in postmodern theory: even signifieds have uncomfortable, subjective component, an unknowable mental concept, particular to each individual.

In her critique of Lacan, Fraser begins by noting that “there are good *prima facie* reasons for feminists to be suspicious of the structuralist model” (180). For Fraser,

the structuralist model brackets questions of practice, agency, and the speaking subject. Thus, it cannot shed light on social identity and group formation. Moreover, because this approach brackets the diachronic, it will not tell us anything about shifts in identities and affiliations over time. Similarly, because it abstracts from the social context of communication, the model brackets issues of power and inequality.

(Fraser 1992, 181)

The implicit rationalist, patriarchal bias of Saussure suits the explicit patriarchal conception in orthodox Freudian and Lacanian implication that the subject does not develop any capacity for a self, symbolisation and history until it enters into the Oedipal phase. For Lacan, as for *early* Freud, the father is of primary, even sole, importance in the socialisation of the infant. Lacan therefore relegates the infant’s experiences with the first caregiver, usually the mother, to “the imaginary” and “the real” and what analysis of these experiences is permitted is all filtered through the patriarchal law of the father.²¹ Lacan’s apparent advantages for feminism – the promise of a more social constructivist Freud and a less biologically-dependent psychoanalysis – are only an illusion, says Fraser, because while Lacan demonstrates that the social, symbolic order genders subjectivity, his metapsychology necessitates that this symbolic order be phallogocentric “since the attainment of subjectivity” in language “requires submission to ‘the Father’s Law’” thus resulting in an “ironclad determinism” (182). Thus for Fraser, Lacan has replaced Freud’s biologism with *psychologism*, “the untenable view that autonomous psychological imperatives given independently of culture and history can dictate the way they are interpreted and acted on within culture and history” and *symbolicism*, “the homogenising reification of diverse signifying practices into a monolithic and all-pervasive ‘symbolic order,’ and, second, the endowing of that order with an exclusive and unlimited causal power to fix people’s subjectivities once and for all” (182). “The form alone in

which Language is expressed,” Lacan tells us, “defines subjectivity. Language says: ‘you will go such and such a way, and when you see such and such, you will turn off in such and such a direction” (Lacan 1953, 61-2). There is in Lacan’s metapsychology, therefore, very little room for subjective agency and creativity in such an authoritarian structure. Lacan finds that the Oedipal complex

marks the limits that our discipline assigns to subjectivity: that is to say, what the subject can know of his unconscious participation in the movement of the complex structures of marriage ties, by verifying the symbolic effects in his individual existence of the tangential movement toward incest which has manifested itself ever since the coming of a universal community.

(Lacan 1953, 40, see also 126)

In other words, the limits of subjectivity in psychoanalysis lie only in what we can come to learn of our inevitable and unconscious participation in the pre-ordained symbolic, Oedipal game. For Lacan, however, focussing on the relationship with the father is necessary because it guarantees the objectivity of his science. If the subject has real agency, it would be impossible to ground any objective conclusions because of the infinite variation and bias that such agency would imply. Everything must therefore be reducible to the symbolic order; the real is inadmissible into analysis, and even the “imaginary economy has meaning,” Lacan tells us, because “we gain some purchase in it, only in so far as it is transcribed into the symbolic order, where a ternary [i.e. Oedipal] relation is imposed” (1954-5, 255). This is the first and perhaps most fundamental concept of classical Freudian and Lacanian theory that Klein reverses: she displaces the penis and castration anxiety as the central, most horrific trauma and in so doing, displaces the rationalist, patriarchal episteme that informs Saussure, Freud and Lacan.²²

I do not want to spend too much time here arguing the *specific* pros and cons of Lacan’s structuralist basis. However, there are some issues to which I wish to draw attention. First, we cannot assume that Lacan’s readings of Saussure are correct. Although Lacan is performing a conscious re-interpretation of Saussure’s work, he

holds a misplaced faith in the phallus as a transcendental signifier and a dubious split between the signifier and the signified, both conceptualisations that, many have pointed out, would be rejected by Saussure. After all, “Language is as much signified as it is a signifier” (Flax 1990, 104), and the signified persists, even in the postmodern corporate brand, unwelcome though it may be for Lacan’s science.

And of course Saussure’s own theories are not without their critics. Norman Holland, in “The Trouble(s) with Lacan” (1998), suggests that the adoption of Saussure’s theories of language is one of three fundamental flaws in Lacan’s thinking. Lacan’s remedy for Freud, the use of modern linguistics that was unavailable to his master, is a poisoned pill: Holland points out that by “modern linguistics” Lacan meant “turn-of-the-century-already-out-dated linguistics” that do not bear up to scrutiny, even by the mid-twentieth century when Lacan adopted these ideas. And regardless, one could argue that Saussure’s *Course* – first published in 1915 – was available to Freud, and before his most productive period of metapsychological speculations; why, therefore, did Freud not use it himself? Borch-Jacobsen asks:

Why did Freud see none of this? That is the question that all revisionist theories must address if they want to present themselves as psychoanalytic. Since Freudian revisionists cannot simply say that the founder was wrong, they must present the new theory as more embracing or “deeper” than the old one. That way, they leave classical theory untouched, while suggesting that its validity is only relative.

(Borch Jacobsen 2000, 16)

I think that some schools and “revisionists” (a term Borch-Jacobsen uses somewhat dismissively) have answered this challenge: Freud could not see early object relations or a socio-environmental constructions of gender in his historical place as a nineteenth century patriarchal rationalist. I am not sure if Lacan is as successful in his answers. He once offers the explanation that “The psychological prejudices of Freud’s day were opposed to acknowledging the existence of any reality in verbalisation as such, other than its own *flatus vocis*” (Lacan 1953, 16), but to

historicise Freud is to call attention to the subjective bias of his science, something that Lacan is not eager to do as he so often cites Freud as authoritative source for his own conclusions. In place of Saussure, Holland offers Chomsky, who, ironically, has his own, very derisive opinion as to the scientific status of linguistics:

Modern linguistics shares the delusion – the accurate term, I believe – that the modern “behavioural sciences” have in some essential respect achieved a transition from “speculation” to “science” and that earlier work can be safely consigned to the antiquarians. [...] to a considerable degree, I feel, the “behavioural sciences” are merely mimicking the surface features of the natural sciences; much of their scientific character has been achieved by a restriction of subject matter and a concentration on rather peripheral issues.

(Chomsky, qtd. in Green 1973, 218).

It would seem that Green, like Holland, would endorse Chomsky as the psychoanalysts’ linguist, finding him “closer to Freud than any other linguist” (1973, 249). Later in this study, I will examine Bakhtin’s theories of language as an alternative partner to psychoanalytic ways of thinking about language.

The Objectification of the Subject, or, Why Lacanian Theory Cannot Redress the Crises of Postmodern Culture (even if it cared to do so...)

To make any advances, all knowledge must objectify the parts which are objectifiable.

(Lacan 1953-54, 206)

Postmodern end-of-history thinking does not envisage a future for us much different from the present, a prospect it oddly views as a cause for celebration.

(Eagleton 1996, 134)

Just because certain celestial bodies can be studied only by means of a telescope does not mean that celestial bodies have the same nature as a telescope.

(Roustang 1998, 57)

Just as Saussure must jettison psychology, anthropology, prescriptive grammar and

philology to look exclusively at the relations between signs to claim a scientific status for linguistics, Lacan must jettison the “mystical experience” (Lacan 1973, 9) that taints the purity of his object: the subjective bias, “the texture of experience,” which get relegated to the status of *secondary qualities* (see Young 1990; 1994, 1-11). In an attack upon British psychoanalysis (I suspect specifically upon Fairbairn),²³ Lacan condemns the concentration upon non-linguistic elements in analysis, and the (British) psychoanalytic inclination to pathologise an over-investment in the intellectual processes (see my discussions of Winnicott, Jones, Fairbairn and Bion below).

If analysis should come round to exposing its weakness, it will be advisable not to rest content with recourse to affectivity – that taboo-word of the dialectical incapacity which, with the verb *to intellectualise* (whose accepted pejorative connotation makes a merit of this incapacity), will go down in the history of the language as the stigmata of our obtuseness regarding the subject.

(Lacan 1953, 10-1)

Lacan regarded the signifier to be an algebraic sign, devoid of meaning and therefore available for a formulaic systematisation. In privileging the signifier in order to claim credibility for psychoanalysis as a science, Lacan therefore must empty the sign of its secondary qualities, cleaving the signifier from signified and referents. Primary qualities exist, therefore, in nature, while secondary qualities exist only in the subjective mind. One consequence of this relegation of secondary qualities, Young explains, is that sounds cannot belong to the birds and colours cannot belong to the flower (1996c). But even Lacan appreciates that “Only a subject can understand a meaning” (1966, 9) and so, by eliminating the subjective element in language and in analysis, he empties the sign and subject of meaning. There is no room for subjects in Lacanian analysis except via the symbolic order: “I identify myself in Language, but only by losing myself in it like an object” (Lacan 1953, 63). Lacan does acknowledge the subjective element: his entire theory of the Real is an acceptance that there are qualities of analysands which elude the analyst, which lie beyond Language. In Lacanian methodology, therefore, subjects lose their status as

subjects, becoming mere inanimate, affectless objects. This contradiction lies at the very heart of Lacanian theory. As Roustang succinctly explains,

For if, on the one hand, science excludes the subject and, on the other, this same subject is the object of psychoanalysis, then the title of subject must be retained, in order to have us believe that the term still refers to an embodied and individualised subjectivity. The Lacanian operation is thus necessarily double – in other words, perfectly contradictory. On the one hand, it has to retain subjectivity as it appears in psychoanalysis in the form of the divided subject (divided, for example, between the conscious and the unconscious), and on the other, he has to empty it of all embodiment, humanisation, affectivity, and so on, in order to turn it into a purely mathematical object, which itself is obviously only one dimensional, or even lacking all dimension.

(Roustang 1998, 54)²⁴

Subjects are not subjects, but objects enslaved to the Word, to the objectively knowable mathematical system. It is the Word that “confers a meaning on the functions of the individual” (Lacan 1953, 19); “Man speaks [...] but it is because the symbol has made him man” (39). It could be said, therefore, that the Lacanian conceptualisation of human nature – and we must not be deceived into thinking that there is no such conception, despite the social constructivist aspirations of his followers – “leave us utterly bereft of a sense of the subject or of any foundations for common humanity or moral discourse” (Young 1996c). In Lacan’s symbolic-determinism, not only the agency of the subject is lost, but the subject itself is rent asunder.

Lacan’s subjects are thus disembodied and depersonalised, and although Lacan would protest that the body is not excluded from consideration in his psychoanalysis, the conceptualisation of what constitutes embodied experience for Lacanians and object-relations theorists is radically different. Lacan, for example, describes the body as “the hysterical nucleus of the neurosis where the hysterical symptom reveals the structure of a Language and is deciphered like an inscription

which, once recovered, can without serious loss be destroyed” (Lacan 1953, 21). André Green similarly finds that “Lacan’s work is exemplary in this regard, not only because affect has no place in it, but also because it is explicitly excluded from it” (1973, 99), although Green does point out that early in Lacan’s work (before 1953), this aversion was less dogmatically pronounced as it became in later years. When faced, in 1974, with the accusation that he neglects affect (in a question, however, posed not by a critic but by one of his most pre-eminent followers, Jacques-Alain Miller), Lacan responds that what the body discharges is not affect, but thought (see Lacan 1974, 20). “Affect,” after all, “befalls a body whose essence it is said is to dwell in language” (1974, 23).²⁵ As if by queer coincidence, Lacan “paradoxically” finds that the psychoanalytic session “normally proceeds to its termination without revealing to us very much of what our patient derives in his own right from his particular sensitivity to colors our calamities, from the quickness of his grasp of things or the urgency of his weakness of the flesh, from his power to retain or to invent – in short from the vivacity of his tastes” (1953, 29) – of course, this is fortunate, since his theory denies that these elements are necessary in analysis. Lacan therefore derides those psychoanalysts who try to bring the affective, subjective element back into analysis.

For this paradox does not become resolved in the efforts of certain people – like the philosophers mocked by Plato for being driven by their appetite for the Real to go about embracing trees – who tend to take every episode in which that fleeting reality puts forth its shoots for lived reaction of which they show themselves so fond. For these are the very people who, making their objective what lies beyond Language, react to our rule of “Don’t touch” by a sort of obsession. Keep going in that direction, and I dare say the last word in the transference reaction will be a reciprocal sniffing between analyst and subject.

(Lacan 1953, 30)

Since Lacan cannot accommodate subjective affect in the analytic scene – lest these secondary, subjective qualities taint his primary object – he minimises its

importance in subjective experience, reducing it to functions of Language. Flax agrees: “Lacan’s psyche is radically severed from and other than the soma; even the unconscious has nothing to do with the body” (1990, 128).²⁶ As Eagleton observes: “Nothing could be more disabling than a ruling rationality which can know nothing beyond its own concepts, forbidden from enquiring into the very stuff of passion and perception. How can the absolute monarch of Reason retain its legitimacy if what Kant called the ‘rabble’ of the senses remains forever beyond its ken?” (1990, 14). Freud’s unconscious is physical, bawdy, archaic, animalistic, but Lacan’s is thoroughly knowable, rational; the unconscious, after all, is structured like a language, following pre-ordained laws and logic. Freud’s instinctual drives – notoriously animalistic sources of unpredictable energy – are transformed by Lacan into thoroughly knowable elements in a thoroughly conventional science, “Because energy is not a substance, which, for example, improves or goes sour with age; it’s a numerical constant that a physicist has to find in his calculations, so as to be able to work [...] something strictly verifiable [...] Each and every physicist knows clearly, that is to say, in a readily articulated manner, that energy is nothing other than the numerical value of a constant” (Lacan 1974, 18). Even Lacan’s sacred phallus is likewise disembodied. It is purely symbolic, and does not refer to the penis; the phallus has no biological referent, and therefore “castration,” for Lacan, is only symbolic and based on language and desire, whereas for Freud and Klein it represents a real, physical threat (compare, for example, Klein 1928 and Evans 1996, 140-4).

Because Lacan is loath to admit the subjective qualities of analysands into analysis, he is even more concerned not to admit the subjective bias of the analyst – the countertransference, the recognition of which is one of the great strengths of British psychoanalysis and, I think, further study of which will have important implications for cultural and literary studies. Begrudgingly admitting that Freud addresses the countertransference in his study of Dora, Lacan limits its conceptualisation to “the analyst’s prejudices and presumptions” – because any subjective bias of the objective scientist is always an undesirable mistake – and finds the term “in my opinion cannot be extended beyond the dialectical reasons for the

error” (Lacan 1953, 69; see also, for example, Burgoyne and Sullivan 1997, 141-8).²⁷

As an ex-devotee of Lacan, François Roustang is both insightful and scathing on Lacan’s objectification of the subject in *The Lacanian Delusion* (1998). With first-hand, in-depth knowledge of Lacan’s methodology, Roustang’s objections cut to the core and expose the attempts to cover the contradictions that inevitably arise from Lacan’s project. Roustang’s central premise is the same as my own: that Lacan’s attempt to scientise psychoanalysis has hazardous consequences for the potential for subjective experience:

In declaring that language was the sole object of psychoanalysis, Lacan believed it could be given a scientific basis, for he was then on terrain where something objective could be grasped. But in reality, something quite different happened: The instrument psychoanalysis employs in order to function took the place of its object, an object that belongs – and this bears repeating – to the order of subjectivity, singularity, affectivity and life. On the pretext of finally revealing the object of psychoanalysis, Lacan placed himself on familiar ground, but this meant forgetting what he was there to find out. With the unconscious structured like a language, something is knowable, but there is nothing left to *be* known [*on peut savoir quelque chose, mais il n’y a plus rien à savoir*].

(Roustang 1998, 113-4)

Roustang, for me, does not go far enough in one respect: he too often seems to share Lacan’s assumption that language is the only instrument available to the psychoanalyst through which to regard the subject. Object-relations has shown that most communication is affective, unconscious and yet structured decidedly unlike a language or in any logical way; the unconscious, like the emotions, is governed by the most primitive processes. For object-relations analysts, psychoanalysis has more means at its disposal than mere language and conscious knowledge as the tools of the trade: the transferences, countertransferences, holding, containing, facilitating are all other equally if not more important means of conducting analysis. Even if one

takes language to be the only tool available to the psychoanalyst, however, this does not mean that the subject or the unconscious are reducible to language. Roustang challenges Lacan's infamous assertion that "The unconscious is structured like a language" (1973, 203) as being a sophism "because the instrument of research is confused with the object of research" (Roustang 1998, 57). Roustang points out that saying "The unconscious is structured like a language" is tantamount to saying "Since we can only see certain objects by looking at them, these objects are structured like eyes" (112) and that "Just because certain celestial bodies can be studied only by means of a telescope does not mean that celestial bodies have the same nature as a telescope" (57). Even if language were the only means through which we can apprehend the unconscious, that does not mean that the unconscious is therefore necessarily structured like a language. This should be obvious, but the fact that it is not is a testament to Lacan's rationalist wizardry and symptomatic, perhaps, of our need to believe him.

Lacan's fetishism of language leads to a consistent mis-identification of what ails the subject. For example, as I already discussed, Jameson uses Lacan's description of schizophrenia as a breakdown in the signifying chain (see Jameson 1991, 26). Schizophrenia is not *brought about* by a break in signification but the inability to symbolise is *symptomatic* of schizophrenic processes, principally splitting (see Klein 1930; Bion 1955; Segal 1957). Bion clarifies, for example: "I do not wish it to be supposed that I ignore the peculiarity of the schizophrenic's object relations, of which verbal thought, for all its importance, is but a subordinate function" (Bion 1955, 222). Again Lacan mistakes the linguistic symptom for the disease, the object for the subject. It is not a breakdown in the chain of signifiers that gives rise to the schizoid postmodern subject but radical splitting of self/other, signifier/signified, mind/body, subject/object.

Therefore, in his effort to scientise psychoanalysis, Lacan himself is guilty of the derealisation of the subject, moving the centre of gravity from the kernel to the shell, the care, the technique. Although it is exceedingly inconvenient for our certainties in fields that, by definition, evade such easy objectification, we cannot satisfy our rationalistic impulses and defensive needs by objectifying the subject.

Through Lacanian theory we *can* adopt a subject that is knowable, but without affect and without emotional responses – so for the sake of the subject, and for subjectivity, we should resist this impulse and learn to survive these paradoxes.

Lacan's Rationalism and the Bourgeois, Narcissistic Subject

In the end Lacan recreates the myth of a solipsistic disembodied self. Despite his heroic self-image as a brave Nietzschean negator of bourgeois culture, elucidating our primal alienation and fractured selves, Lacan replicates rather than dismantles a dominant strain of modern Western thought extending from Descartes through Sartre. The subject is not “decentred.”

(Flax 1990, 107)

When he was twenty [...] he had believed that happiness was a quality which resided in its possessor and bore no relation to his environment. But now he was a little older and had learned his theory was difficult, if not impossible, to work out in practice.

(Carter 1971, 82)

As Flax so concisely puts it above, despite the rhetoric portraying his struggle as an epic of radical reversal of the Enlightenment (see, for example, Lowenstein 1994, especially 716-7) and the initiation of a radical new episteme (see, for example, Sullivan 1991), Lacan presents us a thoroughly rationalistic, bourgeois subject, a subject entirely suited to study under the Enlightenment scientific discourses and to go shopping in the malls of (post)modern capitalism. Despite his protestations, Lacan's theory rests on classical Cartesian mind-body dualism. The Lacanian subject is affectless, depersonalised, the psyche split from the soma, and his methodology is similarly typical of Enlightenment reason that comes to know that which is irrational so as to rationally contain and control it through knowledge; he confines that which escapes his rationalist schema to the real, locking it away so as to not have to confront it.

Lacan himself admits to this Cartesian lineage – to a degree. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan discusses Freud's Cartesianism.

For Lacan, Freud, like Descartes, starts from the question of certainty: of what can one be certain? Lacan sees that whereas for Descartes, I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am, for Freud, I doubt, therefore there is resistance in the signifier, therefore I am. Lacan sets the signifier in the place of Cartesian god, as that which confirms our existence, offering certainties to ease the anxiety of doubt, though he gives credit for this to Freud. Lacan's Freud, therefore, "places his certainty, his *Gewissheit*, only in the constellation of the signifiers" (1973, 44). And for Lacan – but certainly *not* for Freud as Lacan tries to make us believe – "there is only one method of knowing that one is there, namely, to map the network. And how is the network mapped?" (1973, 45): By recourse to Saussure's scientific structure of signifiers. But Lacan's existence, his *sum*, therefore, is guaranteed by the signifier, limited to the signifier and, as with Descartes, limited to the epistemological concerns of subjectivity. Lacanians, such as Lowenstein (1994), would argue that Lacan, like Freud, decentres Descartes' autonomous ego. This is true, to an extent, but in positing an ego that is *only* an object, he is not, I argue, radically reversing the Cartesian trend of perceiving subjectivity but merely progressing to the next inevitable stage a view of the subject necessitated by rationalist discourses. This move, however, is strenuously resisted by many contemporary subjects and the magic realist authors I consider in Part II.

A Foucaultian analysis of Enlightenment discourses shows us the power/knowledge strategies at work in Lacan's theory. Just as reason itself creates the barrier beyond which lies the unreasonable, so too language creates a barrier on the other side of which lies the abyss of the Real, that which Lacan cannot admit into his analysis of the subject. Lacan draws the line, defining what is to be allowed in a psychoanalytic science, at the limit of what is knowable through language. On the one side of this line is the symbolic, on the other, the Real, bracketed-off as forever unknowable. Rather than confronting the uncertainty of that which lies beyond a rationally knowable, accessible and consciously verifiable language, Lacan tries to make a virtue of the inaccessibility of the Real. Like the Oedipal father, he issues the prohibition "Don't touch!" to those that would identify with his phallic conception of psychoanalysis. That which lies beyond language is deemed to be only an "illusion,"

the “errors of existence” (see Lacan 1953 72-3). “In other words,” Roustang mimics Lacan, “nonverbal communication is permanently there in analysis, but I’m going to show you how not to have to bother with it.” (1998, 40-1). In order to deflect this persistent, irrational character of analysis and to keep psychoanalysis wholly rational and free from subjective infection, as demanded by sciences in an Enlightenment episteme, Lacan places this element of immediacy, the personality, the substance of the subject, outside the limits of psychoanalytic experience. But then, Roustang tells us,

Lacan wants to distinguish between physics and psychoanalysis by reintroducing subjectivity, but at the same time he wants to give psychoanalysis a force akin to that of physics. To do so, he has to have us believe that the subjectivity peculiar to psychoanalysis has been accounted for, while draining it of its content so as to make it manipulable, in the same way that a scientific object is manipulable.

(Roustang 1998, 48)

As I quoted earlier, Lacan regards those analysts who have an “appetite for the Real” to be like those philosophers mocked by Plato for embracing trees.²⁸ But Lacan even tries to rationalise the irrational. He reassures his audience that nothing will escape his objectification:

This is the first time that I’m granting that there is something irrational [in analysis]. Don’t worry, I take this term in its arithmetical sense. There are numbers which are called irrational, and the first one which comes to mind, however unfamiliar you may be with this thing, is $\sqrt{2}$, which brings us back to the *Meno*, the archway though which we passed to begin this year.

(Lacan 1954-5, 256)

The subject is thus *completely* capable of being studied by a rationalist discourse – that which lies beyond the capacity of such a discourse is deemed madness, defined ($\sqrt{2}$) and confined, thus neatly placing Lacan in a tradition of “psychology” dating back to Pinel in the middle of the seventeenth century (see Foucault 1965). Although Roustang finds this to be a “same strange form of reasoning,” there is nothing unique

about Lacan's move. Classical, orthodox Freudian analysis, Robert Young says, is a "story of well-drawn and well-guarded borderlines," it is "a model based on keeping the irrational at bay" (1994b) and this is the strategy that Lacan canonises. A model like Lacan's that regards the ego only in terms of its adaptive function,

depends on a model of the mind where there is a border between the rational and irrational, between ego and id, which is policed by the ego's platoon of keepers of the peace [...] In a classical neo-Freudian model, the irrational goes on one side of the line and the rational on the other. In the Kleinian model they are jumbled, and we are constantly shuffling between these two basic positions, managing paired emotions – love and hate, envy and gratitude – with constant difficulty, living much of the time near the edge or, perhaps I can say, in the borderlands.

(Young 1994b)

In terms of power-relations, the mechanisms that patrol the border between rational and irrational, ego and id are those institutions – including, to a degree, psychoanalysis itself – that theorise, colonise the irrational in defence of bourgeois Reason. For Lacan (and Lacan's Freud), even "the Real is rational" because even it follows logical laws of desire and language. Lacan's methodology is steeped in the "essential procedure through which the psychoanalyst, in his experience, conjugates the particular to the universal; through which, in his theory, he subordinates the Real to the rational" (Lacan 1953, 139). As we shall see, Klein and object-relations offers us a means to reject this dichotomy – and, to a degree, the power relations that it supports – forcing us to live in the borderlands, to survive the paradoxes with which we are necessarily confronted, to "bring the Otherness of psychosis nearer to the rest of life" (Young 1994b).

The Lacanian subject is therefore that bourgeois, isolated monad, again, despite his protestations. We find in Lacan the same strict division of rational/irrational as in the seventeenth Enlightenment and our own (post)modern society, the same surveillance and containment of what threatens the rational order. Also, orthodox psychoanalysis focuses upon the *intrapsychic* mechanisms of the

subject, the instincts that drive the subject; the object-relations school, on the other hand, focuses upon intersubjectivity, those objects that the instincts are directed towards. Therefore, from the outset the Lacanian approach begins from an inward-looking view of the subject in isolation, even if, when looking in, he finds nothing. Lacan and Lacanians claim that Lacan's subject is "intersubjective" by virtue of the subject's participation in the symbolic order, but this conception of subjectivity is not "intersubjective" by object-relations standards, in the sense that it is not a relation *between subjects* that is being examined. Lacanian subjects relate not to each other but to the symbolic structure; Lacan's intersubjectivity is limited to "the intersubjectivity of the Word" (Lacan 1953, 54), which actually *removes* subjects from the equation (in order that they not prejudice the results). In the process, Lacan removes agency and the impact of environmental factors upon the subject. Roustang says,

The subject is alienated in the signifier, to the point of having no other existence than that of a pure locus of passage from one signifier to another. Similarly, the Symbolic refers to the structure subtending the subject, even if he goes as far as to disappear in it. The human individual had been reduced to the form that constituted him in imaginary rivalry; hence, at a later stage, we find that there are no subject-to-subject relations that are not governed by effects of signifiers.

(Roustang 1998, 115)

Lacan appeals to social-constructivists who wish to reject a sphere of interiority or any concept of human nature – indeed, the Lacanian shift away from Freud's biological determinism was largely responsible for his initial (and perhaps sustaining) appeal. But Lacan has replaced a biologically determined human nature with a psychologically and symbolically determined human nature; instead of our lives being inevitably governed by instincts, or genetic material, we are inevitably governed by an unalterable, ultimately authoritative linguistic structure. This is not social-constructivism, because it makes no allowance for *the social*, the *specific* socio-cultural environment in which subjects develop; these necessarily *subjective*

socio-cultural factors are similarly reduced to the symbolic order. The language that provides the basis for Lacan's supposed intersubjectivity is a logic, a system, that exists as external to all subjects. Not only is this structure disembodied, but the environment is governed not by other subjects that can respond *dynamically* to one another but by a pre-inscribed system of laws and codes.²⁹ One is plugged into a structure in which the infant will proceed through the imaginary and symbolic orders, want to kill the father, fuck the mother, and so on and so on, regardless of any failures or successful adaptations in the environment.

The subject Lacan conceives is isolated and a narcissist, for whom the external world only exists as a means or obstacle to the realisation of its desire. Flax refers to this as Lacan's "ontology of narcissism" wherein Lacan "transforms Freud's concept of narcissism into an ontological and incontestable theory of human nature" (Flax 1990, 91). Such a theory of human nature serves not only Lacan's ideological purposes, but also, as I argue below, as a defence against the uncertainty and the unknowability of the external world. Narcissism in object-relations theory is only one aspect of human development, a defence mechanism that can be employed by the subject in time of need, but Lacan universalises narcissism, seeking "to persuade us that narcissism is the natural state of the human being" (Flax 1990, 93), and locks us in a narcissistic conception of the world from which there is no escape. Rather than marking a break from a bourgeois conception of the monadic self, Lacan's fragmented self is actually *symptomatic* of the bourgeois narcissistic subject: only a narcissist desires the perfect unity of self, and the perfect unity of self and other, which Lacan sees as the impossible goal and source of perpetual subjective lack. Lacan's conception of the "other" is also indicative of this narcissism. His theory is, despite some clever distractions, totally solipsistic: His "other" is not a dynamic, active and embodied entity outside the self. Lacan's other is always a projection of the ego, existing only in the imagination (imaginary), and his Other, although an actual subject, is inscribed in the symbolic but represents the *limit* of our knowledge as it is beyond our signifying practice. And like the subject itself, the other is imagined to be similarly narcissistic, thus always hostile to the subject's desire. "Lacan (like the child?)" Flax speculates, "assumes that the mother herself is a

narcissist who can be satisfied only by being restored to narcissistic perfection” (Flax 1990, 98).³⁰

Intersubjective exchange and affective, and consequently effective, communication is thus impossible for the Lacanian subject. The transference, for example, is limited to simply the “normal error of existence” comprising feelings easily assimilated under three headings: “love, hate, and ignorance” (Lacan 1953, 73). Any such intersubjective connection – other than that sanctioned by the Word – is illusory; as Fraser explains, “affiliation falls under the rubric of the imaginary. To affiliate with others, then, to align oneself with others in a social movement, would be to fall prey to the illusions of the imaginary ego” (Fraser 1992, 184). Therefore, group affiliation – and, ultimately, collective political agency – for Lacan is impossible.

Another consequence of this intersubjective bar is that, for Lacan, love is also impossible because the subject is “unable to turn two into one [*faire de l’un avec deux*]” (Roustang 1998, 86). Instead, for Lacan, love – and all affective states, which only really include love and hate – is a function of the symbolic (1953, 26). Love, Lacan conceives, is “an intersubjective accord imposing its will and harmony on the torn and riven nature which supports it” (Lacan 1953, 26). For Lacan, there can be no love because union, fusion between the subject and the other is impossible. This is true, of course, but such a conception of love is wholly narcissistic: only a narcissist ever expects to be *completely* satisfied, only a narcissist ever expects to experience “some kind of pre-established harmony” (Lacan 1966, 24), only a narcissist ever expects to experience fusion with the other, the single Being (“l’Un”) that Lacan mistakes for love, and this is why Lacan’s love always faces an “imminent lapse into the mirage of narcissistic altruism” (1966, 158). The desire of the subject can never be fulfilled for Lacan because total fulfilment for the narcissist is impossible, and Lacan’s subject is inherently narcissistic. Thus for Lacan, hell is other people, and Lacan’s Hobbesian subject is always *conflicting* with the other, its environment, its culture, as these seek to place limits upon the insatiable, inherently narcissistic desire of the subject. Object-relations psychoanalysis demonstrates, however, that such a relationship between self and

environment, inner and outer worlds is not inevitably and always thus, but once Lacan has negated the possibility of meaningful relationships with the caretaker and the environment, all that is left for the subject in Lacanian theory is to come into being through an alienating process. Lacan's self is, therefore, "necessarily a false self in Winnicott's sense, but unlike Winnicott, Lacan believes that no other 'true' self is possible" (Flax 1990, 106). Winnicott's "true self" does not, of course, refer to an authentic being or "soul" but a mode of relating to the external world in a creative way (I return to this below), which is inconceivable in Lacanian thought. Again, despite Lacanian accusations to the contrary, Kleinian and object-relations theorists are not so naïve, such throwbacks to a pre-Freudian episteme, that they maintain a belief in an unitary self. For example, while not making grandiose claims for anti-establishment self-importance, Riviere can quietly point out that "We cling to the fiction of our absolute individuality, our independence, as if we owed nothing to anyone and nothing in us had been begged, borrowed or stolen" (1955, 359). Lacanians would, no doubt, find nothing in this statement to grumble about. But there is an important difference between condemning the attitude of omnipotence that acts as a defence against uncertainty (characteristic of subjects of most ages, I suspect, not only the Enlightenment) and to extemporise that all subjects are therefore forever and inevitably narcissistic, alienated and isolated.

These conceptions of the other also apply to the pre-oedipal experience that Lacan has little time for, since this is the time before the subject is inserted into the symbolic. As Flax points out, despite everything else in Freud's theory that contradicts it, Lacan follows certain early Freudian conceptions of pre-oedipal experience as narcissistic (primary narcissism) and vastly under-estimates the importance of the maternal care in the development of the subject and its psychopathologies.³¹ What notions of the pre-oedipal experience that do exist for Lacan are, again, intrapsychic and not intersubjective by object-relations standards: Klein and especially Winnicott consider the environmental set-up of the infant, where the adaptive failures and successes of the caretaker are paramount. Lacan's mothers are Others, unwittingly and uncontrollably subjected to the vicissitudes of their infant's narcissistic drives.

Mothers exist for infants only as extensions of their own bodies [...] In keeping with the narcissistic premise, Lacan presumes that infants want total, instant, and perfectly timed responses to their wishes or needs and experience any deviation from such responses as painful frustration.

(Flax 1990, 94)

As we shall see, the Winnicottian infant also experiences painful frustrations, but these are seen as necessary adaptive functions. Narcissism for Winnicott is not the starting point, the structural basis of subjectivity, but a defence against the too imperfectly, or too *perfectly*, timed responses of the mother. Whereas for Lacan we are narcissistic from birth and remain so throughout our lives, for Winnicott narcissism is seen as the bitter recourse of a subject unable to function in the world.

Where Lacan does recognise that “modern man [...] does not recognise his very own *raison d'être* in the disorder that he denounces the world” (1953, 44), his solution sounds remarkably counter-productive:

But a way out is offered to the subject for the resolution of that impasse when his discourse is delusion. Communication can validly be established for him in the common task of science and in the posts which it commands in our universal civilisation; this communication will be effective within the enormous objectification constituted by that science, and it will permit him to forget his subjectivity. He will be able to make an efficacious contribution to the common task in his daily work and will be able to furnish his leisure time with all the pleasures of a profuse culture which [...] will give him the wherewithal to forget his own existence and his death, at the same time as that to misconstrue the particular sense of his life in a false communication.

(Lacan 1953, 45)

Although Lacan obviously regards science as a potential salvation for the woes of modern and postmodern subjects, as I have suggested throughout, the discourses of science that reduce the subject to objects of scrutiny actually contribute to the

depersonalisation and derealisation of the subject. Wilden's note on the above passage instructs us that by the common task of *science*, Lacan also means "knowledge" and "learning," but still not *affect*; Lacan further desires that the subject find its salvation in a disinterested, disembodied reason, personified in his disinterested, disembodied scientific analyst who admits no subjective bias, that is, countertransference. Lacan's suggestion that in the distractions of culture the subject can find stability by forgetting his own existence and death echoes Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw who tell Septimus Smith in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, "Try to think as little about yourself as possible" (Woolf 1925, 86). Drs. Lacan, Holmes and Bradshaw suggest that the means to health in a scientific society that regards you only as an object is to accept your own objectification (see also Lacan 1953, 55-6).

Because of this inherent narcissism, I am sometimes bewildered by how readily Marxist or socialist strategies have adopted a Lacanian framework for their own conceptions of society and subjectivity. True, the Marxist-inspired Lacanians point out that the symbolic order into which the subject is inserted is the social order that is alienating, and on that reading, Lacan can provide valuable insights into the subject in a particular capitalist mode of production. Also the Lacanian denial of interiority and focus upon rationalist, logical structures do have something in common with classical, scientific Marxism – most obviously a common root in Enlightenment rationalism. But as I have already discussed, group affiliation for Lacan belongs to the imaginary and illusory (in a thoroughly negative sense of the word). Fraser reasons that "from a Lacanian perspective, collective movements" such as feminism and, I add, socialism, "would by definition be vehicles of delusion; they could not even in principle be emancipatory" (1992, 184). In a Lacanian world we are caught in a hopeless contradiction where opposition is self-defeating, always re-confirming the existing hegemonic dominance of structure. "It is the irony of revolutions that they engender a power all the more absolute in its actions, not because it is more anonymous, as people say, but because it is more reduced to the words which signify it" (Lacan 1953, 46; the limits of transgression and the

possibilities of real political agency are themes I return to in Part II). Critics and colleagues have argued that Lacan is trying only to describe the subject in our depersonalizing, desubjectifying, culture, the culture that is itself dominated by the rationalistic privileging of the representation. However, rather than exposing these mechanisms as ideological constructs, he *naturalises* them by *universalising* his mythology of infantile development. To say, for example, that the phallus is the transcendental signifier that dictates all meaning in the symbolic order naturalises patriarchal ideology. But also to say that desire is insatiable naturalises the capitalist ideology that wishes us to imagine ourselves insatiable consumers. What is an ideological construct – the vicissitudes of supply and demand in the capitalist mode of production – is accounted for with recourse to a mythical psychological determinism, wherein our very status as subjects depends upon our inevitable unconscious participation, as per Lévi-Strauss, in a symbolic order of exchange. Lacan's narcissists are “unable to experience interpersonal relations as a reciprocal rather than a zero sum game in which one person's gain is invariably the other's loss” (Flax 1990, 95). The belief that it is “Only through what we lack and therefore want do we become aware of our being” (Lowenstein 1994, 720) must be a very satisfying philosophy for the brands who depend on that lack – and the empty promise of fulfilment – for their survival. Capitalism, in this formulation, is not a particular mode of production but the *only* means through which we can come into being.

Winnicott warns against strategies that rely on biological determinism (Freud's instincts) or symbolic determinism (Lacan's language), seeing these as tantamount to using the Garden of Eden to explain the Fall, mythologies to explain a mysterious present.³² If the subject is destined to be fundamentally isolated, fundamentally narcissistic, and suffer from an inevitable lack, as Lacan would have us believe, is a social or socialist culture even conceivable? In Part II, I will argue that the Lacanian interventions into the political sphere, *transgression* and *jouissance*, derived from and for the narcissistic bourgeois subject, provide an unsatisfactory, limited conception of the political re-evaluations offered by magic realist fiction.

Theaetetus' Children: (Postmodern, Lacanian) Theory as Defence Mechanism

We cannot help ourselves and, as with other things that we cannot help in ourselves, we make up elaborate explanations, reasonable rational explanations, to chant away the powerful things that don't belong to us.

(Winterson 2000, 168)

“The answer is man,” said Oedipus to the Sphinx, causing her to throw herself over the cliff in humiliation. But is that the question as well, the only question? Certainly it was not for the ancient Greeks. For the tragic poets, as well as Socrates, “know thyself” meant knowing one’s place in the cosmos. Do we really want to reduce this question to “know thy own motivation,” a question that is all too readily pressed into service as protection against narcissistic injury.

Knowledge becomes a defence not just because humans do not like to be narcissistically wounded, but because a focus strictly on man tends to be recurvate.

(Alford 1999, 135)

“What lies behind the analyst’s attitude?” Lacan asks.

The concern to provide the dialogue with a participant who is as devoid as possible of individual characteristics; we efface ourselves, we deprive the speaker of those expressions of interest, sympathy, and reaction that he expects to find on the face of the listener, we avoid all expression of personal taste, we conceal whatever might betray them, we become depersonalised, and try to represent for the other an ideal of impassibility.

(Lacan 1966, 13)

For Lacan, the analysand’s “emotional demand” is a “trap” that he insists psychoanalysts avoid (1966, 13). No psychoanalyst, of any school, would deny that there are instances in analysis, or in life, when one must defend oneself from the excessive projections and emotional demands of others; however, Lacan elevates such defences to a moral imperative as a guarantee of psychoanalysis’ scientific status. Lacan’s rejection of the potential uses of counter-transference, his emotional detachment from his work, function as a defence that excludes the emotional

component of analysis and of subjectivity.

Such a defensive posture is not unique to Lacan. Psyche-somatic splitting and defensive emotional detachment are common in everyday life, for example, in professions that must deal with death and pain everyday (soldiers, doctors, nurses). Such splitting, moreover, is a key prerequisite of many of the Enlightenment's discourses – the sciences, capitalism, utilitarian ethics, postmodernism – that function and gain legitimacy through the negation of the variables such as emotional responses and subjectivity. Eagleton argues that it is an epistemological pre-requisite that since the emergence of bourgeois capitalism, “Knowledge burst out of its ethical constraints and began to operate by its own internal autonomous laws” (1990, 367). But part of the strength of object-relations psychoanalysis I think lies in its refusal to make a virtue of enacting such a split in analysis, recognising that objectivity is not an ideal but a defensive posture that is not always desirable or useful in analysis (see, for example, Winnicott 1947; Kohon 1986; Young 1994). Consequently, we can re-evaluate how we come to *know*, trying to denaturalise knowledge as divorced from affect and to offer alternative conceptions of reason and knowing.

For Winnicott, such psyche-somatic splitting can be the result of a break in the continuity of being in early infantile development. When the caretaker is good-enough, that is, adequately responds to the adaptive needs of the infant (holding *and* frustrating), the “mental activity of the infant turns a *good-enough* environment into a perfect environment, that is to say, turns relative failure of adaptation into adaptive success” (Winnicott 1949, 245). When the caretaker is not good-enough, however, the psyche develops as a *false entity* and finds a *false localisation* in the mind. This mind-psyche, now split from the body, usurps the environmental functions (holding, containing, adapting), and mental functioning (thinking, the intellect) becomes a thing in itself, dominating the subject's relationship to its environment. As Katherine E. Agar concisely phrases it, “An intellectual solution for frustrated needs results in the tyranny of mind” (1998).

This splitting also brings into being a *false self* that is often tied-up with the mind-psyche, prematurely assuming the nursing functions for the subject (Winnicott 1971, 144; 1986, 43). The function of the false self is, Winnicott tells us, “similar to

the function of the Ego, in early Freud, turned toward the world, between the Id and external reality [...] Other writers have used the following term to describe similar states: Observing Ego” (1986, 43). This identification (from Winnicott’s early notes³³) is interesting in that the false-self or “Observing Ego” invites a comparison with Lacan’s definition of the ego as alien to the subject itself. But what is important to recognise here is that for Lacan the ego is *always* alien to the subject. For Winnicott, the false self – although *necessary* – is not the only means through which we relate to our environment. While a part of normal subjective experience and object-relations, the false self can become extreme (pathological) when it is taken as *real*, as the subject itself, not defending the subject from hostile environments but fully taking over, preventing even the formation of the true self. Again, I must emphasise that this true self does not, as some Lacanians would have it (see, for example, Lacan 1953, 25; Lowenstein 1994, 716-7; Hall 2001³⁴), represent some naïve belief in a human essential self. The true self, “what ever that may be” (Winnicott 1960, 142), is an elusive entity that we may liken to Bollas’ idiom (see below). It is “the source of personal impulses” (1986, 43), the source of the “spontaneous gesture and the personal idea [...] Only the True Self can be creative and only the True Self can feel real” (1960, 148). Rather than an entity, the true self is a *process*, a means of relating to the world. But through constant exposure to environments that are not good-enough, that are perceived to be too hostile or threatening to the subject, the false self subsumes the true self, not permitting the latter even a secret life. The false self is thus the *surface representation* of an unintegrated subject, incapable of depth or feeling. Unable to act creatively, the subject is seduced into compliance and a compliant false self is the subject’s only response to its environment.

Psyche-somatic splitting as a defence against poor object-relations may also manifest itself in other ways. British analysts consistently show how the scientific, the rationalist, the intellectual impulse is an attempt to gain mastery over the feared unknown elements and to re-enforce phantasies of omnipotence. Freud described an “intellectual function in us which demands unity, connection and intelligibility from any material, whether of perception or thought, that comes within its grasp; and if, as

a result of special circumstances, it is unable to establish a true connection, it does not hesitate to fabricate a false one” (Freud 1913, 154). Jones (1908) explains how *rationalisation* functions as an intellectual process to conceal repressed feelings.³⁵ Fairbairn discusses the process of *intellectualisation*, a schizoid tendency to over-value the thought processes, to privilege the mind-psyche over affective, bodily and environmental functions (see Fairbairn 1940; Winnicott 1949; see also Riviere 1955).³⁶ Such a subject has difficulty with emotional contacts with other people, and “tends increasingly to substitute intellectual solutions for his emotional problems for attempts to achieve a practical solution of them within the emotional sphere in his relationships with others in the outer world” (Fairbairn 1940, 20). The intellectual³⁷ libidinises thought processes so “ideas tend to become substituted for feelings, and intellectual values for emotional values” (1940, 20). These schizoid tendencies, Fairbairn believes, are behind the contemporary “obsessional appeal of science, based as this is upon the presence of compulsive need for orderly arrangement and meticulous accuracy” (6).

Such a personality, when he is in love with an intellectual system which he interprets rigidly and applies universally, has all the makings of a fanatic – which indeed is what he really is. When, further, such a fanatic has both the inclination and the capacity to take steps to impose his system ruthlessly upon others, the situation may become catastrophic – although at times it may admittedly be potent for good as well as for evil.

(Fairbairn 1940, 21)

The intellectual, doubtless someone we will all recognise from our own experience, is also characterised by narcissistic attitudes of omnipotence, a sense of isolation and detachment and a preoccupation with inner reality (1940, 6).

But I am not claiming that Lacan or his followers are themselves schizoids, or that postmodern subjects are *en masse*. I *do* think, however, that postmodern theory employs some schizoid defences, particularly its exercises in intellectualisation. With the relentless privileging of the signifier, contemporary theory divorces mind from body, substituting intellectual, quantifiable, systematic

problems for emotional ones. One reason I think we are so enchanted by Lacan is because he offers us a strategic model for creating an object of study, a science by which to systematise our study of the world that offers us certain knowledge and does not make us engage our emotional responses, responses that might reveal more of our true selves than is comfortable. This has not been without certain advantages, but we should not delude ourselves that postmodern theory marks a break with Enlightenment rationalism. On the contrary, post-structuralist, postmodern, psychostructuralist theory perhaps more efficiently than any other discourses splits and confines the variables that threaten to taint it – the body, affect, the subject.

Although, again, I do not want to psychopathologise all postmodern theorists, it is interesting to consider how Freud might regard postmodern theory. Freud, I think, would label as “psychotic” the negativity of many contemporary discourses – the foci upon absence, false selves, the lack of the subject and the unbridgeable gap between subjectivities. Jacques-Alain Miller contends that “what we call the subject in analysis is nothing more than a function of the combination of signifiers” (1991, 33).³⁸ Freud regarded negativism as a splitting of the intellectual function from the affective process – much to Lacan’s displeasure. As with Fairbairn, Freud saw negative judgement as an intellectual substitute for repression that indicates a withdrawal of libidinal energies from objects (Freud 1925a, 438, 441). Such negativity defends against the possibility of having to *mean*, a theme I shall return to when I examine Bion’s conceptualisation of thinking below. Finlay-de Monchy similarly identifies postmodernism as “a psychotic defence against loss of referential identity” (Finlay, 1989, 59; see also Finlay-de Monchy *forthcoming* and Young 1989, 1996c). Postmodern theory too often echoes the apathetic adolescent cursed by the anguish of existential angst – nothing matters, nothing is real, whatever, nevermind. For Eagleton, there is an Oedipal relation between postmodernists and their modernist fathers, as the former squirm “with some embarrassment at the gap between the big talk of the father and his feeble deeds” (1996, 63).

This image of the negating teenager also shows us how such a defensive theoretical position may also be positioned Oedipally. André Green, writing on Greek tragedy, asks “If King Oedipus is the tragedy *par excellence*, the fundamental

question is, why is this unremitting relentless questioning, this passion for knowledge, so indissolubly linked with parricide and incest?" (Green 1979, 229).³⁹ Without wanting to evoke an "anxiety of influence," I think that such negative Oedipal positions are a common feature in a great deal of postmodern and post-structuralist theory. There seems to me to be an uneasy relationship with Fathers, one's discursive ancestors; on the one hand, Lacan, for example, must acknowledge his debt to Freud, Saussure, Hegel, Kant. Not only are they his predecessors, but he also depends on them to lend him authenticity: Lacan often evokes the Fathers' Word, their Law, to secure the objectivity of his science. How do we know that language exists as signifiers and signifieds? Saussure tells us so. How do we know that human relations are defined by a master/slave dialectic? Hegel tells us so. How do we know about the unconscious, repression, sublimation? It is all in Freud, if only we return to his original works. Yet, like any son, Lacan has a simultaneous need to distinguish himself from the Father, to set himself apart. Thus Lacan, who relies on Freud and pledges loyalty to him, must destroy, devour, possess Freud and reconstruct him in the son's image. Lacan's Freud, a pioneer of symbolic-determinism, certainly does not reflect any Freud that I have read, and while I do not withhold from anyone the right to reread any text, I am not sure that Lacan's Freud, enamoured with signifiers, exists anywhere but in Lacan's imagination.⁴⁰ Thus, there seems to me to be a nervous tension in the work of Lacan and his followers, both incestuous and parricidal; whether this is much greater than with any other theoretical strategy remains to be seen.

We also see a violence in much Lacanian and postmodern theory if we explore the passion for knowledge in terms of the relationship with the mother. Klein's conception of the *epistemophilic instinct*, a healthy, normal desire to know, is originally directed towards the mother's body and her internal contents. Here too we have a reading of postmodern theory that illustrates an (pre-)Oedipal relation gone awry. For Klein,

The infant, still underdeveloped intellectually, is exposed to an onrush of problems and questions. One of the most bitter grievances which we come upon in the unconscious is that many of these

overwhelming questions, which are apparently only partly conscious and even when conscious cannot yet be expressed in words, remain unanswered. Another reproach follows hard upon this, namely, that the child could not understand words and speech. Thus his first questions go back beyond the beginnings of his understanding of speech.

(Klein 1928, 188)

Typically, for Klein, she sets the origins of epistemophilia, the desire to know, before language – furthering the notion that the ability to use language does not mark any significant break in subjective development.⁴¹ These grievances, the early anxiety of *not knowing*, if not lessened by the adaptive functions of the caregiver, “give rise to an extraordinary amount of hate. Singly or in conjunction they are the cause of numerous inhibitions of the epistemophilic impulse” (Klein 1928, 188). These inhibitions lead to feelings of impotence and being incapable, exacerbated by the Oedipal situation. To defend against such helplessness, the anxiety of knowing nothing *definitely*, the infant experiences disturbances in symbolisation and speech, the deflection of meaning and a sadistic aim to possess, appropriate or destroy the unknowable, which for Klein is the mother’s the body.⁴² Curiosity towards the mother and her internal contents becomes “intrusive, rending, devouring, primordially bound to the desire to scoop out and possess the content’s of the mother’s body” (Alford 1999, 131). We can see these mechanisms at work in postmodern theory, in the certainty offered by structuralism and Lacan’s psychoanalysis, devouring and destroying the subjective, unknowable quantity, and the emptying of meaning from the sign. Thus the epistemophilic impulse is transformed from a instinctual curiosity involving the body and its processes to a sadistic defence against narcissistic injury that enacts a psyche-somatic split, privileging the abstract knowledge that is divorced from emotional processes. Attempting to confine one’s self to exact, authoritative definitions that defy play is thus a defence mechanism though – again to recall Theaetetus – certainly not one unique to our age.

However, despite these assaults – the depersonalising, desubjectifying, intellectualising efforts of postmodern theory – the subject persists, insisting upon existing. As Lisa Erdman exclaims to Freud in D. M. Thomas' *The White Hotel*, “*La théorie c'est bon, mais ça n'empêche pas d'exister*”; theory is good, but it does not prevent things from existing, or, more accurately, it does not prevent *existence*.⁴³ The subject insists upon its being through a range of strategies – for some this manifests itself in psyche-somatic symptoms, some scar or mutilate their own bodies, some utilise defence mechanisms that have until now been mistaken for psychopathology. Some even employ language.

We need, therefore, to develop strategies for examining subjectivity that appreciate these efforts and can recognise them for what they are: resistances to discourses that threaten to rend subjectivity asunder. Our theoretical strategies should tolerate and nurture the subjective element, regardless of the uncertainties and paradoxes with which it confronts us.

Winnicott's Potential Spaces: New Psychoanalytic Approaches to Postmodernity

I do not offer object-relations as an infallible cure-all to contemporary subjective crises, or pretend that object-relations does not have flaws of its own.⁴⁴ But, I want to argue – somewhat tentatively – that object-relations offers a means to redress many patriarchal, bourgeois Enlightenment ways of thinking about the subject, knowledge and reason that postmodern culture and theory face.

The recognised inadequacy of the traditional categories in psychopathology and changes in the needs of analysands has, for many psychoanalysts, forced a corresponding alteration in both practical approaches to and theoretical conceptualisations of analysis. Kleinian and Independent psychoanalysts, therefore, move away from the epistemologically-centred psychoanalysis that sets as its focus and aim only self-knowledge, the showing and telling of repression and desire. From Ernest Jones' earliest essays, we can see that the culture of British psychoanalysis – infused with the ideas of Ferenczi via Klein and Balint – will prove to be much different from Lacan's scientisation. Whereas Lacan's Freud founded a science of signs, Jones' beloved Professor devoted himself to “the science of ‘feeling psychology’” (Jones 1908, 9). And whereas Lacan utilises reason in analysis, putting ego where id was, making conscious the unconscious, Jones bemoans the subordinate position that feeling has assumed in academic psychology at the expense of the “intellectual processes.” (Ironically, however, it was Jones, with James Strachey, who produced the scientised English translation of Freud I discussed earlier.) Freud's great innovation was not the linguistic component of the talking cure, argues British psychoanalysis, but the understanding of primitive processes and the communication of emotions, to the point where “one may fairly question whether there exist any mental processes in the formation and direction of which feeling does not play a part of the first rank” (Jones 1908, 8-9). This re-conceptualisation of psychoanalysis has led to a number of significant changes in how we conceive of psychoanalysis and of the subject on the couch and in culture.

First Being: Subjective Ontology

There's my life, why not, it is one, if you like, if you must, I don't say no, this evening. There has to be one, it seems, once there is speech, no need of a story, a story is not compulsory, just a life, that's the mistake I made, one of the mistakes, to have wanted a story for myself, whereas life alone is enough.

(Beckett 1967, 93)

"Thunder and lightning, did yuz think I was dead?"

(Carter 1984, 118)

The first and most fundamental aspect of Winnicott's work that offers an opportunity to redress the crises of a postmodernism thus perceived, I feel, lies in his insistence upon the primacy of subjective being. In this, Winnicott insists that the principal aim of psychoanalysts, and also by extension, cultural and political theorists, should lie in the realisation of the subject's own being *as a subject*, as a material, embodied entity. "After being – doing and being done to. But first being." (Winnicott 1971, 85). Ontology must precede epistemology (but not ignore it) because, simply, it is pointless to construct a meaningless knowledge of entities that do not exist.

I find the concept of the subject's *being* a difficult one to convey in acceptably "scientific" terms, and this is probably a sign that we are on the right track. The language I use here reflects what I perceive to be a general tendency in contemporary British psychoanalysis, beginning I think with Winnicott, towards a discourse that actively works to accommodate uncertainties – my meaning in this respect will hopefully become more clear as I proceed. I find that what I am trying to get at is concisely described by Christopher Bollas in the concept of *being a character* (1992).

To be character, to release one's idiom into lived experience, requires a certain risk, as the subject will not know his outcome; indeed, to be released into being, not as a knowable entity *per se*, but as an idiom of expression explicating a human form. Even in these moments of self expression the individual will not know his own meaning, his reflections will always lag behind himself, more often than not

puzzled by his itness, yet relieved by the *jouissance* of its choosings
[...]

(Bollas 1992, 54)

To be a character is to enjoy the risk of being processed by the object
– indeed, to seek objects, in part, in order to be metamorphosed [...]

To be character is to gain history of internal objects, inner presences
that are the trace of our encounters, but not intelligible, or even
clearly knowable: just intense ghosts who do not populate the
machine, but inhabit the human mind [...]

(Bollas 1992, 59)

Being a character, then, means bringing along with one's articulating
idiom those inner presences – or spirits – that we call on to contain,
now and then transferring them to receptive place in the other, who
may knowingly or unknowingly be inhabited by them.

(Bollas 1992, 62)⁴⁵

I do not wish to explore the minute detail of this conception all at once here, but the above passages contains some central themes that dominate my considerations. In order to become a subject, there must be a degree of play, of risk, and uncertainty and liminality in the subject's experience of the world. And our being is largely *unknowable*; the creative experiences that allow us moments of self-realisation are not rational and do not follow any systematised or formalised logic. This does not mean that they are simply "beyond language," but that language, instead of an organising principle of our experience, is only one piece or tool of our being that permits the communication of affective processes. Subjective being is also dependent upon a paradoxical but productive tension between our inner world, a sphere of interiority that contains the "presences that are the trace of our encounters," and an external world that is populated with other subjects that may be receptive, or hostile, to our communications.

Winnicott's maxim and Bollas' character also reminds us that subjective being cannot be assumed *a priori*. For Lacan, too, subjectivity cannot be assumed *a priori*, but again I warn against eliding the important differences that exist between

Lacan and an object-relations approach, despite the illusion of parallels generated by their similar terminology. For Lacan, the subject comes into being through language, and subjectivity is achieved through *recognition* and a knowledge of one's self and is therefore an *epistemological* becoming of the subject who *knows*. For Winnicott, a very different subjectivity is achieved through *creativity* and the realisation of *being* and is therefore an *ontological* becoming of the subject who can simply *be*. This difference is perhaps most clearly explained by an examination of Lacan's and Winnicott's respective conceptualisations of the mirror phase (see Lacan 1966, 1-7 and Winnicott 1971, 111-8).⁴⁶ For Lacan, who first theorised a mirror phase, the ego is formed by an identification with its own image in the mirror.⁴⁷ Thus for Lacan the ego is based only in an image, from the imaginary, mis-recognised as the self, a deceptive illusion, alien and not to be trusted.

The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image [...] to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development.

(Lacan 1966, 4; see also 6)

For Winnicott, who claims to have been influenced by Lacan's work in this respect, the mirror is the mother's face that gives back to the baby part of the baby's own self. Thus the mother provides a good-enough environment for the baby who realises that she is alive in a world that recognises his needs and is capable of responding accordingly. For Lacan, the mirror forms the ego, splitting the infant and fracturing the deceptive illusion of fusion between itself and the ideal mother, providing the basis for the subject's objectification in the symbolic order. For Winnicott, the infant, already born with a nascent ego, comes into being through creative interaction with its environment, with its embodied, not imaginary, caretaker(s) that will foster *productive* illusions and paradox.

“Subjectivity,” Finlay-de Monchy clarifies, “is not a neutral *a priori* presence but something which emerges time and again out of the *discreteness* and *intricacy* of

experience – an etching on surfaces made by meeting the other’s impression of one, as in the ‘mystic writing pad’” (*forthcoming*, 500-1). Flax also finds that “The ‘psychological birth of the human infant’ does not occur simultaneously with his or her physical birth [using Margaret Mahler’s phrase]. Psychological birth is a distinct event occurring within a finite and easily determined period of time; psychological birth is a complex process stretching over roughly the first three years of life [or longer!]. Psychological birth emerges out of the interaction of physical, relational, and mental processes” (1990, 111). And again, both Flax and Finlay-de Monchy, like Bollas and Winnicott, find a necessarily *intersubjective* component to subjective becoming, not subjects’ relating through an all-consuming, pre-ordained structure, but dynamically, having a direct and immediate, mutual impact on others.

What is Creativity?

For Winnicott the subject comes to realise its status as a subject through creative play. Creativity for Freud is something that has its genesis in child’s play, but in adult experience Freud sets creativity in opposition to reality. “The opposite of play is not what is serious but what is real” (Freud 1908, 132); creativity creates worlds that are unreal, and leads us to phantasy, to daydreams. Thus for Freud, as a sublimation of libidinal impulses, there is a sense that creativity “has at its root a sense of the pathological [...] The view that the creative is a life-force that materialises in specific individuals because of the errors in their development” (Gilman 1997, 602). Klein developed the idea of play and recognised how the games of children, and the inhibition of play, assume central importance in adult’s abilities, or inabilities, to negotiate the demands of the real world. In Kleinian theory, the creative impulse of the artist arises from guilt and a desire to make reparations to an object damaged by aggressive phantasies. These objects, regarded in the paranoid-schizoid position as split and persecutory, need to be repaired, re-integrated in the depressive position (see Klein 1929, 1937; Fairbairn 1938; Stokes 1955).⁴⁸

For Winnicott, however, the possibility exists that creativity may characterise

all of our experience, and is essential in the realisation of subjective being. The creative impulse, for Winnicott, is

something that can be looked at as a thing in itself, something that of course is necessary if an artist is to produce a work of art, but also something that is present when *anyone* – a baby, child, adolescent, adult, old man or woman – looks in a healthy way at anything or does anything deliberately, such as making a mess with faeces or prolonging the act of crying to enjoy a musical sound. It is present as much in the moment-by-moment living of a backward child who is enjoying breathing as it is in the inspiration of an architect who suddenly knows what it is that he wishes to construct, and who is thinking in terms of material that can actually be used so that his creative impulse may take form and shape, and the world may witness.

(Winnicott 1971, 69)

Notice here that Winnicott perceives creativity to be a thing in itself that is present in all “healthy” individuals. The identification that the simple act of breathing, when experienced and enjoyed, can be a creative act emphasises that creativity is intricately and inextricably linked to our very sense of being and not only a gift granted to the artist.⁴⁹ Perception itself can be a creative act for Winnicott, “for this is the process by which the inner becomes actualised in external form and as such becomes the basis, not only of internal perception, but also of all true perception of environment” (1986, 391-2).

For Winnicott, the degree to which creativity is present in the subject constitutes an integral component of what we are to regard as psychopathologic. “In some way our theory includes a belief that living creatively is a healthy state, and that compliance is a sick basis for life” (1971, 65). A compliant relation to the world is sometimes necessary to adopt as a part of normal mental functioning. In severe cases of compliance, however, and with the creation of a false-self organisation, the creative capacity of the subject is subverted or repressed. Winnicott’s admission that we may not have held this view identifying subjective health with the realisation of

creative experience “elsewhere and in another age” (1971, 65) or “a thousand years ago” (70) suggests that the pathology of compliant, false-self personalities observed by object-relations psychoanalysts may be particularly endemic in our contemporary, specifically Western capitalist, culture. Gabrielle Schwab goes further, speculating that “We may well evaluate a culture according to the extent to which it tries to gain access to and mold or control the transitional space – especially given our increasingly invasive media culture” (1994, 36).⁵⁰

For Winnicott creativity itself is to be realised in the subject’s play. Winnicott and Klein often endorse strategies employing play in their analyses of children (and sometimes adults), where the analyst enters into the games and the imagined realities of young analysands as a means of communication. Play evolves from an entirely subjective object-world and develops the infant’s perception of its external environment, but the concept of play applies to adults as well, “only the matter is more difficult to describe when the patient’s material appears mainly in terms of verbalisation” (Winnicott 1971, 40). And, significantly, only the integrated psyche-soma can engage in play. “Playing involves the body: (*i*) because of the manipulation of objects; (*ii*) because certain types of intense interest are associated with certain aspects of bodily excitement” is, for me, Winnicott’s obvious but unsatisfactory answer (1971, 52). It is only the true-self that can really engage in play, for the objects we play with must be objects of our subject’s own choosings, objects that can potentially carry meaning, that are found on the body and *concretely* inscribed on the psyche-soma.

For Winnicott, play is more than merely the expression of individual interiority or the discursive exchange between “doctor” and “patient.” Playing is a *creative, communicative experience* where subjects meet – it is not wholly the domain of either participant. Winnicott further explains that “only in playing is communication possible; except direct communication [e.g., acting out], which belongs to psychopathology or to an extreme immaturity” (1971, 54).

Psychoanalysis, Winnicott says, has developed a “highly specialised form of playing in the service of communication with oneself and others” (1971, 41). Play, as communication, is primarily *intersubjective*, and takes place at the point of

paradoxical intersection *between* subjectivities. Through creativity, we meet what Jessica Benjamin calls *like subjects*; the recognition of the outside other as a separate and equivalent centre of subjectivity (Benjamin 1995, 7). Play permits the movement of experience from the entirely subjective object-world to mutual subject recognition and provides a basis for our symbolic use of objects (which, in a Kleinian model, then forms the basis of language).

In his theory of creativity then, Winnicott allows for and demands that the full weight of environmental factors be considered in the developmental aetiology of the subject. Winnicott finds the emphasis placed on the instincts by Freud and Klein and Lacan unacceptable, particularly the death drive, representing a retreat to a mythical narrative to explain mysterious processes. Henderson further considers:

For the Freudian and Kleinian viewpoints hold aggression to be innate and (it follows from that) inevitable – the best man can hope for is to come to terms with his inherent badness and suppress it analogous to the “instinctual renunciation” idea in psychotherapy and the superseding of id by ego. To accept man’s aggressiveness as bedrock is to invoke premature closure in a way which is hardly scientific – if we accept, for example, that the apple falls because it is heavy we shall never discover nor feel the need for a law of gravity. To say that mankind’s problem of original sin is really his problem of innate aggression is hardly an advance.

(Henderson 1975, 118)

For this reason, some Winnicottian theory may seem hopelessly optimistic, not regarding the subject as inherently narcissistic (Freud and Lacan) or inherently violent (Klein); instead, for Winnicott, narcissism and aggression arise in response to environmental conditions, particularly, the frustration of infantile needs. Again, Henderson further explains that “In terms of theory, it is not at all aggression which is innate, but rather the ego weakness of an immature infant who cannot grasp that ‘mother’ is an imperfect being who can never fully gratify him” (1975, 118). It is inaccurate, of course, to portray Winnicott as such a Utopian (this is, after all, the analyst who openly discusses how much he hates his patients – see Winnicott 1947);

his rejection of the death instinct is meant to challenge what he regards as an unacceptable, and unscientific, retreat to a mythical explanation. And Winnicott's theory of creativity, like Freud's does include some notion that frustration is necessary to facilitate the play of the infant; a "perfect environment" is not "good enough" – a degree of gradual disillusionment is necessary.

The history of the subject cannot be written therefore in terms of the subject alone but must also necessarily take into account the environment that responds and either meets the adaptive needs of the infant or fails to do so. The recognition that creative experience is not something that happens solely *within* the individual, nor something that happens *to* an individual subject, but *between* two (or more) subjects is an important re-conceptualisation of the subjective and intersubjective space and how we conceive, both in psychoanalysis and literary criticism, of experience itself. This theory necessitates and creates a space that is neither the *intrapsychic* world that characterises the subjective model proposed by orthodox Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, nor is it the external, social world offered by old-fashioned Marxists for whom the sphere of individual interiority does not exist independently of social-ideological reality.⁵¹ This leaves us then to question, if play takes place neither within the (subjective) individual nor in the (objective) environment, where are we to engage in this creative play?

Setting the Scene: The Potential Space

The location of creative, and, just as importantly for our analysis of language, cultural experience must be the *potential space*, or the "playground," between two subjects, a third area that is both "me" nor "not-me," that is between the internal phantasy world of the individual and the external world, or between the subjective object and the object that is objectively perceived (Winnicott 1971, especially 95-103). The liminal experience that is the potential space (also variously labelled "the transitional zone," "the transitional space," "the third space") is, according to Winnicott, first realised in the gradual separation of infant from the caregiver.⁵² This

is the place where we are creative, and subsequently becomes the place of cultural experience, the place where we *live*. This is a place where we can be challenged and experiment, but must also (Winnicott insists) be a place of rest “for the human individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated” (Winnicott 1971, 2).

We see that in our play paradoxes must be negotiated, and in the potential space the subject becomes aware that *paradoxes can have positive value*.⁵³ This I will demonstrate has not only important implications for how we are to conceive of language and literature, but this realisation can also provide new strategies for approaching the very problem of the subject-object paradox that has thus far in contemporary theory been dominated by the ancient vicissitudes of dualisms and dialectics. Contrary to dialectical thinking, in which opposing factions seemingly “come together” in synthesis, the paradoxes maintained in the third space insist that *there be no resolution*, that the contradictions and complements of subject and object, internal and external, separation and union, be allowed to exist simultaneously and unresolved. I cannot emphasise this point enough, as the full value of the Winnicottian potential space would be lost if one regards this paradox as a dialectic. A dialectical synthesis, like a war carried out upon a battlefield, is a failure in that something is *always* lost on both sides, because one side emerges victorious over another. And syntheses are usually less an equitable meeting than a triumph of an already dominant thesis.⁵⁴ The potential space, on the other hand, allows the ascendancy of neither extreme. There is no union – without separation. Nor does this space offer a metaphysical transcendence beyond polarities. When the potential space is polluted, that is, dominated by one side, there is no creativity, no play, no space for subjective ontological experience. To be effective, the potential space must remain unpolluted, that is, not dominated by foreign objects or ruled by one extreme over the other. For Flax, this space can only be enjoyed and utilised if it remains “neutral” (1990, 120), though neutrality to me implies something passive, where the potential space is active and alive with paradox. Caregiver and infant, analyst and analysand, author and reader, reader and critic, employer and employee, citizen and politician enter this space *together*, as it is rightfully the creation of

neither but is *shared*.

The potential space, it may not therefore come as a surprise to learn, is not only perceived as source of creativity for the possible realisation of subjective being, but, because of the difficulty inherent in the acceptance of paradox, it is also the source of a dreaded anxiety; but this is yet another paradox that must be negotiated. This anxiety stems from much the same source as that fear of ambivalence, identified by Klein, accompanying the impending recognition of whole-objects. Briefly, as the infant develops improved physiological perceptive capabilities and means of reality testing, the part-objects that are the source and target of the infantile love and hate in the paranoid-schizoid position begin to be recognised for the whole-objects (that is, “like subjects”) that, in reality, they are. The infant, however, fears the confluence of love and hate directed toward the whole-object – retribution for past aggressive phantasies, the tainting of the ideal object – and continues to struggle to keep the two poles separate, using splitting, projection, introjection and idealisation, to keep loving certain objects ideally and to keep hating other objects demonically. Just as the infant fears having to confront the ambivalence from love and hate, good and bad coalesced in one object, there is a similar hesitation in having to negotiate the paradoxes of the potential space. Visits to the potential space are sometimes accompanied by fears of disintegration, that is, a weakening of the boundary between self and other. When this fear is too great to enable the positive experience of paradox in the potential space, subjects are unable to act creatively and simply comply with the object – or discourse – that dominates their world and threatens to overwhelm them. As I will soon demonstrate, the subject therefore requires an object to aid in its movement to this in-between world of productive paradox.

The potential space should not be thought of as an abstract, metaphysical space but as a material, real place. Winnicott remarks that this area is not meant to be thought of as part of the (body-)ego organisation, but that it is found “on body experiences” (1971, 70). This notion of experience as *inscribed on the body* is important in this study in that it is my assertion (made with others, including M. M. Bakhtin and V. N. Vološinov) that language is an *embodied* object, arising from

embodied experience and taking place in an embodied space that cannot be so easily abstracted from the ontologically real, psyche-somatic experience of subjects.⁵⁵

I concur with Flax's evaluation that this notion of the transitional space "is one of [Winnicott's] most important contributions to (possible) post-Enlightenment thinking [...] He breaks decisively with Enlightenment values in identifying the capacities to play and to 'make use of' and 'relate to' objects, rather than reason, as the qualities most characteristic of human 'being'" (Flax 1990, 116). Instead of reason as envisioned by Descartes, or the capacity to reason symbolically as envisioned by the Cartesian Lacan, subjectivity for Winnicott is based on the capacity to use objects creatively in a transitional space. Women used to be excluded from *being* human subjects because they were said to lack a capacity to reason. Lacanians exclude anyone incapable of participating in the symbolic order, anyone, in short, incapable of language. Winnicott's move thus explodes the field of subjectivity, radically rewriting the criteria by which we judge aliveness.

Because the potential space is a place of constant play and negotiation, it is the place where the subject can meet objects in its world. The potential space thus offers a way out of the narcissistic, self/other dualism common to Enlightenment thinking. For these reasons, Green is also full of praise for Winnicott's discovery:

When he distinguished transitional objects, transitional phenomena and transitional space, Winnicott took a decisive step in the concept of the object in connection with inside-outside, subjective-objective, non-existing-existing and positive-negative relations. Instead of viewing the object as the stake in play between internal and external reality, he brought into action the notion of the *boundary*. By creating the notion of potential space existing at the point of separation between self and object, by making of this space of separation a space of reunion, by describing the creation of the transitional object within it, he allows us to resolve the dilemma. Psychic reality has been transformed. It no longer remains trapped in the unreality-reality opposition; it now defines itself according to the nature of the

potentiality which calls forth infinite transformations.

(Green 1986, 274)

The transitional space bridges the gaps, but also helps to individuate, self and other, subject and object. Because of the potential space, “humans are not condemned to a world in which there are only gaps that can never be bridged between self and other. The narcissistic position in which there are only purely internally constructed ‘representations’ or ‘ideas’ of objects who are alive because and only so long as libidinal energy is invested in them is only one aspect of our experience with others” (Flax 1990, 119). And, as Green goes on to say, “Analytic experience has convinced me that the only way out of the impasse of empiricism versus intellectualism, or ‘realism’ versus ‘abstraction’, is through exploiting the technical and theoretical possibilities suggested by Winnicott’s work” (1986, 286). The impasses that the conception of the potential space may help us to overcome will also include, in Part II, that of “realism” and “magic.”

Transitional Phenomena: Transitional Objects and the Role of Illusion

Helping the subject overcome the anxiety experienced due to the liminal status and paradox of the potential space is the *transitional object*. This term Winnicott uses to describe any number of objects first used by the infant to decrease the anxiety of its “transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate” (Winnicott 1971, 14).

The object is a symbol of the union of baby and the mother (or part of the mother). This symbol can be located. It is at the place in space and time where and when the mother in transition from being (in the baby’s mind) merged in with the infant and alternatively being experienced as an object to be perceived rather than conceived of. The use of an object symbolises the union of two now separate things, baby and mother, *at the point in time and space of the initiation of their state of separateness.*

(Winnicott 1971, 96-7)⁵⁶

The successful use of the transitional object is necessary to achieve a balance in the liminal development between internal phantasy and external reality. The transitional object is regarded by the infant as neither internal, a mental concept, nor external, in that the object is not perceived to be a foreign entity, but a possession belonging to the infant – a subjective object. It is essential for the subjective experience of transitional objects to be effective in containing the anxieties of insecurity in the paradox of separation and union that the ontological status of the transitional object as either internal (subjective) or external (objective) is never challenged.

Of the transitional object it can be said that it is a matter of agreement between us and the baby that we will never ask the question: “Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?” The important point is that no decision on this point is expected. The question is not to be formulated.

(Winnicott 1971, 12; italics in original)

Entwined with the notion of transitional objects is Winnicott’s conception of *illusion* as a necessary first process “without which no contact is possible between the psyche and the environment” (Winnicott 1952b, 223). Illusion is not understood to be deceptive but as the first expression of the “creative potential” and is thus the precursor to, but is not supplanted by, the transitional object.

FIG. 19

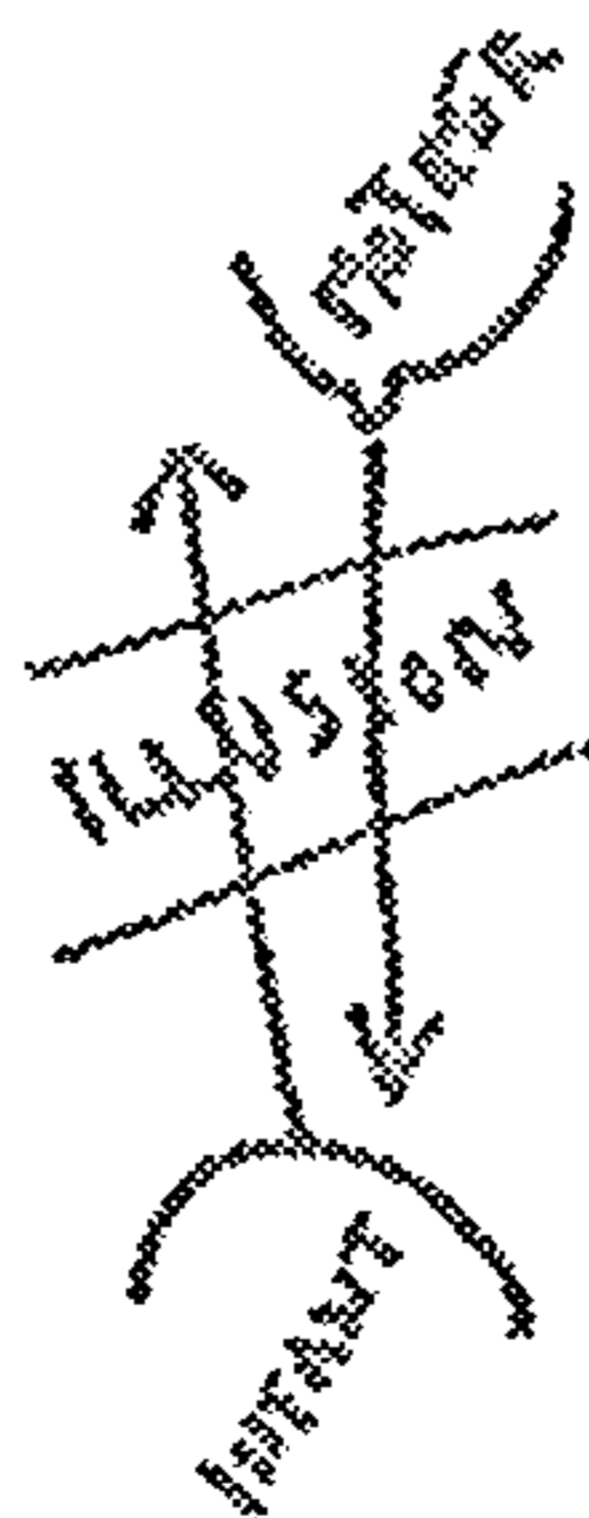
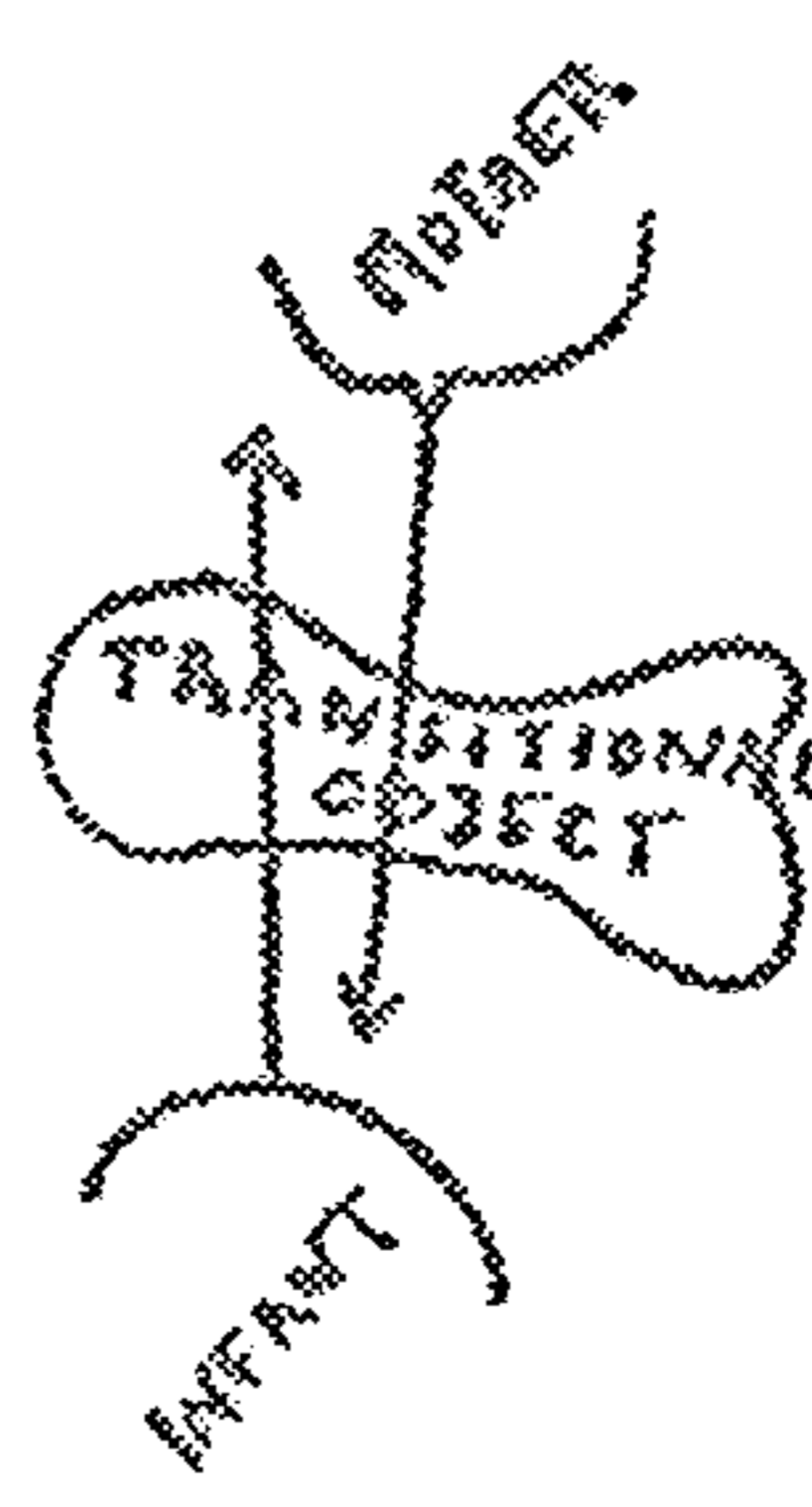


FIG. 20



(Winnicott 1951, 240)

Phillips notes that Winnicott calls such phenomena illusions “not because they are false but because they combine the desired with the actual in tolerable ways”

(Phillips 1988, 119).

Illusion is transformed under Winnicott “from a synonym for error into a source of truth by making it synonymous with creativity and insight” (J. Jones 1992, 225). Both illusions and transitional objects exist, therefore, between infant and mother in the intermediate third space and form the basis of intersubjective experience; in fact, Winnicott sometimes calls this space the “intermediate area of illusion” or simply *illusory experience*.

Perhaps the most significant difference we can draw between illusion and transitional objects is that the transitional object exists as a material, external entity, whereas illusion exists only as an object in the mind of the subject. Regardless, we are not allowed to point this distinction out to the subject as, like the transitional object, if illusion is to be effective, we must refrain from challenging its ontological status. The mother “allows the baby the *illusion* that what is there is the created by the baby; as a result there is not only the physical experience of instinctual satisfaction, but also an emotional union, and the beginning of a belief in reality as something about which one can have illusions” (Winnicott 1948, 163). Like the transitional object, illusion is necessary for a successful adaptation of the world (see Milner 1952), and offers opportunities for creatively linking internal and external worlds.

The subject of illusion is a very wide one that needs study; it will be found to provide the clue to a child's interest in bubbles and clouds and rainbows and all mysterious phenomena, and also to his interest in fluff, which is most difficult to explain in terms of instinct direct [sic]. Somewhere here, too, is the interest in breath, which never decides whether it comes primarily from within or without, and which provides a basis for the conception of spirit, soul, anima.

(Winnicott 1945, 154)

Notice again a link between creativity and breath, re-enforcing in the fundamental link between creativity and being. Like the transitional space, illusion is the shared system of experience between infant and mother or, later, between any subjectivities. Many British psychoanalysts understand the transferences to be an

illusion shared between analyst and analysand (see, for example, Milner's discussion of the "frame," 1952 183; also Kohon 1986, Symington 1983, 262).

Rethinking Reason, Rethinking Knowledge

That which we call defence mechanisms are also ways of thinking.

(Green 1986, 27)

Simply *being*, not (self-)knowledge, is the most important and fundamental aspect of human experience, but something we, in our analysis of subjective experience, foolishly take for granted. Ontology must precede epistemology, but not ignore it. "I am' must precede 'I do', otherwise 'I do' has no meaning for the individual" (Winnicott 1971, 130). However, in emphasising here the belief in the primacy of subjective being, while condemning epistemological-centricism, I do not wish conversely to over-privilege the ontological at the expense of the epistemological. Such a move would be to act dialectically, in the thrall of binarism, rather than *dialogically* (see my discussion of Bakhtin, below). The paradox between epistemology and ontology is yet another that must be negotiated in subjective experience. I am not saying that we should scorn or ignore the subject's need for representation, for self-knowledge. This is certainly neither possible nor desirable. Rather, I hope that before we ascribe identities to ourselves, before we hang ourselves upon those signifiers, that there be some *content*, some *referent*, to which our signs refer. Ultimately, this is another dialogue I would like to introduce, playing with the paradoxes between being and knowing, being present and being represented.

But if we are to learn to address knowledge *and* being, we need to re-conceive what we mean by *knowledge* itself. We want to find systems of knowledges and strategies for obtaining knowledge that are not depersonalising, a way of knowing *about* the subject that *includes* the subject. We want to conceive of knowledge as being more than merely that which is rational, or that which is

available for objectification. We need to be able to tolerate *uncertainty*, the *unthought knowns* (Bollas 1987) that comprise subjective experience and, as Klein would insist, simply *not knowing*.

Implicit in Winnicott's notion of the third space, Murray Schwartz suggests, is a new way of conceiving of knowledge, where "subjective and objective realities interpenetrate" (Schwartz 1992, 172). Winnicott's notion of play refuses to privilege a narrow, rationalist conception of knowledge, and "thus erases a sharp distinction between artistic and scientific modes of representation" (172). Schwartz reads Winnicott's notion of creativity as a "healthy" means of knowledge acquisition, whereas compliance leads to not only the creation of a false-self but also "the madness of alienating rationality" (173). James M. Jones (in the same edition of *The Psychoanalytic Review* that we find Schwartz's considerations) takes from Winnicott that "Knowledge arises not from the self alone nor the world alone but from the interaction between them" (J. Jones 1992, 225). Jones suggests the term "interactionalist epistemology" (233) to describe an alternative to traditional conceptions of objectivity based on the work of Winnicott. However, I find counter-productive Jones' capitulation to the "linguistic inevitability" of any conception of epistemology; his conclusion, that "Only through cognitive, linguistic categories do we understand the world of our experience" (235) seems to erase the advantages and advances offered by Winnicottian, and object-relations, reconceptualisation of knowledge as/through/of *affect*.

It is with Bion that we can find a more thorough re-evaluation of knowledge and the processes by which one comes to know. Bion regards thinking as developed from projective identification, as the "successful outcome of two main mental developments" (1961, 179); simply, the development of thoughts and the development of processes to cope with these thoughts – thinking. Bion's formula seems straightforward, almost mindlessly oversimplistic, but these premises mark a significant shift: "It will be noted that this differs from any theory of thought as a product of thinking, in that thinking is a development forced on the psyche by the pressure of thoughts and not the other way around" (179); "thoughts" are to be "regarded as epistemologically prior to thinking and that thinking has to be

developed as a method or apparatus for dealing with ‘thought’” (1962, 83). For Freud (1911b), thinking is a means of restraining motor discharge, and for Bion

thinking is something forced on an apparatus, both suited for the purpose, by the demands of reality, and is contemporary with, as Freud said, the dominance of the reality principle. A modern analogy is provided by the fact that the demands of reality not only forced the discovery of psycho-analysis, but have led to the deflection of verbal thought from its original function of providing restraint for motor discharge to the tasks of self-knowledge for which it is ill-suited and for the purpose of which it has to undergo drastic changes

(Bion 1962, 57)

Bion, like Fairbairn and Winnicott, is reversing our perception that thinking exists as a thing in its own right, independent psyche-somatic concern. These thoughts emerge, according to Bion, from the conjunction of *preconceptions, a priori* expectations – for example, of the breast⁵⁷ – with realisation in experience – for example, when the infant is brought into contact with the actual breast, or when the expected presentation of the breast is frustrated. The satisfaction of expectations leads to *conceptions*, the frustration of expectations Bion calls *thoughts*. Thus thoughts and concepts are initially associated with the *emotional experience* of environmental responses to psyche-somatic needs, and Bion’s theory lights the way for a view of knowledge that does not force us to decide between questions of epistemology and those of ontology but seeks to show how these are intricately and inextricably related. Thus, the role of thinking, of the human capacity to reason, is not an end-in-itself, but to provide us a means of *thinking about feelings*.

For Bion, then, thinking arises in response to thoughts – *not the other way around* – that are based upon an absence (that is, of the breast), but not *only* absence; thoughts are always conjoined with conceptions, and so it would be more accurate to say that for Bion thinking is based on the paradoxes of absence and presence. For example, Bion says, “This breast that is swallowed is indistinguishable from a ‘thought’ but the ‘thought’ is dependent on the existence of an object that is actually put into the mouth” (1962, 57). To focus solely on the negative term would

be to miss Bion's point. "A capacity for tolerating frustration thus enables the psyche to develop thought as a means by which the frustration that is tolerated is made more tolerable" (180). If there is no capacity for the development of frustration, "what should be thought, a product of the juxtaposition of preconception and negative realisation, becomes a bad object, indistinguishable from the thing-in-itself, fit only for evacuation" (180) through projection. Thus, Bion explains, if only absence meets our expectations, "all thoughts are treated as if they were indistinguishable from bad internal objects" (180). This leads to poor object-relations, confuses the distinction between self and external object, and obstructs the capacity to think.

Bion therefore provides us with a theory of thinking that is important in many ways. First, it enables a new conception of reason, offering an alternative to Enlightenment rationality.⁵⁸ Ironically, using his own algebraic notation, Bion explains the objectification of knowledge and its effects on the subject. Bion formulates that $x K y$ only follows $x L y$ and $x H y$, where x is the subject, y is the object (or other subject) and the middle term defines the relation between subject and object – L as loving, H as hating and K knowing; in other words, before one can meaningfully (*creatively*) know an object, one must have an emotional engagement with it. However, because Bion regards K to be inextricable from the subjective elements of both x and y , he recognises that "in proportion as inanimate machinery is introduced to displace the living element, L , H or K have ceased to exist" (48). "The techniques employed by those who have a scientific outlook have achieved most success when y is an inanimate object. The conviction that a scientific outlook prevails in the relationship $x K y$ is more easily maintained if y is inanimate and if x can be made to seem to approximate to the inanimate, for example uses a machine" (1962, 47). The objectification of knowledge, the depersonalisation of x and/or y , destroys the capacity to relate to objects, in terms of not only love and hate but also in a meaningful, knowledgeable way (K). However, Bion clarifies that "If the learner is intolerant of the essential frustration of learning he indulges phantasies of omniscience and a belief in a state where things are known. Knowing something consists in 'having' some 'piece of' knowledge and *not* in what I have called K " (65). "Knowledge" in this negative sense, what Bion signifies as " $-K$," is, through

appropriation and possession, an attempt to confirm omnipotent phantasy – Bion’s K describes, on the other hand, a relation, a process that is active, more akin perhaps to *learning*.⁵⁹ This distinction proves useful when we are thinking about reason and rationalism as defences as opposed to productive processes that characterise a means of living in our environments.

Bion’s somewhat obscure formulation also proves useful when considering the difference between what has been described as our modernist and postmodern crises. Even the question, “How can x know anything?” which characterises the modernist obsession with epistemology, Bion tells us “expresses a feeling; it appears to be painful and to inhere in the emotional experience that I represent by $x K y$ ” (1962, 48). But postmodernists go further, negating the affective element, and is better represented by the formula $x -K y$.

Bion posits two possible strategies – evasion and modification – through which a subject deals with (or “removes”) the pain and frustration inherent in such reasoning. Emotional experience that is felt to be painful may initiate an attempt either to evade or to modify the pain according to the capacity of the personality to tolerate frustration. Modification “is attempted by using the relationship $x K y$ so that it will lead to a relationship in which x is possessed of a piece of knowledge called y ” (1962, 48). Modification describes obsessive collection and the desire to master the world displayed by Enlightenment science: encyclopaedia, Orientalism, *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. “Evasion on the other hand,” Bion tells us, “is attempted by substitution of the meaning ‘ x is possessed of a piece of knowledge called y ’ so that $x K y$ no longer represents the painful emotional experience but the supposedly painless one” (48-9) – thus resembling the postmodern denial of meaning. And further inviting parallels with our postmodern environment, Bion explains that “Such a manoeuvre is intended not to affirm but to deny reality, not to represent an emotional experience but to mis-represent it to make it appear to be a fulfilment rather than a striving for fulfilment” (49). The subject of postmodernity, again, is shown to be not that different from that of the Enlightenment; through different means, both achieve the same ends, namely, the confirmation of subjective omnipotence. Both evasion and modification, as defences

against uncertainty that cause anxiety and frustration, also sever the link between emotion and knowledge, the subject and object. Modification attempts to reassert our omnipotence by denying that anything can escape our control, that we can *objectify*, therefore *know* and *possess*, everything; evasion reasserts our omnipotence by denying the importance, relevance or reality of anything that threatens to escape our control.

We can begin to re-conceive reason and rationality if we consider that a reasonable perception of world can be found not in the abstract, paranoid-schizoid processes of a depersonalised mind-psyche but only through the affective recognition of integrated whole objects in the depressive position.

The emotions fulfil for the psyche a function similar to that of the senses in relation to objects in space and time: that is to say, the counterpart of the commonsense view in private knowledge is the common emotional view; a sense of truth is experienced if the view of an object which is hated can be conjoined to a view of the same object when it is loved, and the conjunction confirms that the object experienced by different emotions is the same object. A correlation is established.

(Bion 1961, 185-6)

Thinking does not arise as a thing for itself, as it does for Descartes and the intellectual, and, unlike intellectualisation, thoughts arise first and should not be distinguished from emotional responses to the environment. This different, more productive conceptualisation of rationalism is also suggested by Winnicott's concept of the "mind in health" where "the mind does not usurp the environment's function, but makes possible an understanding and eventually a making use of its relative failure" (1949, 246; see also Phillips 1988, 95).

We thus have a theory of thinking that does not naturalise a depersonalised conception of knowledge and shows how knowledge acquisition can – and should – be a creative, embodied process. Bott-Spillius argues that Bion "lessened the divide between emotion and cognition, for it is as much concerned with describing how emotions become meaningful as with describing a model of how the capacity to

think develops” (1983, 323). For Meltzer, the view that “the emotional experience of the intimate relationship has to be thought about and understood if the mind is to grow and develop” is “almost diametrically opposed to Freud’s attitude towards emotion” (1981, 182). With Bion’s, Fairbairn’s and Winnicott’s connection of thinking to the earliest maternal care, reason is not dependent upon the whims and fancies of patriarchal authority. Flax, for one, has found such a revision of reason useful to her feminist project:

Furthermore, because Winnicott locates the development of the capacity to reason within the unfolding relationship of mother and child, his account is more compatible with and useful to feminist theorizing. Reason no longer appears as a fragile, tentative acquisition dependent upon the existence of patriarchal authority of the child’s submission to the alien logic of language and the father’s law.

(Flax 1990, 117).

Bion and Winnicott therefore share the idea that the inability to live creatively leaves one to abandon the ontological concerns of subjective experience and focus solely upon the epistemological:

The problem that has to be solved on this early, yet superficial, level must be stated in adult terms by the questions, “What is something?” and not the question, “Why is something?” because “why” has, through guilt, been split off. Problems, the solution of which depends upon an awareness of causation, cannot therefore be stated, let alone solved.

(Bion 1959, 95)

The realisation of subjective being is thwarted by an inability to tolerate depressive ambivalence, by the imposition of an overwhelming figure or discourse, and by the psyche-somatic splitting that replaces environmental care with intellectual processes. As I will argue in Part II, trying to negotiate a form of reason that does not rely upon these assumptions is an important task that many contemporary British magic realist novelists set themselves.

Speaking of Transitional Objects... Language

Language, in my view, is the heir to the first transitional objects.
(Green 1986, 47)

I now wish to offer some initial investigations into how we may conceive of a Winnicottian and Kleinian approach to language. I believe that we need a theoretical strategy that will dislodge language from its privileged place as being equal to, or even greater than, the subject itself, while still appreciating how language serves an important function in the realisation of subjectivity. I find that Winnicott offers one such strategy that puts language in its place, simultaneously offering many new insights into how language can serve the subject – or fail to do so.

It is unsurprising that object-relations theorists do not present a complete, pre-packaged strategy for examining language – simply, they do not privilege the role of language in subjective experience to the same extent as Lacan or even Freud. Phillips notes that “In the work of the British School linguistics was never seen as a complementary discipline to psychoanalysis” (1988, 138). The reasons for this are varied, historically, clinically and ideologically. Zaretsky, for example, cites Britain’s strong empirical, meliorist and feminist traditions as central to the development of a specific British psychoanalysis (1998, 34-8). Green finds the important difference between French and “Anglo-Saxon” analysts to lie the latter’s love of empiricism and pragmatism and general distrust of intellectualism and abstraction, so beloved of their continental neighbours (see Green 1986, 4). Again, the science of linguistics is not needed by British analysts who are not as desperate to make psychoanalysis a science, although it would be a fallacy to say that some British psychoanalysts did not wish to make some claim for psychoanalysis as a legitimate science. Bion, who, like Lacan, attempts to reinforce psychoanalysis’s claim for scientific validity by drawing upon algebraic principles, shies away from an authoritative position, accepting that the methods he employs “are not definitive [...] I have found myself in a similar position to the scientist who continues to

employ a theory that he knows to be faulty because a better one has not been discovered to replace it” (1962, x) – significantly, this recognition appears in the preface to book on *knowledge* itself. Furthermore, because psychoanalysis in Britain historically centred on the work of pioneering analysts who focussed on infants and children, there was less *verbal* material to work with from their analysands. Analysis continued, therefore, not as the “talking cure” as Freud envisioned, but forcing analysts to examine the other processes through which relations and communication are conducted. The fact that many of the innovative British psychoanalysts were women – and thus better suited to study children, the establishment reckoned – also doubtlessly contributes to a shift in focus from the Oedipal relations with the father to the maternal care. And British analysts, despite taking a great deal of interest in art and literature, were concerned first and foremost only with developing strategies to cope with their analysands and were less concerned with constructing metapsychological metanarratives of human experience for the consumption of philosophers, artists and their critics.

Despite this, Phillips notes that “In virtually every paper Winnicott wrote, he says something explicitly about language, though he tends to speak of ‘words’ rather than Language as a system” (1988, 138). Phillips is right when he says that “Winnicott [...] never makes clear how the child gets from the private experience to the more communal experience, from a personal teddy-bear to a pleasure in reading Dickens” (1988, 115), but although Winnicott never makes it *clear* there are hints, leads, allusions and assumptions throughout Winnicott’s work which lead us to a playground strewn with toys, ideas, objects that allow for almost infinite play. I will also briefly examine a specifically Kleinian account of symbolisation in an effort to present a range of psychoanalytic perspectives on the issue. This is important not so much to show cohesion within the British psychoanalytic movement but to add further distinctive strategies to our approach to language. A theory of language based upon object-relations, I maintain, presents us with an understanding of language as embodied and idiomatic to subjective experience and inscribed on the psyche-soma, a potential tool to be used for the realisation of subjective being and for the mediation of the paradoxes between union and separation, the internal and the

external worlds, the subject and the object. To this end, I will also briefly examine the Bakhtinian circle, whose approaches to language I find share a great deal with object-relations, despite their disparate starting places. After these thoughts on language, I will conclude this theoretical exposition with some general conceptions of literature that may be derived from an object-relations perspective, examining the possibility that the text can also be a transitional phenomenon enabling creativity and play.

First Thoughts: Winnicottian Considerations

Language, as it is manifest both in our first experiences of signs and as a creative communicative tool utilised in adult life, can be seen to function as a transitional object, acting as a defence so as to reduce the anxieties of separation and union, anxieties that arise from the conflicts of internal and external worlds, experienced in the potential space between subjects. We need not regard language as an entity foreign to the subject, as “something alien to the individual, imposed over and against the inner self” (Flax 1990, 119). Like the transitional object, language is not immediately perceived by the subject as something external to its own being – when used creatively, language is not something wholly external to the subject, nor internal, but both. Language is the toy that is shared, and as the rightful property of both but also the sole possession of neither, it must be located in the third space between subjectivities, thus enabling subjective and intersubjective play and a means to realise subjective being. As Winnicott describes, the symbol, like the analyst’s attitude towards his or her analysand, “is in a gap between the subjective object and the object that is perceived objectively” (1960c, 161).

Like the transitional object, language first evolves as a bridge between caregiver and infant, aiding in the negotiation of paradoxes of union and separation. Martin J. Weich speculates that “speech provides a means of retaining a connection to the mother as well as separating from her. Children replace sucking at the breast with introjection of the mother’s sounds” (1978, 415). Transitional objects – and

symbols – can also play an instrumental role in preventing the disintegration of the psyche-soma, fulfilling an *integrative* function, uniting not only infant and mother but also the fragmented ego, using meaning as glue (see, for example, Deutsch 1959). But in addition to offering a means of connection and integration, the transitional object also permits the gradual separation of the infant as the disillusionment and frustration successfully enacted by the good-enough caregiver may be better tolerated through a “calling forth” (creative selection and use) of an object that is *present*, inscribed on the psyche-soma. These objects are, at first, equated with but later come to represent the caregiver. The transitional object thus enables the subject to bridge the gap between itself and the caregiver, but, Jeanette Winterson reminds us, “Bridges join but they also separate” (1987, 61): Language not only connects, but it also separates, offering opportunities for individuation. Language thus begins with the infant’s parroting of sounds such as cooing and babbling – thus comforting the infant in the caregiver’s absence – and gradually develops into more complex symbolic representative speech with no sudden or traumatic initiation into a symbolic order.

Bollas notes that “Language functions through illusion” (1989, 30); language not only derives from transitional illusions but also helps to nourish these illusions that are necessary in intersubjective experience.

This illusion is quietly sustained by the language we hold in common that cultivates an assumption that what we mean when we speak is what the recipient understands through our speech. If I say “Would you please pass me the paper clip?” and the other does so, I am assured that I am understood. Countless simple transactions of this kind sustain the powerful idea that people understand one another. In this belief lies a freedom to assume reception that facilitates communication and creativity.

The idea that we understand one another through the different orders of communication is, in my view, largely illusory.

(Bollas 1992, 185-6)

Bollas, like Winnicott, does not mean that our ability to understand one another is

deceptive – though he is playing on the meaning of illusion. Like any psychoanalyst, he recognises that we cannot ever understand each other completely. The illusion is an agreement between subjects that allow us to communicate by offering others the license to play with our objects, verbal and emotional. Illusion, rejected by rationalism as deceptive, is necessary to the generation of meaning.

The suggestion that the infant first utilises language to compensate for the absence of the caregiver does not therefore imply that language itself is predicated solely upon *absences* in the Kantian/Saussurean/Lacanian sense. Rather, language is as much a reflection of a presence; language is derived from the objects (phantasies, sounds, symbols, words, thoughts, images) that have a material existence and are inscribed on the psyche-soma. Or, one may say that language is not predicated solely upon absence but upon the *paradox of absence and presence*. If I were to speculate further, I would suggest that language, when used creatively, is a material presence in the face of a potential absence, whereas language when accepted compliantly is an absence with no material presence, just as thinking for the intellectual becomes a thing in itself with no somatic referent or content.

This tension between absence and presence is also taken up by Green; in analytic communication, he says, potential meaning allows for the meeting of present meaning and absent meaning (1986, 48). Without absence, symbolisation is impossible, and we find ourselves in psychotic (or “prepsychotic”) structures – Green cites, as examples, acting out and Klein’s and Segal’s notion of symbolic equation, where there is no distinction between the symbol and the thing represented. However, Green also explains that absence cannot only mean *loss* if communication is to be possible. If there is to be play, this absence must also be transformed into a *potential presence*,

For absence, paradoxically, may signify either an imaginary presence, or else an unimaginable non-existence. It is absence in this first sense which leads to the capacity to be alone (in the presence of the object) and to the activity of representation and of creating the imaginary: the transitional object, constructed within that space of illusion never violated by the question. Was the object created or was it found?

(Green 1986, 293)

I find the suggestion that we relate to the objects of language at different levels – in this case, of presence and absence – an important one, for while a theory explicating how language is used creatively examines a preferable alternative, there are occasions when compliance has an essential role to play in “healthy,” adaptive subjective functioning. Language is only one potential medium for creative experience, though language cannot, and should not, always be seen in these terms – there needs to be a balance between creativity and compliance, true and false selves, subjects and objects. And, as Winnicott reminds us, it is not the object itself that is transitional, but the use one makes of it (Winnicott 1958b, 1971).

Milner highlights how Winnicott’s and her own conceptualisation of language marks a shift from previous psychoanalytic thinking on the symbol. She finds that the orthodox position that symbolism arises as a defence in response to absences or prohibitions tells only part of the story. Expanding upon Ernest Jones’ initial perception of symbolism as not just a consequence of forbidding forces but also as an attempt to establish a relationship with external reality,⁶⁰ Milner finds that symbols also arise “due to the need to endow the external world with something of the self and so make it familiar and understandable” (Milner 1952, 181), or to create a world filled with idiomatic *meaning*. Milner provocatively asks:

Do we really mean that it is only the desire for ease and pleasure, and not necessity that drives us to identify one thing with another which is in fact not the same? Are we not rather driven by the internal necessity for inner organization, pattern, coherence, the basic need to discover identity in difference without which experience becomes chaos?

(Milner 1952, 182)

Thus for Milner and Winnicott, symbolism and language do not merely try to patch up the gaps in experience, to compensate for the lost object or for the object denied by the internal or external father. Symbolism actively tries to make sense of those objects and experiences that are very much a part of the infant’s (and adult’s) internal and external worlds, constructing meaning that is not just a defence against

meaninglessness but as a basis for our relationships to the environment and to ourselves.

A language articulated creatively, arising from the embodied experiences of the subject, can be said to be spoken in a specific, creative *idiom*. Bollas describes the subjective idiom as the sum of qualities specific to an individual.⁶¹ The idiom is comprised of objects, drives, ideas, affective states, private experiences, phantasies, biological design... in short, everything that comprises and is inscribed upon the psyche-somatic subject. The subjective idiom is the means through which a subject experiences and articulates itself by the successful and creative use, selection and manipulation of objects that are specific to that subject. And it is therefore from and through the idiom that language arises and is put to creative use, and it is the means through which language can be put into the service and realisation of the subject's being. Bollas finds that if the subject is permitted to *elaborate* (articulate, express, speak) itself in its own idiom, "then life will be punctuated by inspired moments of self-realisation" (1992, 70). Therefore, when we speak of the (re-)ontologising power of language, the "words to say it" (Cardinal 1975) must be derived from one's own subjective idiom, selected from the objects inscribed on the psyche-soma.

Lying between caregiver and infant, analyst or analysand (or any two subjects), language is like a toy, in the true Kleinian sense, to be played with (see Klein 1955; Milner 1957). It is the job of the caregiver, psychoanalyst, and literary critic to inquire as to *how* that toy is being played with. Does she break it? Does he play with toys indiscriminately and wildly, leaving a battleground in his wake? Is she interested in play at all, or is he uncreative and lazy? Or – and most significantly with regard to the realisation of subjective being – are these toys chosen by the subject itself, from one's own toy-box and capable of expressing one's own desires, wishes and phantasies, or are these toys the only ones available to the subject in a hostile battlefield and require one to play someone else's game?

Other Winnicottian Conceptions: Transitional Language

Although the printed word and, as I argue, language itself have a material existence on some level, psychoanalysts most often discuss and deal with *concrete* transitional objects – blankets, teddy bears, the body. Winnicott himself is not clear whether language, therefore, can serve as a transitional object. In the early 1950s, Winnicott defines the transitional object as a “precursor of a symbol” (1989, 43) and often maintains the distinction between transitional object and symbol proper. However, Winnicott’s own later illustrations detailing the progression of the infant’s use of transitional objects (1971, 3-4) suggest a continuity between the transitional object and language, and he concedes that “Whatever I say about children playing really applies to adults as well, only the matter is more difficult to describe when the patient’s material appears mainly in terms of verbal communication” (1971, 40). Transitional objects represent the infant’s “first use of a symbol and first experience of play” (1971, 96). As such, they are used as communicative tools and the infant’s use of these objects develops from the manipulation of a blanket to mouthing, babbling, anal noises and the first musical notes (1971, 4; see also 1960b, McDonald 1970). The important point here is, again, that there is no clear break between the infantile use of its earliest objects and symbol-formation. For Kleinian and object-relations theorists in general, the boundary between pre-symbolisation and symbolisation proper, like that between pre-Oedipal and Oedipal, is fluid and porous. Our movement from one to the other does not follow developmental, one-way “progress”; achieving the capacity to symbolise does not mark an irreparable break with the past – we slip in and out of both throughout our lives. With the onset of verbal capability and the increased capacity to use symbols in language, language becomes the most obvious and perhaps the common – but certainly not the only – transitional object in our cultural playground. Adult language never fully or even partially replaces these earliest objects.

It is perhaps useful in trying to determine the status of language as a transitional object to consider Milner’s belief for the need for a *medium* between the self-created and external realities (1952). Although Milner speaks of the “artist’s

medium,” she makes clear elsewhere that such creative processes and media are not exclusively utilised by the artist but apply to a vast array of adult experiences. The media used in creative processes fulfil the same function as illusion, negotiating between the internal and external spheres. For Milner, the media employed in these negotiations are concrete, they are “pliable stuff that can be made to take the shape of one’s phantasies, can include the ‘stuff’ of sound and breath which becomes our speech” (1952, 190). Like Winnicott’s transitional object, this medium can be the toys found in the playground but also, in the case of the transference, a person may also become the medium through which the subject works out its relations with the world.

Weich also addresses Winnicott’s apparent failure to include language amongst the catalogue of transitional phenomena. He concludes that “One reason for this neglect may be that Winnicott tended to stress the physical concreteness of the transitional object, along with the sensory modalities of touch, smell, vision and taste, while he paid little attention to the auditory sphere” (1978, 413). Weich is accurate in saying that Winnicott did not focus a great deal of explicit attention on language or the transitional nature of verbal utterance and language itself, but I wish to reconsider Weich’s equation of language with the non-material auditory senses. First, it is my belief that languages conceived and utilised as transitional objects do themselves possess concrete status as objects that are available for use by virtue of the fact that they are inscribed on the psyche-soma of subjects. Winnicott allows that the transitional object is not always an external object:

Often this symbol precursor is in fact an object [...] Often there is no materialisation, however, and then certain phenomena may be found later to have the same significance; for instance, watching, thinking, distinguishing between colours, exploitation of body movements and sensations, etc. etc..

(Winnicott 1989, 43)

Language, I would respond to Weich, should not be equated with an auditory sensation – certainly it is only sometimes that language finds its expression in this medium. The concrete, material existence of language is a strength of a

Winnicottian conceptualisation of language as a transitional object, and something that such an understanding may share with Vološinov and Bakhtin.

Weich himself focuses upon what he calls *transitional language* – a particular phase of language development experienced between sixteen and eighteen months and which lies between one and two word utterances, where transitional “protosymbols” exist as both symbolic equations with the object and true symbolic representations (see also Deri 1978). The stage of transitional language, according to Weich’s conceptualisation, is successfully negotiated by most subjects, with the notable exception of schizophrenics and autistics, and it rarely returned to, except perhaps in the psychoanalytic scene. Transitional language Weich places in a category with “language fetish” and “language constancy,” existing in a pre-Oedipal developmental phase before language is systematised or phonemically structured.

My use of Winnicott’s transitional phenomena in the study of language differs from Weich’s primarily because of our respective analytic foci and experience. He is an analyst, I deal with literature and culture, and I am also responding to a theoretical culture dominated by Lacan. So I do not mean to be critical of Weich, but merely to emphasise certain aspects of Winnicott’s transitional objects that Weich does not. While Weich perceives the transitional nature of language to be particular to a specific stage of infantile language acquisition, I maintain that language never completely loses its transitional quality, so long as it is used creatively. The transitional status of language, for me, applies not only to early infantile language development, but also to the more common manifestations of transitional relatedness to be found in adult communication and intersubjective experience. This is perhaps true, Weich allows, in the analytic scene, but also I believe in the aesthetic experience of language to be found in literature or any creative use of language, where words and concepts more forcefully reflect a particular idiom.

It is inevitable that the accusation will arise that by expanding these categories of transitional phenomena too much they lose their significance and effectiveness as concepts to address a specific means of experiencing the world. I myself wonder if my analysis does not threaten to render useless through ubiquity

the concept of transitional objects (like Fairbairn's schizoid), but I do not say that language is *only* a transitional object, just that symbolisation arises from transitional objects and always maintains some of their status as transitional phenomena. Weich also considers the transitional quality of language to carry on into the adult use of language (1978, 413), although again this is limited to the analytic scene. I would like to expand Weich's identification that transitional language "represents the earliest creative use of language" (416) to include the uses of language in more widely conceived "creative" experience in general, creativity experiences, as Winnicott would say, that include any act, performed by anyone, when experienced and enjoyed, inextricably linked to our sense of being as subjects.

The Vicissitudes of Symbolism: Klein

There is, it seems, more explicit interest in language and symbol formation in the work of Klein and her followers than in that of Winnicott and the Independents. Klein's innovations are vital to our conceptualisation of language. She was the first to regard symbol formation more in terms of advancing the subject's emotional and intellectual development and relation to its environment, rather than regarding it as a necessary sublimation of the thwarted libidinal impulses. Before Klein, "analysts asked themselves: What is the content of a given symbol? To-day," however, thanks to Klein, "another question is added: In what way is the content expressed by the symbol? This last question perhaps proves to be the more important, for the difference between normal and abnormal thought rests on how symbols are dealt with" (Rodrigué 1956, 153). Although I will not explore all the existing work and possibilities that the Kleinian approach offers our study of language here, I would like to begin to set in dialogue those features that will contribute to the Winnicottian perspective that is my focus here.

Briefly, for Klein, language arises out of symbolisation, which itself arises from processes of identification – the basis of the subject's relation to the external world, reality and other subjects (for a concise summary of Klein's conceptualisation

of symbolisation, see Klein 1930; also Klein 1923). In pre-Oedipal experiences the infant's world comes to be dominated by sadistic phantasies directed against the mother, or parts of the mother and her imagined internal contents (the penis, excrement and children). The infant therefore experiences a severe anxiety, fearing retaliation from the objects against which its hatred and destructive wishes are directed. Some would further add (for example, Winnicott) that this anxiety also arises from the infant's fear that its sadistic phantasies may actually be successful and destroy the mother and/or her part-objects, thus annihilating the good object along with the bad. These anxieties, characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid position, are compounded through phantasy, projection and splitting, by association of the specific object feared with other objects. As Klein describes it:

This anxiety contributes to make him equate the organ in question with other things; owing to this equation these in their turn become objects of anxieties, and so he is impelled constantly to make other and new equations, which form the basis of his interest in the new objects and of symbolisation.

(Klein 1930, 220)

We see here that the process of symbolisation, for Klein, also forms the basis of sublimation, wherein the subject substitutes other objects for the real objects of its desire, obtaining the real object being prohibited and thus giving rise to too great an anxiety, in the classical Freudian model. In this respect, I think the Kleinian approach has much in common with Lacan's, although Klein (as usual) identifies this process as beginning much earlier and at a much more primitive, fundamental level of experience than at the Oedipal indoctrination to *le loi-du-père*. For Klein, the development of our capacity for language hinges upon our relationship with the mother and has little to do with the Father. The significance of these ensuing differences should not be underestimated, for as we shall see it has far-reaching consequences for upsetting the Lacanian and Freudian rationalist and patriarchal bias in approaching language and subjectivity in general.

Klein distinguishes between and postulates a movement in subjective development from *symbolic equation* to *symbolic representation*. It is Klein's belief

that in the paranoid-schizoid position, where splitting, persecutory anxiety, idealisation and demonisation are the norm and only part-objects are recognised, the infantile subject has only the capacity for symbolic equation, where there is an equation of the symbol with the thing symbolised, or the symbol is imagined to actually *be* the thing symbolised (see Segal 1957; Hinshelwood 1991, 452-6; also Bion 1955, Thorner 1955). Through the processes of sublimation, the subject gains the capacity to experience objects *as symbols*, or for symbolic representation, where the symbol comes only to stand-for, or represent, the object of anxiety.⁶² This ability to recognise symbols as symbols is characteristic of the depressive phase of subjective development, where the subject is able to tolerate the anxiety of ambivalence that accompanies the recognition of whole-objects, mixing good and bad elements without splitting.

There is more that could be said about the Kleinian theory of symbolisation as it pertains to our investigations of language and literature. However, for our purposes here, I believe that I have provided enough of an outline to exploit the similarities between Kleinian conceptualisations of language and those of Winnicott. First, it is apparent from both the Kleinian theory of symbolisation and the Winnicottian theory of transitional objects that language, in part, arises as a response to primitive anxieties experienced early in life.⁶³ While for Winnicott this anxiety is primarily the result of the liminal tensions of separation and union from the primary caregiver, Klein envisions language as originating from the anxieties of persecution that necessarily accompany the destructive phantasies of the infant. The sources of these anxieties are not, I contend, as different as they might seem, as I find the Kleinian notion of persecutory retaliation to lie at the base of the more generalised Winnicottian conceptualisation of internal and external reality.⁶⁴ Implicit also in both Klein's and Winnicott's understanding of this anxiety is that a degree of anxiety is *always necessary* if representational language is to develop and succeed as a useful tool in adult life and communication. Winnicott, remember, insists that for transitional objects to be successfully used by the infant, they require the presence of an environment that is *good-enough*, that is not perfect, but *adaptable*, at times necessarily frustrating the infant's wishes.

For Klein and Winnicott, it is not that we always employ these defence mechanisms in order to *rid* ourselves of anxiety, but as to *tolerate* the inevitable, so to “survive our paradoxes.” Klein explains that

the development of the ego and the relation to reality depend on the degree of the ego’s capacity at a very early period to tolerate the pressure of the earliest anxiety-situations. And, as usual, it is a question of a certain optimum balance of the factors concerned. A sufficient quantity of anxiety is the necessary basis for an abundance of symbol-formation and phantasy; an adequate capacity on the part of the ego to tolerate anxiety is essential if anxiety is to be satisfactorily worked over, if this basic phase is to have a favourable issue and if the development of the ego is to be successful.

(Klein 1930, 221)

While, therefore, language may be employed as a defensive strategy against anxiety, the inability to tolerate anxiety prohibits the development of the capacity to symbolise. Other strategies for dealing with this anxiety, utilised and arrested at a more primitive level of development (usually in the paranoid-schizoid position), can thwart the development of language capability, especially the creative use of language; for example, compliant acquiescence with dominant figures or discourses, “direct communication” or “acting out,” retreat into a wholly internal phantasy world – characteristics variously attributed to schizophrenics, psychotics and autistics and, perhaps, postmodern subjects who are unable to use objects symbolically and/or creatively.

In Klein’s theory of symbolisation and Winnicott’s notion of the transitional object there is also the shared suggestion that language first arises from the embodied experiences of our first objects, usually relating to the maternal caretaker. Specifically, according to Klein, the anxieties that give rise to language are directed against the internal organs and contents of the mother, and identification, the forerunner of symbolism, arises from the epistemophilic instinct, “the baby’s endeavour to rediscover in every object his own organs and their functioning” (1930, 220).⁶⁵ Language is not, therefore, an abstract entity imposed from without upon a

subject, but evolves as part of a process by which we creatively come to know ourselves and others.

There is also this suggestion by Klein, developed most explicitly by Bion, that language acts as a tool of mediation between subjects. Bion describes an analysand whose attempts to prevent relationships with other subjects – what Bion calls “attacks on linking” – were “expressed in a stammer which was designed to prevent the patient from using language as a bind between him and me” (1959, 91; see also Bion 1955, 223).⁶⁶ Language, for Bion as for Winnicott, is a tool through which intersubjective communication and subjective creativity is realised. The attack on the link between subjects is thus enacted because of the desire to avoid creative communication, due to an inability to tolerate the anxiety accompanying psyche-somatic integration. Bion says that

The couple engaged in a creative act are felt to be sharing an enviable, emotional experience [...] [his analysand] had a hatred of emotion, and therefore, by short extension, of life itself [...] the patient is suffering the consequences of his early attacks on the state of mind that forms the link between the creative pair and his identification with both the hateful and creative states of mind.

(Bion 1959, 93)

We see here Bion, like Winnicott, is proposing not only that language is a means by which subjects interact creatively, but also that an inability to tolerate the anxieties of liminality inhibits the subject’s capacity for creativity which may manifest itself in an inability to use symbols.

Introducing Winnicott to the Bakhtinian Circle: Dialogue in the Potential Space

Existence, like language, is a shared event.

(Holquist 1990, 28)

Caryl Emerson correctly notes that in the polemical *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*, Vološinov is “very selective in his reading of Freud. Nowhere does he

engage Freud's most provocative works, the great sociopsychological essays of the war years and the 1920s. In those works Bakhtin [Vološinov] would have found a more complex opponent and, at times, an uncomfortable ally" (Emerson 1986, 26). It is this later Freud – the Freud that inspired object-relations – that I would like to draw into dialogue with Bakhtin. Nevertheless, it is important that we do not elide the important ideological and strategic differences between Bakhtin and psychoanalysis. However, Bakhtin and Winnicott are, I think, coming to similar conceptualisations of language and intersubjective experience, despite these radically different backgrounds and approaches. They need each other, I think, and this study certainly needs both of them. In the study of language, Bakhtin offers Winnicott a more rigorous, more specific examination of signs and strategies for textual practice. Winnicott offers Bakhtin a more rigorous examination of subjective interiority, a realm of subjective experience that Bakhtin's Marxist roots make it hard for him to imagine, and the psychological processes involved in the shared space that both theorists describe. For Bakhtin, Emerson explains, the psyche is "not an internal but a boundary phenomenon" (1986, 25), which is not inconsistent with Winnicott's belief that the subject comes into being through creative experiences in a potential space between the subject and others, but cannot accommodate the rich internal world with which Winnicott endows the subject.

There have been readings that attempt to draw together Lacan and Bakhtin (for example, Emerson 1986; Lowenstein 1994), but as Sue Vice warns, we should not be too quick to equate Bakhtin and Lacan, even though some of their language, on the surface, seems similar; for example, "While Bakhtin's other is social, Lacan's is psychological" (Vice 1997, 4), Lacan's is intrapsychic. Predictably, I find that Bakhtin's language more closely echoes Winnicott's, with explicit references to embodiment, play, creativity and an implicit conception of intersubjectivity. Even the title Holquist gives the collection of Bakhtin's essays, *The Dialogic Imagination*, suggests an intricate relationship between intersubjectivity and creativity. Perhaps a mediator, such as early-twentieth century Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, would be useful in helping us to negotiate through the differences and similarities between British psychoanalysis and Russian linguistics and literary theory (see, for example,

Leiman 1992). Vygotsky, as I understand through my initial investigations, does not hold language to be a transcendental, organising principle of subjectivity but rather, like a transitional object, regards the sign as a mediating “tool” between embodied subjects. Winnicott’s transitional objects and Bakhtin’s and Vygotsky’s concepts of the sign share two important features that are important to my study of language. These theorists all regard language as a tool in the mediation of liminal anxieties of union *and* separation, and all three posit a language as a paradoxical *shared experience*, between objective world and internal reality (see Leiman 1992, Vygotsky 1996).

Bakhtin notoriously avoids concise definitions (a quality he shares with contemporary Independent psychoanalysts), but his conception of language is concisely summarised by the following:

As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes “one’s own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own.

(Bakhtin 1981, 293-4)

First, Bakhtin’s concept of language is distinct from that of Saussure and psychostructuralism in that it is fully *embodied* – “For Bakhtin, words cannot be conceived apart from the voices who speak them” (Emerson 1986, 24). Against structuralist approaches to language – and any approach that tries to objectify, that is, desubjectify, language – Bakhtin, arguably as a good Marxist, constantly insists that what is important in the study of language is “Who speaks and under what conditions he speaks: this is what determines the word’s actual meanings” (1981,

401). And, like the transitional object, signs are taken to be concrete, “particular, material things [...] Every phenomenon functioning as an ideological sign has some kind of material embodiment” (Vološinov 1973, 10-11). Bakhtin constantly emphasises that discourses, realised dialogically and not monologically imposed, are “historically concrete and living things” (1981, 331). The Bakhtinian circle does not therefore engage in a scientific splitting the sign from the subject; theirs is not a rationalist, abstract conception that seeks to remove the subjective element from language but instead tolerates the uncertainty characteristic of the paradoxical location of language between subject and object, internal and external. In fact, Bakhtin actively endorses embodied, creative uses of language in his praise for Rabelais, who wants to “return both a language and a meaning to the body” (1981, 171). Another consequence of this approach is that Bakhtin shares with a Winnicottian approach a view of language not only as an absence and meaning through difference but also of language as a matter of *sameness* (see Holquist 1990, 31), of presences, and an on-going tension between these.

Language for Bakhtin is to be found in the spaces between oneself and the other, at the flexible, ambiguous boundaries between speakers, or between author and reader. For both Winnicott and Bakhtin the space between subjectivities is “dialogically agitated and tension-filled” (Bakhtin 1981, 276), but also for Winnicott and Bakhtin, it is in this place that meaning is negotiated through *play*:

into this complex play of light and shadow the word enters – it becomes saturated with this play, and must determine within it the boundaries of its own semantic and stylistic contours. The way in which the word conceives its object is complicated by a dialogic interaction within the object between various aspects of its socio-verbal intelligibility.

(Bakhtin 1981, 277)

This idea of the word existing in a space between is reflected in Winnicott’s conception of the potential space. As Green explains with regard to communication in analysis, “the real analytic object is neither on the patient’s side nor on the analyst’s, but in the meeting of these two communications in the potential space

which lies between them” (1986, 48).

And for Bakhtin, as for Winnicott, the paradoxes that generate meaning in language are never to be resolved – there is always a tension between union and separation. For Bakhtin, these are centripetal and centrifugal forces that create and tear down languages and meaning:

Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal and centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralisation and decentralisation, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance [...] Every utterance participates in the “unitary language” (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces).

(Bakhtin 1981, 272)

This is why I think it is so important when talking about the relationship between subjects in object-relations terms to speak of *dialogues* rather than the *dialectic* that is preferred by philosophically-minded interpretations of Freud (including Lacanian).

Between dialectic and dialogic relations there exist important differences and consequences for our conceptualisation of experience. Bakhtin explains:

Dialogue and dialectics. Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgements from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness – and that’s how you get dialectics.

(Bakhtin 1986, 147)⁶⁷

With a dialectical synthesis, the result is always more the product of the dominant discourse, but with a Winnicottian third space and Bakhtinian dialogue, there is no resolution, no synthesis, but a uncomfortable, tension-filled, but ultimately *productive* paradox. And this dialogic principle need not be limited to a conceptualisation of language; we can also describe the relationship of the subject to its environment in terms of a dialogic relationship, where meaning is constructed through productive paradoxical tension. Bakhtin leads us to this expanded concept

of the dialogue: “As long as the organism lives, it resists a fusion with the environment, but if it is torn out of its environment, it dies” (Bakhtin 1981, 254).

The words that a subject uses, if they are to have meaning, for Bakhtin as for Bollas must be within a specific subjective idiom, not imposed from without, but *internally persuasive*:

many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them; they cannot be assimilated into his context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker.

(Bakhtin 1981, 294)

Like Bollas’ idiom, these discourses are “tightly interwoven with ‘one’s own world’” (1981, 345), and are suitably based in productive paradoxical relations with others:

the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else’s. Its creativity and productiveness consists precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organises masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition.

(Bakhtin 1981, 345)

And, like the idiom that is elaborated in the psychoanalytic scene, the internally persuasive discourse “is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions, it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts” (1981, 345-6). These discourses are not sealed internally, but interact dialogically, intersubjectively, to produce new meanings; it is “*not finite*, it is *open*; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer *ways to mean*” (1981, 346). And as for Winnicott, such discourses, used creatively, offer the opportunity for a (re-) birth of the subject: Bakhtin shows how language of the marketplace, having lost its renewing (ontologising) power, is renewed by Rabelais’ use of language in carnival, a theme I develop further in Part II.

I doubt that Bakhtin's notion of creative language includes a Winnicottian conception of how objects can be used in the service of the recognition of subjective being, though it is tempting to pull some quotations out of context as Bakhtin often discusses the idea of "becoming." Most often, Bakhtin discusses *ideological* becoming, by which he means the way in which our language is infused by our own and others' ideas and ideologies, not in the abstract but as they arise, in a true Marxist sense, from the concrete, material conditions of the subject. As Vološinov phrases it, any ideological product is both a part of reality and "reflects and refracts another reality outside itself" (Vološinov 1973, 9). In this sense, Bakhtin's becoming shares with Winnicott's the idea of materiality, a being involving an integrated psyche-soma. Bakhtin also speaks, however, more ambiguously of a "becoming" realised through communication, creativity and the play of intersubjective boundaries that invites further parallels with Winnicott. "The very being of man (both external and internal) is the *deepest communication*. To be means to *communicate* [...] To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself" (Bakhtin, quoted and translated by Emerson).⁶⁸ Holquist also points out that Bakhtin defines existence as an *event*, conceiving of existence as "the event of being" and that the Russian word Bakhtin uses for "event," *sobytie*, is always used in conjunction with the word "being," emphasising the relationship between the two words and concepts (1990, 25). But in the end, I think that further investigations in this regard should first be undertaken by someone with a better appreciation of Bakhtin's native language.

Bakhtin's description of authoritative discourses also proves useful when we consider a subject's relation to language on a compliant, rather than creative, basis. An authoritative discourse, Bakhtin tells us

may organise around itself great masses of other types of discourse (which interpret it, praise it, apply it on various ways) but the authoritative discourse itself does not merge with these [...] it remains sharply demarcated, compact and inert: it demands, so to speak, not only quotation marks but a demarcation even more magisterial, a special script, for instance [...] for it is fully complete, it has but a

single meaning [...]

It is not a free appropriation and assimilation of the word itself that authoritative discourse seeks to elicit from us; rather it demands our unconditional allegiance. Therefore authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it. It enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it.

(Bakhtin 1981, 343)

The authoritative discourse thus negates the possibility for play and meaning by polluting the potential space; “it enters the artistic context as an alien body, there is no space around it to play in” (Bakhtin 1981, 344). Authoritative discourses are the only kind of discourses capable of being imagined by (psycho)structuralism, as an entity imposed from without. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that Lacan’s own discourse tries to be similarly authoritative, or monologic – as if it were possible to create a language that was not laden and impregnated with the dialogic history and materiality of words. While one could argue with a certain degree of success that Lacan juggles several discourses, sometimes playfully, it seems to me that his own discourse is not meant to merge with these. Like Theaetetus, in a drive for exact definitions and for words that are frozen, free from the interfering play of meaning, Lacan’s language appropriates others, trying to complete itself, to seal itself off with a single meaning that demands unconditional allegiance. Such languages are transmitted, not represented (1981, 344), in a special script, the Lacanian algebra. This is also why, I think, Freud’s *it*, *I* and *over-I* are rendered in the English translation into the Latinate designations we are familiar with – and not meant to re-interpret as freely as we do Freud’s more colloquial terms

Bakhtin and Winnicott would also agree that such authoritative discourses cause a psyche-somatic “rupture between language and material, and seek for themselves a form that will permit this rupture to be overcome by *style* – no matter how conventional and obvious that style might at first glance seem” (Bakhtin 1981,

380). The depersonalising language described by Bakhtin echoes the “style-over-substance” mantra of postmodern discourses, emphasising the “surface charms” and with only “external meanings” that do not reflect the subjective idiom; it is a language that does not reflect emotions, affect, the body, and ultimately subjective being.

The Unconscious is Structured Like an *Affective Language*?: The Possibility of Dialoguing with Lacanian Theory

Language without affect is a dead language: and affect without language is uncommunicable.

(Green 1986, 205)

Having been so critical of Lacanian approaches to the subject and language, it is now perhaps time to re-consider Lacan in a Winnicottian and Kleinian context and try to draw his ideas back into play. Any such attempt should not aim to show the analogous nature of Lacan, Winnicott and Klein, but to try to construct a mutually informing dialogue, rather than imposing an oppositional dialectic. While I obviously disagree with much of Lacan’s work, this is not to say that some of his perceptions on the subject in late-capitalism are not useful, when historicised and re-read so as to eliminate the assumption of the subject being narcissistic and inevitably depersonalised – although this would indicate such a radical shift in Lacanian thought that perhaps Lacan would no longer recognise himself in it. Part of the problem with the Lacanian language and Lacanian theory in general is its universality, its invariant structure that can envision only one relationship of the subject to language. Eventually, however, I believe that such a dialogue will be possible, once all psychoanalytic schools are historically contextualised and develop a respect for the important differences between them. Also, I would be terribly disappointed if issues as important and ubiquitous as language or literature could be so easily explained by just one perspective or theoretical strategy.

Klein, Winnicott and Bakhtin show us that language is not necessarily imposed upon the subject, that the subject does not necessarily enter an alienating “symbolic order,” and that the infant is not dragged, kicking and screaming, into language. The acquisition of language is not, as Lacanians would suggest, “traumatic,” but rather is more often experienced by the infant as an accomplishment to be celebrated. However, we perhaps also need, in contemporary culture in particular, to negotiate a space between a “maternal” theory of language as creative and ontologising and a “paternal” theory of language that helps us to address those instances when language is imposed and demands compliance from the subject. Just as Winnicott does not pathologise the false-self but sees it as an essential part of healthy mental functioning, language demanding compliance and our ability to interact with this should not always be regarded in a negative light; however, if such a relationship is the only one a subject can establish with its world it will inhibit the opportunities for play in the potential space.

Where I believe the Lacanian contribution to a theory of language is perhaps most useful derives from the recognition that language is not always available to the subject as a potentially creative transitional object. The *contents* of the potential space, Winnicott tells us, must be carefully selected and vetted. The subject is unable to defend itself effectively against a foreign entity – such as others’ language – that encroaches upon and threatens to overwhelm it. I am thinking here, for example, of the imposition of language or larger ideological discursive constructs upon an individual or a culture in the form of the patriarchal Law of the Father, positivistic scientific discourses and the imperialists’ language (of economics or racial superiority) – Bakhtin’s authoritarian discourses – where compliance is extracted from the oppressed subject at the expense of creativity and the realisation of subjective being.⁶⁹ The promise of the Lacanian theory of language, I believe, lies in the effective demonstration of what happens when the creative element is removed from subjective experience and the use of language. Here we may find useful a return to the paradox of presence and absence in symbolisation expressed by André Green. While refuting Lacan’s claims that the unconscious is structured like a language, Green reminds us that “the Unconscious presents a double picture”: it is

both a semantic and an affective system that reveals meaning, or how meaning functions (Green 1986, 176). As Green more succinctly phrases it, “Language without affect is a dead language: and affect without language is uncommunicable” (205). Or,

Without affect there is no effective language. Without language there is no effective affect. The unconscious is not structured like a language (Lacan); *it is structured like an affective language, or like an affectivity having the properties of language.*

(Green 1986, 295; italics in original)

I cannot yet say whether I wholly concur with Green’s creative marriage of ideas, though there certainly seems to be some truth in the notion that for language to be effective, it must be affective, and for affect to be effective, one must be able to effectively communicate. Perhaps here too a dialogue can be established between Lacan and Winnicott’s theories of compliance and the false-self. If a discourse does not reflect the subjective idiom, is not internally persuasive, and can instead only elicit a response from a disembodied false-self, the resulting depersonalisation could indeed be perceived to be traumatic, equally to the adult as to the newly ordained “Oedipal” child.⁷⁰

The Location of Literature

As I will demonstrate at greater length in the next section, if words are the toys, the transitional objects that enable subjective creativity, then our dialogues and texts are the playgrounds, the places where we meet other subjectivities in creative play. I would hesitate to identify *all* texts thus – there are too many other factors, other aspects of subjective experience, too many authoritarian discourses. Such a location of the text, as existing between writer and reader, is not a concept unique to this study; reader-response's horizons and re-drawn boundaries, Barthes' dead author, Bakhtinian dialogue and polyphony all share certain features with a Winnicottian approach to literature.⁷¹ As Val Richards points out, Winnicott's entire approach to psychoanalysis, the "shifting connotations" of terms such as "playing," "good-enough mothering" and "true" and "false" selves, "depends considerably on the reader's own interpretations," exemplified in Winnicott's *Squiggle Game* (1996, 5). There have also been moves by some reader-response critics to dialogue with the American conception of object-relations – represented by the work of Heinz Kohut and Otto Kernberg; this approach, like those that employ British psychoanalysis, focuses more attention than orthodox psychoanalysis upon the transferences and the spaces between analyst and analysand, author and reader (see Alcorn and Bracher 1985). Furthermore, perhaps contemporary writers themselves appreciate better than any theorist how texts can negotiate the innumerable paradoxes between fiction and reality, between stories and history, between what is probable and what is improbable. Kleinian and Winnicottian appraisals offers these conceptions of the text a more complex and intricate understanding of the psychological processes of reading, and a more complete picture of the subjects involved.

In reading, like any experience in the potential space, there is a play between the subjective use of the object and the object objectively perceived. While the words written on the page are already inscribed with meaning, these objects are re-conceived subjectively by the reader in such a way that the reader experiences the words and stories not as foreign entities, but as subjective-objects, filled with

personally and culturally idiomatic significance. Thus, while the object is concrete and consistent in the external world, each subjective experience of that object is particular to the subject. Or, as Murray M. Schwartz puts it in his excellent Winnicottian analyses of the experience of literature, “each of us brings to the literary transaction a unique style of attempting to unite inner and outer realities – our potential spaces and transitional objects are often shared but never identical” (1975, 61; see also Schwartz 1977, 1982). Schwartz recognises the *transferential* relations that are engaged whenever we approach a text. “The critical act,” claims Schwartz, is always *interested*, “in the sense that criticism transforms or, if you prefer, distorts its object in the service of the interpreter’s desires, which may include the desire for what is called ‘objective’ truth in other vocabularies” (1982, 36). We should not fear our subjective responses, Schwartz suggests following Geoffrey Hartman, but our defensive overreaction to and fear of it, “those pseudo-objective criteria which imprison both the work and ourselves” (Schwartz 1982, 37, quoting Hartman). There are, however, also *limits* to the extent to which one can impose one’s own reading onto another’s text, which I examine below. The goal, for Schwartz, is “to impart our experiences of literature without abandoning the possibility of formal knowledge or criticism and without relegating these things to the realm of ‘professional’ activity” (1975, 52). If we consider literature to be “written language located in the potential space,” the critical act becomes inclusive, in which “both the data and ourselves are constantly interacting and recombining in new configurations” (1975, 60-1).

A simple example of the negotiations the reader must face when approaching a literary work is offered by Schwartz’s Winnicottian appraisal:

I may, for example, bring intense feelings about the images of sexuality to an interpretation of “Leda and the Swan.” To announce these without reference to the story of Troy would be to absorb the poem into my own subjectivity. But to speak only of Leda, Zeus, the story of Troy, even the arrangement of words on the page, would be to deny my experience of the poem.

(Schwartz 1975, 61)

This describes what happens, or what *should* happen, in the experience of reading, and the limits we may wish to suggest for the subjective interpretation of a text in literary scholarship. Schwartz encourages us to bring our *feelings* about a text to bear on our analysis – it is significant that Schwartz connects our readings of sexual imagery (for example) with a psyche-somatic response to the text, and not merely an intellectual solution or knee-jerk imposition of a critical discourse that defends one against such emotional responses. But one cannot make a text entirely one's own subjective object, that is, consume the text within one's own internal phantasy world and thus deny the ontological status of the external object. To claim, for example, that another's poem is actually a story of one's own life (as in Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*) would not only be an act of hermeneutic tyranny, but is indicative of a paranoid or narcissistic character, unable to withstand the anxieties associated with the paradoxes of union and separation, phantasy and reality, self and other. Such a total possession is an attack on the intersubjective link elicited by the text, denying the meaning that would emerge from dialogic play. Just as with the transference in the psychoanalytic setting, "the psychoanalytic critic has a special obligation to differentiate his own transference responses from responses in general" (Schwartz 1982, 42). On the other hand, to speak only of the structural, stylistic or historical elements of a work of art, without reference to the subjective, emotional impact on oneself, is too greatly to objectify what should rightly be experienced subjectively by an integrated psyche-soma. This is the strategy favoured by structuralists and formalist approaches to literature, methodologies that seek to eliminate the subjective factor (see, for example, Reed 1982), and those forms of "linguistics that consider poetry as a text without reference to the subject who wrote it," or the subject who reads it, "and can therefore treat it as an object" (Roustang 1998, 52-3). Schwartz, writing on the other side of Atlantic, singles out Frye's critical methodology for particular scorn in this case. Frye, Schwartz finds, in focussing only upon the structural, formal elements of the text, transforms the personal into the impersonal, maintaining a Cartesian "splitting of subject and object," placing "'man' on one side and 'nature' and 'society' on the other" (1975, 51-2). Echoing Fairbairn, Schwartz judges that "Frye's critical methodology operates at an intellectualised

remove from the affective sources of our organizing powers themselves” (1975, 52). Both the exclusively subjective and exclusively objective strategies are products of the transference, where we can see that “the reader’s assimilative attempt, like the patient’s transference, is an effort to force present experience to conform to the (often infantile, distorted, and conflict-ridden) adaptive strategies and paradigms of experience that are derived from the past” (Alcorn and Bracher 1985, 346).

By way of example, I wish to examine recent scholarship regarding Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Gilman’s semi-autobiographical novella is written as if it were the erratic diary of a woman in late nineteenth-century New England, confined in her own home and denied the simple pleasures of guests, caring for her children and even writing. Despite Gilman’s narrator’s opposition, this “cure” is imposed upon her by her doctor, her husband (also a doctor) and other men of “high standing.” Despite their prohibitions, the narrator finds relief in the creative act of writing and, when all else is unavailable, by tracing in her mind the cracking wallpaper that decorates the room in which she is imprisoned.

Julie Bates Dock, in describing the evolution of the text and critical responses to it, notes that recent editions vary in wording and structure.

Moreover, many received “facts” on which interpretations of “The Yellow Wallpaper” have been built – including Gilman’s valiant struggle to get her story into print, the original audience’s reading of it as a ghost story, and the irate reception it received from the male medical community – do not hold up well under scrutiny.

(Dock 1996, 53)

It is Dock’s thesis that Gilman’s text and our historical understanding of Gilman herself have suffered as a result of the shifting interests and needs of various critical evaluations. She suggests, for example, that “the struggle to gain a foothold for women writers in literary studies and in the academy” (53) resulted in changes and revisions of the text itself. We may wish to say that the text has been transformed – devoured and internalised – appropriated from an idiomatic articulation of the author into a wholly subjective object of inquiry in another’s experience. Using the

story as an entirely subjective object, the literary critic does not enter into a creative dialogue with the “like subject” that is represented in/by the text. So too, the history of Gilman’s life has been rewritten, sometimes with little regard for historical accuracy or context. For example, Dock demonstrates that the story was not received with the degree of hostility that some scholars would have us believe. Dock notes that “many feminist critics of the 1970s accepted – and perhaps even required – a publication history that cast Gilman in the role of beleaguered heroine” (57).

Do we wish to imply here that there has been a breach of some sort of ethical limit of interpretation? Although perhaps refraining from declaring these readings and revisions to be “unethical,” I would certainly like to suggest that these scholars have acted – perhaps unconsciously – as greedy children might in the playground, “hogging” all the toys for themselves. The critic, by thus manipulating the text and making it an entirely subjective object, would, in effect, be upsetting the balance, polluting the potential space. The text, if we are to regard it either as a toy in the potential space or as a potential space in itself, can facilitate the idiomatic expression of two subjectivities *only* if it is understood that it belongs to both author *and* critic/reader but also *to neither*, if it is located in a third area of cultural experience, if it fosters the understanding that paradox can have positive value.

I do not here wish to single out feminist theory, or imply that feminist literary scholars are particularly tyrannical in their subjective appropriation of textual objects. On the contrary, feminist theory more often demonstrates self-awareness and explicitly draws attention to its own internal conflicts and potential exclusions. Of course some of the worst offenders, some of the most indiscriminate appropriations of the textual object, are performed by psychoanalysts. Because Freud’s posthumous approval seems to be needed to offer legitimacy to any analytic strategy or theory that wishes to regard itself as “psychoanalytic,” and citing the master is the quickest route to share Freud’s objective, scientific status, we find attributed to Freud all kinds of things that he would have been shocked to hear himself say. However unlikely, I find myself agreeing with Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen’s evaluation of contemporary Freuds:

This is how psychoanalysis “progresses,” not by openly rectifying the

doctrine, but by silently recuperating the criticisms directed at it and by having Freud endorse the most varied and contradictory theories, according to the fashions and necessities of the moment. “Return to Freud!” clamours the chorus of psychoanalysts and then see how Freud, before our wondering eyes, becomes successively a phenomenologist, an existentialist, a hermeneuticist, an experimental psychologist, a Marxist, a Hegelian, an anti-Hegelian, a structuralist, a Derridean, a Post-Modernist, a Wittgensteinian, a feminist, a cognitivist, a neuro-scientist – or a Girardian.

(Borch-Jacobsen 2000, 16)

Lacan, again displaying a remarkable lack of self-awareness, would also prohibit mis-readings and appropriations of Freud.

For the analyst to point that he is a practitioner of the technique does not give him sufficient authority, from the fact that he does not understand a Freud III, to challenge the latter in the name of a Freud II whom he thinks he understands. And his very ignorance of Freud I is no excuse for considering the five great psychoanalyses as a series of case studies as badly chosen as they are badly expressed, however marvellous he thinks it that the grain of truth hidden within them ever managed to survive.

(Lacan 1953, 30)

From my glass house, I would not wish to prohibit rereadings of Freud, although this is further evidence demonstrating the desperate need for an *historical* consciousness when using psychoanalytic theory. There have been important historical studies of psychoanalysis to be sure, but when we read and reinterpret psychoanalysis, we too often tend to find in Freud what *we* want. We do abuse Freud with such subjective readings, and “the productive tension between the antimonies within Freud’s work tend to be lost within subsequent psychoanalytic theories” (Flax 1990, 90). I am not arguing for the sanctity of Freudian theory (as if I am in any position to do so here), but our readings of Freud tell us less about what he says and more about what we need him to say; perhaps we need to learn to tolerate Freud’s ambiguity, the

irresolvable paradoxes, and to see Freud as a whole object, a confluence of good and bad objects, sometimes the source of great insight and sometimes just wrong.⁷²

I would also like to consider an ethics of interpretation in literary criticism to counter the claims made by those critics who more greedily, and for more despicable political-ideological purposes, appropriate for themselves the objects that are rightfully our shared cultural objects. For a particularly poignant example, Harold Bloom, in "Feminism as the Love of Reading" (1994), casts himself in the role of Nabokov's Dr. Charles Kinbote, and attempts to create a Virginia Woolf that is his own entirely subjective object, who writes only in the interest of literary aesthetics, that is, who confirms his narcissistic phantasy of what "writing" should be about. Woolf and her texts become part-objects that are manipulated in Bloom's phantasy. While Woolf herself problematises the notion of what it means to write "as a woman," Bloom would have us all believe that it is possible to write without the body, without a space or place in time.⁷³ Such beliefs are entirely without justification or insight; they serve ideologies that seek to undermine the claims of those subjects who cannot, will not, *should not* live without their bodies or the ability to articulate their own subjective idiom. Such depersonalising, rationalist claims actively undermine the possibility for recognition of the integrated psychesoma, and denies that language and experience are inscribed upon the body. It is these claims made by patriarchs, literary critics and sometimes psychoanalysts to which the authors in my next section so often object.

Endnotes

1. For example, the postmodernism of Jameson, Lyotard or Flax or Linda Hutcheon's (1988) and Brian McHale's (1987) studies of postmodern literature, with whom I concur to varying degrees. I find myself apparently arguing against Lyotard and Flax, who regard postmodernism as a productive set of discursive practices that dissolve metanarratives; however, I find Flax's reading of psychoanalysis and Enlightenment so compelling I cannot really say that I entirely disagree with her conception of postmodernism, but my own focus is different from hers. With Eagleton, I would like to think that "Unlike most postmodernists, I myself am a pluralist about postmodernism, believing in postmodern fashion that there are different narratives to be told of postmodernism too, some of them considerably less positive than others" (1996, 26).

2. There have, however, been attempts to re-read some of these traditional psychoanalytic diagnostic categories in a more contemporary context. See, for example, Bollas' *Hysteria* (2000); there have also been books from analysts who are not of the object-relations school, including Elaine Showalter (*Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture*, 1998) and Juliet Mitchell (*Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria and the Effects of Sibling Relations on the Human Condition*, 2001).

In opposition to this, André Green finds rather that the fundamental change in psychoanalysis lies not in changes in analysands themselves but in "what the analyst hears – and perhaps cannot help but hear – which has until now been inaudible" (1986, 33-4).

3. When I identify such diagnostic categories as being increasingly common in contemporary times, I do not want to go as far as some in proclaiming their ubiquity. The *DSM* criteria for identifying Borderline Personality Disorder is so broad that it could apply to anyone. In the words of Robert Young, "It is a list calculated to make most people I know pretty uncomfortable" (1994b) – conveniently so, perhaps, for the pharmaceutical-psychiatric industry. There is also some resistance to such diagnostic categories in psychoanalysis itself; Harold Searles, for example, says "I became convinced, long ago, that borderline phenomena will be encountered in any deep-reaching course of psychoanalysis or intensive psychoanalytic therapy, for these phenomena are part of the general human condition" (qtd. in Young 1994b).

4. By *episteme* – a term and concept I use in various contexts throughout this work – I am referring to Foucault's belief that there are "epistemological fields" that can be historically grounded and in which knowledge is ordered (see Foucault 1966, xv-xxiv).

5. Stewart cites a study finding depersonalisation to be the third most common symptom seen in mental institutions, behind only anxiety and depression (1964, 171).

6. For Kleinians, depersonalisation similarly involves a lost sense of being, brought about by excessive projective identifications and the inability to maintain good (and bad) internal objects. This might also be regarded as similar to Winnicott's concept of disintegration as the subject experiences an internal vacuum and the environment, or others in the environment, are felt to hold all the parts of the self (see Thorner 1955; Hinshelwood 1991, 271).

7. These terms are sometimes used contrarily to my uses here: “Derealisation” is also a term used by Fairbairn, distinct from but related to depersonalisation (Fairbairn 1940, 5). For Stewart (1964), the “derealisation” is interchangeable with “depersonalisation,” although he seems to accept the distinction that the former “involves an estrangement from the identity of the self” while the latter “involves an estrangement from the identity of a *familiar object*” (173). For Thorner, “In ‘derealization’ the patient has a feeling that the world has changed, has become unreal; while in ‘depersonalization’ he feels that he himself, that is his ego, has changed” (1955, 291). Thorner further clarifies that “a feeling of unreality develops when two conditions are fulfilled: when (i) a strong sense of inner persecution by bad objects is combined with (ii) splitting processes within the ego” (1955, 306).

I do not disagree with these, and other, conceptualisations; my uses of these terms are, for now, not excessively prescriptive.

8. Interestingly, I have been unable to find such normotic or normopath subjects in literary texts. When I discussed these concepts in seminars on object-relations, many undergraduates taking the course expressed frustration at not being able to locate any such characters in literature as many of them were interested in exploring this concept in their papers. When we discussed why no such characters seemed to exist in literature – we all agreed that similar if not quite so severe characters were everywhere to be found in our culture – we thought that it must have something to do with the fact that even the most ambitiously postmodern of novels still deals with human experience, when the point of normotic and the normopath is that there is no possibility for experience at all, which would make, some suggested, inconceivably dull novels. In addition, the very existence of the text, the very attempt to articulate experience in a subjective idiom, is evidence of a resistance to such a depersonalised state. Even Bollas’ exemplary case study of the normotic, Tom, cuts himself to enjoy some sort of experience (see my forthcoming essay on Sylvia Plath and Bollas). Bollas declares, “It is my view that Tom’s breakdown constitutes a mute refusal to live within normotic culture, even though at the point of his suicide attempt he had not discovered other avenues for the expression of his feelings” (1989, 151).

9. For example, Nike does not actually make any shoes, they just put their Swoosh on merchandise that is produced by others, usually in the developing world (there is, therefore, no direct relation between the sign and its mode of production). The identification of a movement from commodities to the image does not come from Naomi Klein herself but from Graham H. Phillips, the U.S. chair of Ogilvy and Mather. (See N. Klein 2000, 14).

10. Hardt and Negri admit that this is an oversimplification, but there is some truth in it. Postmodernism, for example, flourishes in the prosperous Western academe, while fundamentalism is taken up by the impoverished, for example in Afghanistan and the US. They point out how the poor and the postmodernists are strangely excluded from each others’ discourses:

The poor is destitute, excluded, repressed, exploited – and yet living! It is the common denominator of life, the foundation of the multitude. It is strange, but also illuminating, that postmodernist authors seldom adopt this figure in their theorizing. It is strange because the poor is in a certain respect an eternal postmodern figure: the figure of a transversal, omnipresent, different, mobile

subject; the testament to the irrepressible aleatory character of existence [...]

They [postmodernists] tell us that a regime of transversal linguistic relations of production had entered into the unified and abstract universe of value. But who is the subject that produces “transversally,” who gives a creative meaning to language – who if not the poor, who are subjugated and desiring, impoverished and powerful, always more powerful?

(Hardt and Negri 2000, 157-8)

11. Naomi Klein does not talk much about academia explicitly, but her judgement on the lack of response in academia to the increasing corporate control of universities is scathing: more than a few of those tenured radicals who were supposed to be corrupting young minds with socialist ideas were preoccupied with their own postmodernist realisation that truth is itself a construct. This realisation made it intellectually untenable for many academics to even participate in a political argument that would have “privileged” any one model of learning (public) over another (corporate). And since truth is relative, who is to say that Plato’s dialogues are any more of an “authority” than Fox’s *Anastasia*?

This academic trend only accounts for a few of the missing-in-actions, however. Many other campus radicals were still up for a good old political fight, but during the key years of the corporate campus invasion they were tied up in a different battle: all consuming gender and race debates of the so-called political correctness wars [...] It wasn’t until the politics of personal representation were themselves co-opted by branding that students and professors alike began to turn away from their quarrels with each other, realising they had a more powerful foe.

(N. Klein 2000, 104)

Klein’s picture may be over-simplistic and specific exceptions could be found to disprove the rule, but Eagleton would concur, more specifically levelling his criticism at American liberal pseudo-leftists, so perhaps Klein’s picture better resembles North American institutions, Klein’s first concern. There have been some significant movements resisting the branding in universities in recent years; for example, the University of Sheffield’s ethical trade policy and the banning of Bacardi and Nestlé, although these movements have been entirely initiated, led and agreed upon by students.

12. See, for example, Paul Foot’s review of Klein’s book, which concludes, “The indignation which these books ignite needs more food for its flames than vague appeals to citizenship” (Foot 2001, 29).

13. Also quoted by Phillips (1988, 120); Phillips points out that Winnicott wrote this in response to the increasing dogmatism of the Kleinian group, though I appropriate it now to criticise not only the dogmatism of the Lacanian school but also Lacan’s attempt to guarantee his vision of psychoanalysis by freezing and sterilising it through his “psychoanalytic algebra.”

14. Flax argues that “Winnicott and Lacan share one crucial assumption: that the subject

comes to be(ing) in the field of the Other” (1990, 126); however I think that these others are so radically different that it makes any comparison nearly impossible. For one, Winnicott would not make a distinction between an “other” and the “Other” (nor have I seen Winnicott ever capitalise the word, except at the beginning of a sentence), and Lacan’s other necessarily leads to alienation, while for Winnicott such an alienation from the other and self is, to varying degrees, pathological.

15. Also quoted in Flax 1990, 90-1. While Freud here accuses philosophy of being stuck in an animistic mode of thinking, earlier in this essay (“A Question of *Weltanschauung*”) he has already separated philosophy and science, psychoanalysis of course being the domain of the latter.

16. Young quotes some observations of A. N. Whitehead (*Science and the Modern World*) that accurately sum up my own feelings towards this scientific methodology.

In the first place, we must note its astounding efficiency as a system of concepts for the organisation of scientific research. In this respect, it is fully worthy of the genius of the century which produced it. It has held its own as the guiding principle of scientific studies ever since. It is still reigning. Every university in the world organises itself in accordance with it. No alternative system of organising the pursuit of scientific truth has been suggested. It is not only reigning, but it is without rival.

And yet – it is quite unbelievable. This conception of the universe is surely framed in terms of high abstractions, and the paradox only arises because we have mistaken our abstraction for concrete realities.

(A. N. Whitehead, quoted by Young 1990)

17. Lloyd describes that “the mathematical excursus in the *Theaetetus* authorises us to attribute a concern for the careful definition of mathematical terms to Theaetetus” (1979, 111).

18. Sullivan claims – without irony, I take it:

I would go so far as to say that he [Lacan] stands as founding theoretician of a post-Modern Age, much as Augustine laid out the City of God blueprint for the Middle Ages, or as Descartes mapped out the preoccupations of the Modern Age. The intractable problem of writing about human culture in a prehistoric era (which left no written record) may yield little, I submit, by being examined in the light of a Lacanian *episteme*.

(Sullivan 1991, 36)

19. Not fluent in German myself, I can only accept others’ word for this. Meira Likierman (1990) discussing many specific issues arising from the translation of Freud’s works, finds that

In the original Freud’s terminology is open ended and allusive, his text full of rich ambiguities and his tone personal and conversational. In the translation such qualities are played down for the sake of an abstract “scientific language” [...] Indeed drawing on the vocabulary of dead languages to

construct the meaning of our most intensely lived, immediate experiences is questionable. It is also somewhat misleading. These terms have the whiff of medical textbooks, and appear to pinpoint interior organs which are concrete and real, unlike our very elusive psychological processes.

(Likierman 1990, 115)

It will be interesting to see whether a planned French Standard Edition (according to Likierman, under the supervision of the orthodox Jean Laplanche) and new British English translations (under the editorship of Adam Phillips, a Winnicottian) will create a more globally “standard” Freud or even more polarised, nationalist Freuds.

20. Also quoted in Emerson 1986, 23. In an address at the Bakhtin Centre at the University of Sheffield (2000), Mikael Leiman was also critical of Saussure’s Cartesianism, which Leiman saw manifested in Saussure’s methodology – his transformation of language into an object suitable for study by a “social science” such as linguistics – and his mind-body dualism in the splitting of the material *sound* from the *idea*.

21. With regard to the debate on the appropriate term for the first infantile caregiver: While I am sensitive to the use of the term of “mother” as an essentialised and essentialising category, I must admit a certain reluctance to abandon its usage. Winnicott tells us that the mother need not necessarily be the infant’s own mother, and also that it need not be a female. “Mother” is used here, when I am quoting others, and because it is understood that in most cases, the infant’s first experiences are in relation to its female parent. Although the functions served by the (“good-enough” and/or “not good-enough”) mother may also be performed by the father or another male, the infant does not recognise this figure as “male” or “female”; what is important to the infant in this stage of development are only those *functions* that relate to feeding, nurturing, holding, etc..

While it is true that the uncritical and unexamined use of the term “mother” will essentialise the functions of “mothering,” and it is clear that another term is preferable to avoid calling to the negative (ideological) implications of gendering the caregiver, I find myself in a difficult position as I do not wish to *disembody* the functions of mothering (as I find “caregiver” might serve to do) or *dehistoricise* the fact that these caregivers have generally been women, within the episteme from which this theory emerged. For now, however, I will avoid the term “mother” where possible.

22. In Freud, the relationship to the father *retrospectively* determines the relationship with the pre-Oedipal mother; in Melanie Klein, however, the relationship with the mother determines the relationship with the father following a linear cause-and-effect movement. For, the position of the subject in relation to the castration complex determines his relationship to the first object. For Melanie Klein, the experience of separation from the first object, the breast, determines all later experiences

(Kohon 1986, 43)

23. In the 1950s, Lacan seems to be obsessed with the lunacy of British psychoanalytic culture. Lacan critiques Klein and Balint extensively in his first seminar (1953-54), and Fairbairn in the second (1954-55). Each of Lacan’s critiques completely ignore how these

analysts differ from him theoretically, as he constantly belittles the British conceptualisation of and focus upon affect. Lacan only engages with them on his terms, finding comfort on his familiar turf of the imaginary, real and symbolic. “Melanie Klein,” Lacan tells us, “has neither a theory of the imaginary nor a theory of the ego” (1953-54, 82) – the latter claim being simply wrong, and as for the former, he does not see that Klein’s theory does not *require* a concept of the imaginary, or consider why that may be. Although Lacan could be said to be correct in his appraisal of Klein’s treatment of Dick (see 1953-54, 62-88), which even most Kleinians would grant is a rather harsh imposition of interpretation, Lacan’s treatment of Balint is scandalous, though not unique in its generally condescending, patronising attitude towards British analysts, none of whom, it seems, are capable of constructing a coherent theory of their practice. Fortunately, however, Lacan recognises his duty: “It is up to us,” he says, “to introduce these notions” (1953-54, 82).

24. Roustang also says:

This is certainly a strange form of reasoning; after acknowledging that this “element of immediacy” is ceaselessly encountered in the analytic experience, Lacan then jettisons it because it is unknowable [...] by virtue of the confusion posited at the outset between the statement that speech is the means of analysis, and the claim that speech alone comes into play in analysis. This confusion traverses Lacan’s entire *oeuvre*, but was only necessary because he so badly wanted to found a psychoanalytic science.

(Roustang 1998, 39)

25. Lacan finds the accusation that he neglects affect to be so completely insubstantial, such a “faint gesture,” that he explains at the end of this seminar, “Your inclusion of the drives among the confusion of gestures used in defense against my discourse lets me off so easily as to preclude my feeling grateful” (Lacan 1974, 24). Green also points out the sarcasm and scorn with which Lacan greeted those who had the misfortune to remind him of his gradually acquired aversion for affect (Green 1973, 100).

26. To the objection that the body is involved in the identification of the mirror phase, I would point out that it is only the “*imago of one’s own body*” (Lacan 1966, 3) that is involved in this operation.

27. For a change lavishing praise on Balint, Lacan points out that he “does not fall into the counter-transference – that is to say, in plain language, he is not an idiot – in the coded language we wallow in, we call the fact of hating someone ambivalence, and the fact of being an idiot counter-transference” (1953-54, 227-8).

28. I am aware that there are those Lacanians who now focus more attention on the real (for example, Žižek), and I welcome their efforts, but it does not change the fundamental distinction set up by Lacan between that which is knowable through language and that which is not – as I suggest in Part II, it would be better to reject the boundary altogether.

29. This is not withstanding Lacan’s attempt to (mis)appropriate Independent psychoanalyst Michael Balint and his “two-body psychology” in the late pages of *The Language of the Self*

(see Lacan 1953, 68-9).

30. Eagleton, who too often accepts Lacanian theory unproblematically for my liking, does muster enough scepticism to question the nature of postmodern "Otherness":

What homogenizes these avatars of Otherness is just the fact that none of them is me, or us, which implies quite as self-centred a perspective as the most discreditable "humanist" subject. If the "other" is reduced to whatever disrupts my identity, is this a humbly decentring move, or a self-regarding one? And if the world is hollowed out along with me, as a fractured subject confronts a fictional reality, is that subject really as humble as it seems if it has made sure that there is no longer any obdurate reality out there to resist it? (Eagleton 1996, 88)

The answer I would give Eagleton is that of course such a view of the other is incredibly narcissistic, though it is a particular kind of empty self-love. Postmodernism sees itself as replacing the modern subject as omnipotent, narcissistic and complete with a view of the subject as fragmented and illusory, but maintains its narcissistic character. The postmodern subject is not "humble," but it can find little in itself to love, so, in an attack worthy of a Kleinian anally-sadistic infant, it seeks to destroy and/or control the outside world. This has had the effect, Eagleton says, of deflating those bourgeois subjects that were too full of themselves, but they can find compensation in the effect this has had on the political left who, instead of merely acting, must now remain fixed while they "problematize the nature of the agent" (1996, 89).

31. In his last essays, Freud seems to begin to realise the importance of these earliest maternal experience, very grudgingly leaning towards the Kleinians and away from his own daughter and orthodox followers (Klein and Anna Freud would soon after Freud's death of course be locked in a bitter struggle for the place as the favourite daughter, the rightful heir to psychoanalysis). See, for example, "An Outline of Psychoanalysis" (1940) where, with Klein and contra Lacan (though of course with reference to neither), Freud discusses the *maternal* origin of the super-ego (424).

32. Again, Winnicott initially meant this as a criticism of Klein and Freud for maintaining a belief in the instincts, trying to explain the history of the individual in terms of the baby alone without reference to the environmental provision (see Winnicott 1971, 70-1).

33. "Ideas and Definitions," probably from the early 1950s (Winnicott 1986, 43-4).

34. Lowenstein, through an over-inflated sense of Lacan's originality and a too-common misreading of Winnicott, finds Winnicott's conception of the self "as an immanent and positive essence" (1994, 716). In the letters page of *London Review of Books*, Kirsty Hall demonstrates the most ridiculous ignorance common to Lacanian (and "Post-Modern theory") self-importance, asking "How many psychoanalysts are aware that Winnicott's formulation of the true and false self is highly problematic? To put the argument at its simplest [most laughable]: how can either the analyst or the analysand distinguish between what is true and what is false?" (Hall 2001, 4). Lacan himself attacks all such notions to be found in Britain, pejoratively referring to "all the Münchhausens of psychoanalytical

normalisation to pull themselves up by the hair in the hope of attaining the paradise of the full realisation of the genital object, indeed of the object, period” (Lacan 1968, 25). These are but a few published examples – many more have come from conferences and informal discussions.

35. Jones also examines rationalisations meant for public consumption. With regard to everyone’s need to have “what might be called a theory of life, and particularly a theory of himself,” Jones explains:

Every one feels that, as a rational creature, he must be able to give a connected, logical, and continuous account of himself, his conduct, and opinions, and all his mental processes are unconsciously manipulated and revised to that end. No one will admit that he ever deliberately performed an irrational act, and any act that might appear so is immediately justified by distorting the mental processes concerned and providing a false explanation that has a plausible ring of rationality.

(Jones 1908, 12-13)

36. Fairbairn’s description of the intellectual is ironically similar to Freud’s description of his “savages” in *Totem and Taboo*, whose belief in magic demonstrates that

A general overvaluation has thus come about of all mental processes – an attitude towards the world, that is, which in view of our knowledge of the relation between reality and thought, cannot fail to strike *us* as an overvaluation of the latter. Things become less important than ideas of things [...] Relations which hold between the ideas of things are assumed to hold equally between the things themselves.

(Freud 1913, 142).

The savage and the “highly intelligent man who suffered from obsessional ideas” thus both maintain a belief in the “omnipotence of thought” (143). Freud over-optimistically finds that “At the animistic stage men ascribe omnipotence to *themselves*. At the religious stage they transfer it to the gods but do not seriously abandon it for themselves [...] The scientific view of the universe no longer affords any room for human omnipotence,” though Freud does have the insight to conclude that “None the less some of the primitive belief in omnipotence still survives in men’s faith in the power of the human mind, which grapples with the laws of reality” (146).

37. This is my own term for the schizoid individual characterised by the processes Fairbairn describes, although Fairbairn does say that such schizoid characteristics, “usually in a less pronounced form, are also common among members of the intelligentsia” (Fairbairn 1940, 6). Phillips also uses this term, stating that “the Intellectual” was a figure with which Winnicott was preoccupied (1988, 95), though Phillips does not cite Winnicott’s usage, nor can I find where in Winnicott’s work where he actually uses this term.

I should also perhaps clarify that to suggest that one utilises a schizoid defence does not, for Fairbairn, imply that the subject suffers from a severe psychopathology. Fairbairn finds that most subjects employ a variety of schizoid defence mechanisms and, as for Winnicott, these are often part of normal mental functioning.

38. Miller preposterously does on to defend this contention thus:

You might think it is a very far-fetched idea, but it is an idea necessitated by the notion that speech in analysis and interpretation can change the subject. If we take as our point of departure the idea that speech and interpretation can change a subject, the simple way to formalize this is to say: The subject is nothing more than the effect of the combination of signifiers.

(Miller 1991, 33)

Never having done a course in formal philosophical logic, the professional term for an argument thus misguided eludes me, but I think more commonly we can say that this not only puts the cart before the horse (language before the subject) but is also a case of cutting a square to fit a circle.

39. Also discussed by Alford 1999, 131.

40. André Green would seem to concur: “But the more progress I made in understanding Freud’s works, the more I became aware that the ‘return to Freud’, as I understood it, did not accord with the interpretation provided by the spokesman of the ‘French Freud’” (Green 1986, 8).

41. Although I do not really take it into consideration here (partly because I am not sure I agree and partly because it is not necessary that I engage with this argument now), Green tries to further define *epistemophilia* by setting it beside *scopophilia*.

Epistemophilia is more akin to the search for an explanatory ‘theory’, as exemplified by the sexual theories put together by children to explain how babies come into this world. Scopophilia is a drive towards a much less inhibited, displaced, or desexualised pleasure. It involves the affect more than the intellect.

(Green 1986, 343)

42. Klein also provocatively suggests that the inhibition of the epistemological impulses may contribute to xenophobia, “for instance, the incapacity to learn foreign languages, and, further, hatred for those who speak a different tongue” (Klein 1928, 188).

43. Thomas is playing with Freud’s own love of Charcot’s quotation. See Freud 1905b, 156.

44. One of these is, as Flax points out, a tendency shared with Lacan to focus only on certain aspects of Freud’s thought. Although my bias would say that those aspects are the better, more accurate ones (and of course Freud was not always right), there is a case to be made that object-relations theorists are somewhat neglectful of certain areas (for example, sexuality).

Many deficiencies of object-relations that Lacanians find – that they cannot recognise a signifier, that it is based on naïve conceptions of the subject that do not address economic relations, power structures and patriarchal gender relations – are a combination of truth and idealisations of Lacanian thought. There have been other, more informed criticisms of the deficiencies in object-relations thought, from the slightly amending (Flax) to the outright damning (Doane and Hodges 1992 – more hostile to Winnicott than Klein). I could stand up

and defend object-relations from these criticisms, some of which are not without foundation, but this is not the place for such engagements. Also, in the spirit of Independent psychoanalysis, it is better that we not accept any theory set in stone but accept such criticisms and rereadings so as to best allow the theory to respond to its own environments.

45. Bollas here uses *jouissance* to describe the joy that “reflects the inner sense of the self’s release to its being” (1992, 51), which is “the subject’s inalienable right to ecstasy” (1989, 19). This use of Lacanian terminology shows how Bollas draws voices together in the dialogic production of meaning – though we should not be tempted to read *jouissance* in the Lacanian sense that is limited to a *transgression*; I think that the experience Bollas wishes to describe in his idiomatic appropriation of this term goes well beyond Lacan’s conception.

46. In this analysis, too, it is important not to succumb to temptation and try to elide the fundamental differences between Lacan and Winnicott’s theory on the illusion of shared language, as Cameron (1996) and Schwab (1994) seem to (and I myself almost did when I was first presented with these ideas).

47. Lacan states that this identification can be made with the infant’s own reflection or the image of another child. Initially, I would say that there is a radical difference between these two positions and that Lacan can not have it both ways, until I remember that Lacan’s other is only a projection of the image/imagination anyway. It is not a *real* other that is important here, but only identification with an image that is mis-recognised as the self.

48. Lacan’s conceptualisation of creativity is hardly worth mention in this context: creativity is a function of the symbolic order, it renews “the never-exhausted power of symbols in the human exchange that brings them to the light of day” (Lacan 1953, 46).

49. Milner approaches a similar conceptualisation, finding that “some form of artistic ecstasy may be an essential phase in adaptation to reality, since it may mark the creative moment in which new and vital identifications are established” (1952, 182); although she does not explicitly link creativity to being as Winnicott does, for Milner it is through successful adaptation to reality and identifications that the external and internal worlds come to have meaning to the subject.

Fairbairn (1938) adding to the Kleinian conception of art-as-reparation, also believes that “*Artistic activity* [...] consists simply in *making something for fun*” and therefore “*anything that is made for fun* may be regarded as a work of art” (384; italics original). Fairbairn also perceives the ubiquity of creativity, finding it to be as present in the first manipulations of a pencil by a three-year old as it is the work of Michelangelo, though he seems – at this early stage, anyway – to underestimate how important such fun and play can be.

50. I also concur with Schwab, as would Winnicott, I believe, when she states that “Just as we find changing historical forms of subjectivity, so too do we find historical changes in the transitional space” (1994, 35).

I have persisted in using Winnicott’s terms of “health” and “normal” with regard to mental functioning and psychopathology. It perhaps should not be necessary to clarify this, but of course Winnicott does not mean either of these to impose normative categories, *à la*

the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (1980). Rather, Winnicott's conceptions of normal, healthy mental functioning are specific to each subject. To me, Winnicott needs to ask only one question in determining "healthy" or "unhealthy" (a term he never uses): does the subject negotiate for themselves a space between paradoxes that enables that individual meaningful object relations as an active agent in its environment?

51. See, for example, Vološinov 1973.

52. I primarily use the phrase "potential space" to describe this phenomenon. There is no significant reason for this; simply that I like the word-play upon "potential" and the constant reminder that this space is flexible and impermanent, a reminder that this space never exists *a priori*, nor, I think, would we wish it to.

53. Most Lacanians would argue that Lacan similarly deals with paradoxes, but Roustang points out that this is "paradox" "in the etymological sense of the word, that is, whatever goes against commonly accepted opinion or runs counter to good sense" – Lacan's thought, Roustang claims is "unilateral" in the sense that doesn't demonstrate the links between opposites but isolates one side in order to hurl the other into oblivion (Roustang 1998, 116).

54. And hence the "politics of the third way," so cherished by (once left or left-centre) Western democratic leaders such as Bill Clinton, Tony Blair and Jean Chretien, has *nothing in common* with the Winnicottian third space. These political ideologies, under the guise of anti-ideologies or "ideologically-free" discourses, are a true dialectical synthesis, and I leave it for the reader to determine which side of the political spectrum exerted the most pull to drag the synthesis to its side. Nor, it should go without saying, does Starbucks' promotional phrase, "A Comforting Third Space," constitute a Winnicottian third space, although they would likely wish to appropriate Winnicott's conceptualisation and recast it as a place of "coffee... community... camaraderie... connection" (N. Klein 2000, 135); these spaces cannot be creative because they are always already polluted by the corporate agenda, forcing us to play by capitalism's rules.

The first to discover the need to paradoxically maintain tension was, who else? Freud. In the *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1916-17), for example, he explains to what one expects would have been a very uncomfortable audience that it is not desirable to replace sexual repression with libidinal gratification, or vice versa. "This conflict would not be solved by our helping one of these trends to victory over its opponent [...] Neither of these two alternative decisions could end the internal conflict; in either case one party to it would remain unsatisfied" (Freud 1916-17, 484).

55. I find Freud's metaphor of the Mystic Writing Pad (1925) to be useful in examining how experience is inscribed on the subject, although I do not employ the metaphor in quite the same manner as Freud. Briefly, the three layers of the Mystic Writing Pad represent the subject: The bottom layer, the wax slab, contains a permanent record of every experience, or inscription, that has been made on the Pad. This we may also liken to the unconscious, as the permanent inscriptions on the wax slab are not immediately visible, unless, Freud tells us, the slab is viewed "in a suitable light." (Also, the writing tool used to make the inscriptions often falls into the grooves previously encoded on the slab, thus reinforcing certain experiences –

repetition compulsion?) The middle layer both receives external stimuli and presents a surface representation of that which has been inscribed; we may therefore liken this layer to what we regard as the self, as the markings visible on this layer are only a small selection of the inscriptions that exist upon the underlying wax slab, and can be erased (repressed) from this surface layer. Finally, the top layer is a protective sheath, a sort of defence mechanism to lessen the impact of the harsh inscriptions of experience upon the pad, mediating between the other two layers and the external world.

56. Winnicott's belief in an initial state of union with the mother could be read as an endorsement of primary narcissism, which I said earlier was an orthodox Freudian idea (largely) rejected by object-relations theorists. With primary narcissism the baby perceives the mother as an extension of itself – and, therefore, all its libidinal energies directed upon its own ego, but Winnicott's union between baby and environment is not based in narcissistic phantasy but an intersubjective dependence.

57. The social-constructivist me that was first attracted to Lacan still shudders when being asked to believe in *a priori* expectations or knowledge, though I think that Bion is winning me over. Bion – like Bollas, with his concept of the idiom – is vague as to what this does and does not include, but Bion further offers “that an infant has an inborn pre-conception that a breast that satisfies its own incomplete nature exists. The realisation of the breast provides an emotional experience. This experience corresponds to Kant's secondary and primary qualities of a phenomenon.” (1962, 69). Green attempts to clarify this further: “By preconception, we must understand not preconceived judgement, but a matrix of conception, an innate unconscious disposition, based on waiting for and expecting a fulfilment involving the participation of an object” (1973, 93).

58. Of course, all psychoanalysis – Freudian, Lacanian, Kleinian and Independent – has its roots in Enlightenment rationalism. For example, Klein's earliest notions of pedagogy in her first essays are explicit evidence of her belief in the power of “Enlightenment,” the power of making conscious what was once unconscious, of liberating that which is repressed on the basis of some antiquated sense of propriety. Furthermore, Zaretsky points out how Klein and British object-relations analysts assumed what he calls “the threefold promise of modernity, three interrelated aspirations first articulated in the Enlightenment: personal autonomy, gender justice and reconciliation, and the democratization of authority” (Zaretsky 1998, 34).

59. Bion, leading the way, claims that “The writing of this book [*Learning from Experience*] is a realisation of K” (1962, 66).

60. In personal letter to Winnicott, Lacan announces his decision to speak on Jones' theory of symbolism

1. because I consider thoroughly well-founded in principle his effort to situate in relation to metaphor, that is, to a figure of speech, the effects of so-called symbolism in analysis (regretting that that effort should have remained without sequel, before me)

2. because his failure is instructive [...]

3. because I find in it a confirmation of my thesis considering the

privileged function of the phallus.

(Lacan 1974, 76)

61. Bollas first introduces the notion of the idiom in his book *Forces of Destiny* (1989), however, I find that the identification provided in this earlier work insists too much upon a heredity or genetic basis. I do not wish to deny the importance of innate factors in human experience, but I believe that Bollas better balances the nature-nurture paradox (so crucial to the concept of idiom) in his later work, and my preference is reflected in my own use of the term.

To go back even further, in *The Shadow of the Object* (1989) Bollas' precursor to the idiom seems to be what he calls the *subjective element* – another term I employ at times. The subjective element is the “internal play of affects and ideas that generates and authorises our private imaginations, creatively informs our work and gives continuing resource to our interpersonal relations [...] a particular kind of internal space that facilitates the reception of unconscious affects, memories and perceptions” (1987, 137).

62. The Kleinian conception, shared with Ferenczi, that this form of symbolisation has its basis in the primary identifications of infantile experience (that is, “arising out of the baby's endeavour to rediscover in every object his own organs and their functioning” – Klein 1930, 220) may also be viewed with Bollas' idea of the *transformational object* (1987), as an object-relations alternative to Lacanian theories of identification with the signifier or *le objet petit a* that attempts to understand, for example, the function of the commodity in consumer culture.

63. Milner also sees anxiety as a necessary component of symbolism (1952, 183).

64. It is, however, Winnicott's unwillingness to conceive of a Kleinian “death instinct” that is perhaps the most significant difference between the two theorists. Interestingly, Nancy Chodorow suggests that myths and legends that feature goddesses, sirens, whirlpools, Immaculate Virgins are often attempts to cope with a “dread of women” that is an anxiety originally arising from the vicissitudes of union and separation with and fears of retaliatory attacks from the mother (1989, 35).

65. As Freud says, “The first and immediate aim, therefore, of reality-testing is, not to *find* an object in real perception which corresponds to the one presented, but to *re-find* such an object, to convince oneself that it is still there” (Freud 1925a, 440) or, more simply, “The finding of an object is in fact a re-finding of it” (Freud 1905, 145).

66. This invites immediate parallels with Pat Barker's *Regeneration* (1991), a novel that similarly addresses breakdowns of communication and the psyche-somatic bases of language.

67. In *Being a Character*, Bollas speaks of an “evolutionary dialectic [...] enabling the reader to participate in that unconscious movement that contributes to a psychoanalyst's clinical practice and informs his creation of psychoanalytic theory” (Bollas 1992, 6). I do not wish to say that Bollas here means *dialogue* when he uses the expression “evolutionary dialectic” – however, I think the former better describes the relations that Bollas is describing.

68. Emerson, however, falls victim to eliding the important differences between Lacan and Bakhtin as she introduces this statement of Bakhtin's as evidence of their correspondence. It undoubtedly sounds like Lacan in places, but this reflection is only on the surface – the ideas behind their language are so radically different so as to make comparison futile.

69. Finlay-de Monchy suggests that it is at this point, when an inviting potential space is unavailable, that the body may become a transitional object: “an echoing of surfaces” where symbolic language usage is blocked and replaced with regressive acting out, where the body becomes the only medium of direct communication (1995, 59).

70. There are other connections to be made between Kleinian and Winnicottian theories of language and those of Lacan that I wish to explore, but which are only tangentially related to my discussion here. Specifically, I would like to explore further the possibility that the laws of language themselves could/should be treated as transitional objects, and how a Kleinian perspective on the development and nature of identification and symbolisation may dialogue with a Lacanian-influenced perceptive of the “I” (*je*) and the “me” (*moi*), especially as it pertains to the analysis of popular and commodity culture, where the product promises to “stand-in” or represent the identity of the subject. Klein believes that identification precedes symbolisation and is characteristic of infantile omnipotence that denies the external, separate existence of the subject (Hinshelwood 1991, 453). Thus, we may speculate that the paranoid-schizoid identification with the commodity denies its separate existence, and that the product may come not to represent, but be *equated* with the subject itself (for example, the ubiquity of Nike or the Molson Canadian beer commercial that promises “I am.”)

Perhaps Lacan does allow for some degree of subjective creativity in language:

This is not to say, however, that our culture pursues its course in the shadowy regions beyond creative subjectivity. On the contrary, creative subjectivity has not ceased in its struggle to renew the never-exhausted power of symbols in the human exchange that brings them to the light of day.

(Lacan 1966, 71)

However, although Lacan may here speak of “creative subjectivity,” we know that his subject, and likely his notion of creativity, are very different from Winnicott's.

71. Consider, for example, Wolfgang Iser's belief that “The convergence of texts and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but necessarily always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader” (1974, 275) and that “without the elements of indeterminacy, the gaps in the text, we should not be able to use our imagination” (1974, 283; see especially 274-94).

Green similarly identifies that “The work [...] is in this no-man's-land, this potential, transitional space, this site of a trans-narcissistic communication where the author's and reader's doubles – ghosts which never reveal themselves – communicate through the writing” (1986, 322).

Gabrielle Schwab's “transitional texts” are also located in Winnicott's potential space, and work continually to transgress and therefore reshape the boundaries of language and subjectivity. There is much I admire in Schwab's analysis – her insistence on the subject, her willingness to embark upon a dialogue with other discourses, including poststructuralist

and Lacanian-inspired philosophies largely overlooked here –though her insistence upon a Lacanian conceptualisation of Winnicott I also find a limitation of her approach. She insists, for example, on showing how Winnicott alters our conceptions of the imaginary and symbolic orders, while I maintain that such orders cannot be maintained at all in a Winnicottian epistemology. Furthermore, “The creative potential of the transitional space,” she says, “is always relative in respect to the symbolic order” (Schwab 1994, 41).

Mary Jacobus’ conception of the “scene of reading” also seems to share many qualities with a Winnicottian potential space, where the reader engages in play and boundary testing, though I believe that Jacobus’ conceptualisation, coming from a more Kleinian perspective, is more concerned with an *internal* “landscape” of phantasy (see Jacobus 1999, especially 17-83).

72. Another worrying trend is the appropriation of Klein’s or Winnicott’s work by Lacanian psychoanalysts and critics. For example, in Elizabeth Wright’s introduction to psychoanalytic criticism (1984), we find a Winnicott whose potential space relates only to the parent’s language and a Klein for whom entry into the symbolic order is paramount for movement from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive positions. To an extent, this is true also of Schwab (see endnote above), for whom the transitional space exists in relation to Lacan’s symbolic.

73. Bloom seems to have a buddy-in-backlash in Lowenstein, who finds that Dora has been unfortunately mis-appropriated by feminism.

If yesterday she was forced into the Procrustean bed of patriarchy, today she seems to be stuffed into the lean mold of feminism. Eager to uncover Freud’s blind spots and to expose his masculine fallibility, recent critics, construing Dora alternately as victim or as heroine, have failed to recognize that Dora’s case history offers us a far more innovative, complex, and subversive model of subjectivity.

(Lowenstein 1994, 718-9)

True, Dora can provide a new way of looking at subjectivity, just as Woolf must have loved reading, but Lowenstein, like Bloom, seems to wish to deny the specific, *embodied* resistances that Dora and Woolf offer.

– PART II –

The Potential Spaces of/in Contemporary British Magic Realist Literature

In the last section, I explored how object-relations psychoanalysis can be used to reconceptualise language and literature and redress the contemporary crises of subjectivity exacerbated by postmodern culture and discursive strategies. Here I wish to demonstrate how I see contemporary fiction responding to these crises of subjectivity. I find that many contemporary writers use their texts to create potential spaces, inviting readers to share in the creative production of meaning. This is most evident, I think, in contemporary magic realist fiction, where readers, writers and characters visit these spaces in real and metaphorical terms. In this chapter, therefore, I will look at what insights an object-relations psychoanalytic approach can offer what has been labelled *magic realist* or *fantastic* literature, and how this literature interacts with the socio-political and cultural sphere that produces it and which it enters. I examine the strategies at work in these texts and how these texts may intervene politically in the development and experience of subjects. More specifically, I wish to demonstrate how these texts may be utilised in the creative play of subjects and how many of these texts point the way out of the vicissitudes of love and hate, reason and unreason, and show us how to survive our paradoxes.

I will begin with a brief exploration of the historical development and characteristics of magic realism since the Western Euro-American Enlightenment. I have tried to situate the discussion with regard to existing perspectives on magic realism, focussing especially on the historical understanding of José B. Monleón and the structuralist and psychostructuralist approaches of Tzvetan Todorov and Rosemary Jackson. I then turn to the texts themselves, using an object-relations perspective to re-examine the narrative strategies and conceptualisations of time that are employed in magic realist fiction. I then examine at length how contemporary British magic

realism differs from earlier representations of the fantastic in its attempt to open potential spaces. On the one hand I examine the spaces of reason and rationality to see how these authors regard the efforts and constructs of the capitalist culture, and the spaces of unreason and irrationality to see how they perceive the previous transgressions in literature and theory as ineffective in trying to imagine real social change. These instances of transgressive unreason are usually conceived as the limit of magic realism's challenges to the established order, but contemporary magic realist authors, I find, reject the very dualism upon which reason and rationality are predicated. Finally, I examine the third spaces created by contemporary magic realism, and how transitional objects and illusion are employed within the text to guide characters and readers through the uncertainty of liminality.

Magic Realism: A Theoretical Review

Just as at the beginning of this thesis I felt it necessary to defend my decision to offer yet another psychoanalytic conception of language and literature, I feel as though here I must present some idea as to why I feel it necessary to offer yet another psychoanalytic reading of magic realist literature. Others that have already provided readings of magic realism that are painstaking and seemingly comprehensive (for example, the structuralist evaluations of Tzvetan Todorov) and somewhat psychoanalytic (for example, the re-evaluations of Rosemary Jackson). What follows is a brief explanation of what it is I borrow and reject from others' conceptualisations of magic realism, and my initial investigations into what unique contributions I think object-relations can make to our understanding of this literature.

Before continuing, however, I need to make a quick clarification regarding terminology. I do not perceive any serious difference between Todorov's (and Monleón's) use of the term *fantastic* and my own preference for the term *magic realism* and so I use the words interchangeably. Todorov uses "the fantastic" (as do Monleón and Jackson), and it often seems to be applied to Euro-American traditions – primarily, the Gothic, from *Otranto* to Poe – between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries, while "magic realism" seems to be term more often applied to the fiction that has emerged from Latin America (and India) since World War II. I elide the difference in this case – something I am usually loath to do – because at least within the context of contemporary British fiction, I am trying to suggest that there is a correspondence between these traditions. Although Jackson's use of "fantastic" is supposedly derived from Todorov, it seems at times to include texts that he would deem "marvellous." However, I do not perceive a significant difference in the general conceptualisations of magic realism and the fantastic, both of which seem to refer to genre that lies in the same liminal space between the real/uncanny and magic/marvellous. I usually use the term "magic realism" here because, first, it starkly and directly calls to the paradox inherent in this form of literature and, more pragmatically, I do not wish to complicate further the issue of fantasy/phantasy.

And Yet....: The Origins of Magic Realism and the Contemporary Tradition

In his intriguing Foucaultian sociohistorical approach to the fantastic, José B. Monleón posits that the fantastic was born at the dawn of the Enlightenment, “by the constant shifting of the diffuse boundaries between reason and unreason” (1990, 6). This would seem to contradict the identification made by Zamora and Farris of a relatively unbroken tradition dating back to the Greek epics and I would be uncomfortable claiming that the fantastic, or a literature that served a similar purpose to it in challenging governing epistemologies and opening potential spaces, did not exist prior to the Enlightenment. However, I believe that this tradition can vary so dramatically from one era to another that there is a need to follow Monleón and examine the post-Enlightenment development of the fantastic in its specificity. Monleón also makes the point that there was almost certainly some pre-Enlightenment conceptualisation of “the fantastic” in literature, for “If the fantastic, as I argue, depends deeply on a specific concept of reality, of what is true and natural, then surely there must be a literature, prior to *The Castle of Otranto*, that deals with this issue, even if the referential premises rest on different values” (Monleón 1990, 7). Angela Carter also implies such a link between the Enlightenment and a shift in representation of the fantastic when, in the introduction to her collection of fairy tales, she notes that

one of the first self-conscious collections of European fairy tales [was] assembled by Charles Perrault and published in Paris in 1697 under the title *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*, translated into English in 1729 as *Histories or Tales of Past Times*. (Even in those days there was already a sense among the educated classes that popular culture belonged to the past – even, perhaps, that it *ought* to belong to the past, where it posed no threat...).

(Carter 1990, x-xi)

Carter thus identifies the genesis of the Enlightenment production of the fantastic, albeit fifty to sixty years earlier than Monleón. This *orientalism*, this making other of folklore, served to distinguish the magical stories and epistemologies from the

emergent Enlightenment rationalism.¹

The emergence of the fantastic or magic realist literature is therefore bound to a specific epistemic shift. As Monleón points out, in an epistemological universe in which

Miracula might exist, the supernatural might be recognised [...] it is impossible to talk about the fantastic, since this implies the recognition of the supernatural not on moral [for example, religious] grounds but, paradoxically, on rational premises. Not until nature becomes objectified, and not until the supernatural was equated with the unnatural, could fantastic literature emerge [...] For this fracture to take place, an exclusive worldview – one that recognises the existence of nature as ruled by independent laws that cannot be transgressed – needs to first dominate in society.

(Monleón 1990, 8-9)

Thus, Monleón can claim, with some authority, that the “fantastic is, at heart, an epistemological question” (9). Certainly Todorov, Jackson, Monleón, Armitt and others offer us enough evidence from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to demonstrate that, indeed, epistemological concerns are often at the forefront of fantastic literature, from Walpole to Poe. However, just because the fantastic emerged as a result of or *in response to* a certain change in the dominant episteme, it does not therefore mean that it only responds to epistemological issues. I would suggest that the fantastic explores not only epistemological questions but also addresses the increasingly prevalent ontological crises of subjectivity that are also exacerbated by the discourses that have proliferated since the Enlightenment. These ontological concerns of the fantastic have, I think, become much more evident in the second half of the twentieth century, and this shift in focus could be perceived, as it often is, as another seismic epistemological shift. It is perhaps significant that Monleón’s study leaves off where I pick up, in about the mid-twentieth century. For Monleón, the fantastic is a genre that exists in the past tense:

The artistic explosion that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century may be seen as inaugurating a different epoch in social and cultural

development, although such an assertion would likewise require historical perspective in order to fully assess its significance. But such a time was also the culmination of a period: the seeds of the new economic and social organisation that we are now experiencing (from corporativism to informatization, from irrationalism to pragmatism) could probably be traced to the events immediately preceding World War II [...] In this sense the history of the fantastic must be seen as covering the periods between the 1760s and the 1930s, and must be included within the history of irrationalism [...] As social production, the fantastic articulated apprehensions that were deeply attached to the specific characteristics of capitalist society. The perception of monstrosity had significant correlations with the way in which dominant culture defined and redefined its political and economic supremacy, and depended upon the concrete forms of class struggle.

(Monleón 1990, 138-9)

Of course there has been a social and artistic shift since World War II. And as Monleón suggests, perhaps this new epoch in social and cultural development requires a new historical – and psychological – perspective in order to understand its significance:

After World War II, the international panorama changed drastically. New relations of power, the creation of a hierarchy of first, second and third worlds, the supremacy of corporations, the existence of a nuclear threat – all would be elements that would contribute to a different social order. The rich production of the fantastic that invades our most recent past thus requires the tracing of another history.

(Monleón 1990, 139-40)

It is unfortunate, therefore, that Monleón's study ends with the literature of the early twentieth century and with a belief that the fantastic ceases when there is no longer a need to articulate the irrational. What is odd is that Monleón seems to proclaim that the Enlightenment is over, the powers of irrationalism having persevered over the bourgeois, capitalist order of reason. Monleón clearly states that

our most recent past is dominated by global capitalism and corporativism, but does not seem to appreciate how these that are the inevitable and (largely) unbroken consequences of eighteenth-century bourgeois reason, not an opposition to it. In fact, these contemporary systems and institutions are even more reliant upon the strategies of capitalist rationality for their maintenance and security. Monleón asserts that at the turn of the twentieth century, “Reason suddenly became an antiquated and powerless instrument, and the old mechanisms of order, its social and legal institutions, became totally inefficient” (95); “the discourse of reason that had served to promote and justify the ascent of the bourgeois world now articulated its own negation” (98); “From 1816 on, the concept that ‘revolutions constitute necessary, organic components of evolution’ became an intrinsic part of the dominant ideology” and that unreason is the “defining epistemology”(137); and that “In the span of approximately thirty years [1900-1930], the scientific, moral, political, and economic universe of the bourgeoisie seemed to have fallen into chaos. The forces of unreason appeared to have taken over the universe of order” (81) and so on. *And yet*, I continually found myself objecting, and yet we live today in a world in which capitalism is even further entrenched, in which the institutions established at the beginning of the Enlightenment are now even stronger, and bourgeois rationalism is the dominant epistemic strategy across almost the entire world (see, for example, N. Klein 2000, Hardt and Negri 2000).² And as Eagleton points out, “the bourgeois humanist subject is not in fact simply part of a clapped-out history we can all agreeably or reluctantly leave behind” (1985, 71). Similarly, I am not so sure that the break between pre- and post-World War II magic realism is as neat and clean as Monleón pretends. Even if there has been a fundamental shift in the fantastic from the epistemological to ontological, I argue in Part I of this study that the ontological crises that we can now observe have been precipitated by the epistemological obsession and bourgeois capitalism that is the Enlightenment’s continued legacy.

For example, I think that Muriel Spark’s *The Comforters*, written in 1957, could be deemed an early example of the fantastic beyond Monleón’s scope. There are certainly questions raised in this novel that we regard as epistemological: when asked about the progress of her survey of the twentieth century novel, Caroline, the

central character, responds “I’m having difficulty with the chapter on realism” (Spark 57); and, with a character writing a book on the twentieth-century novel while being aware of being a character in a twentieth-century novel, Spark demonstrates a self-reflexivity commonly associated by literary theorists as an epistemological postmodernity. She asks if the voices and typewriter sounds she hears are “objectively real” or “imaginary” (44). These questions can, however, also be regarded as addressing ontological concerns: who am I? am I only the sum total of representations of me, or do I have an existence independent of representation? It shows further, I think, that epistemological and ontological questions are intimately and intricately related, so that although there may be a shift in focus from the early to the second-half of the twentieth century fantastic, both sets of issues are at play in all magic realist texts. Caroline argues with Laurence, her ultra-rationalist sometime-boyfriend,

“If the sound has objective existence it will be recorded.”

[Laurence]

“This sound might have another sort of existence and still be real.” [Caroline].

“Well, let’s first exhaust the possibilities of the natural order”

“But we don’t know all the possibilities of the natural order.”

“If the sound doesn’t record, we can take it for granted that it either doesn’t exist, or it exists in some supernatural order,” he explained.

She insisted, “It does exist. I think it’s a natural sound. I don’t think that machine will record it.”

[...]

“Well, in that case, I think you should try to understand the experience in a symbolic light.” [Laurence]

“But the voices are voices. Of course they are symbols. But they are also voices. There’s the typewriter too – that’s a symbol, but it *is* a real typewriter. I hear it.”

(Spark 1957, 64 and 68)

Echoing concerns of other writers of the time (for example, Beckett, Pirandello), in *The Comforters* we see characters disappear when they are not being looked at, or not being represented in the narrative. One can see how the ontological and epistemological concerns of subjectivity cannot be easily separated into discrete categories, but we do injustice to the text and the subject if we limit our analysis to purely epistemological concerns. Caroline here is articulating the cry of a subject who feels that her entire ontological existence is dependent upon knowing, upon representation, and resists Laurence's attempts to rationalise her experience into a neat objective certainty. He simply refuses to listen to what she is saying, placing his own defensive need to reconcile and explain her experience in terms that are comfortable for him, that do not challenge his rational conception of the world. It is "as if her body, at such times, were only awaiting her word" (Spark 1957, 66), identifying the inversion of contemporary philosophy and culture that places representation before being, epistemology before ontology. As I quoted in Part I, Beckett's deteriorating narrator in *Texts for Nothing* similarly asserts the need to tend to ontological over the epistemological, being before doing, albeit too late.

There's my life, why not, it is one, if you like, if you must, I don't say no, this evening. There has to be one, it seems, once there is speech, no need of a story, a story is not compulsory, just a life, that's the mistake I made, one of the mistakes, to have wanted a story for myself, whereas life alone is enough.

(Beckett 1967, 93)

The Structuralist Approach: For and Against Todorov

In Tzvetan Todorov's super-scientific structuralist study, the *fantastic* is a genre that lies between the antithetical genres of *realism*, wherein supernatural events can be rationally explicated in terms of *the uncanny*,³ and *the marvellous*, dominated by the unambiguous presence of supernatural events or elements. There are for Todorov

three conditions that must be met for a work to be categorised as “fantastic”:

- 1) the text must oblige the reader to hesitate between the natural and the supernatural
- 2) this hesitation must be experienced by a character, with whom, on some level, the reader identifies
- 3) the reader must reject both poetical and allegorical interpretations

These criteria are plausible enough and form the contemporary standard from which all critical analyses of the fantastic begins, and I would like to retain, to a certain degree but with notable exceptions, all three in my own analysis.

Todorov’s conceptualisation of the fantastic offers some obvious parallels with Winnicott’s conception of the third area of experience. Like the potential space, Todorov defines magic realism as a careful negotiation between opposites: “either the reader admits that these apparently supernatural events are susceptible of a rational explanation, and we then shift from the fantastic to the uncanny; or else he admits their existence as such, and we find ourselves within the marvellous” (58). The fantastic, he says, “lasts only as long as a certain hesitation” (41); when a decision is made, the work becomes not fantastic but something else. “The fantastic therefore,” like the potential space, “leads a life full of dangers, and may evaporate at any moment” (41). Todorov also insists that the fantastic must not challenge the ontological status of the experience. He says that “when a book begins with a sentence like ‘John was in the room, lying on his bed,’ we are not entitled to ask ourselves if this is true or false. Such a question has no meaning, for literary language is a conventional language in which the test of truth is impossible” (82). Ultimately for Todorov, and I think that this may also be true for everyone, “*all* literature escapes the category of the true and the false” (83). As James Henderson reminds us, Coleridge also spoke of the willing suspension of disbelief exercised by readers of poetry. “Surely,” Henderson suggests, “we are all quite capable of exercising such a faculty in the face of our wish to do so, bolstered by an awareness of the limitation and fallibility of our rational processes” (1975, 114).⁴ This call for uncertainty echoes, of course, Winnicott’s assertions regarding the transitional object that we will never ask the question “‘Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from

without' [...] The question is not to be formulated" (1971, 12) and that the potential space must maintain – without resolution – the paradoxes that exist in the potential space (cf. Winnicott 1971).⁵ When the question is asked, when the paradox is resolved, we are no longer enjoying the experience in the fantastic world of the potential space.

Todorov's first condition is often explicitly addressed in magic realist fiction. In Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, Fevvers, for example, constantly challenges us by asking "Is she fact or is she fiction" – but she knows that no one, other than the rationalist Walser, really wants to know. As a condition of the "game" that is played in Fowles' *The Magus*, Maurice Conchis insists that Nicholas not attempt to resolve the paradoxes and illusions he finds on Bourani. Conchis tells Nicholas, "I do not ask you to believe. All I ask you is to pretend to believe" (Fowles 1977, 137), because to challenge the ontological status of the object, to know with any certainty whether it is real or not, spoils the point of the game. Nicholas, like Walser, eventually realises this:

At last it began to seem plain. All that happened at Bourani was in the nature of a private masque; and no doubt the passage was a hint to me that I should, both out of politeness and for my own pleasure, not poke my nose behind the scenes.

(Fowles 1977, 165)

For Conchis, "the unknown" is "the great motivating factor in all human existence" (288) as liminal experience is necessary for creative subjective being. He further states that "The solution of the physical problems that face man – that is a matter of technology. But I am talking about the general psychological health of the species, man. He needs the existence of mysteries. Not their solution" (235). George Singer, in John Murray's *John Dory*, explains the condition of uncertainty thus: "The crucial encounter with the second [talking] fish and my subsequent entanglement with Wright are only credible if we accept one basic assumption, viz. that I am not a certifiable lunatic subject to florid hallucinations" (Murray 2001, 88). Singer, without wishing to "prove" to the reader that his experiences undoubtedly happened, realises that if we think him mad, that if we take his smiling fish as a hallucination, we have

identified his text as a work of uncanny, as Todorov would say. This rationalisation of his story would cause his narrative to lose all of its power. And although I appreciate that Toni Morrison would not want her work classed as “magic realist” – for the historical and cultural implications this Euro-American term evokes – I also would point out that at the carnival in *Beloved*, Sethe, Paul D and Denver watch the magicians and clowns, “and the fact that none of it was true did not extinguish their appetite a bit” (Morrison 1987, 48), which could be easily said of the reader of fantastic fiction.

Todorov’s concept of uncertainty as a requisite component of the fantastic invokes Klein’s concept of epistemophilia.⁶ In Klein’s first essay, “The Development of a Child” (1921), Klein refers to a positive intellectual development as “enlightenment” (in inverted commas) or “natural enlightenment.” Klein’s use of this term is paradoxical and I think can be seen to mark a significant shift: On the one hand, her notion of “enlightenment” can be seen to correspond to Freud’s wish for pedagogic enlightenment whereby children’s incorrect knowledge of sexuality is replaced by accurate, objective understanding. However, unlike Enlightenment rationality, in which the demarcation between fact and fiction is predetermined by acknowledged authorities, Klein argues for a relaxation of the (perceived) authority of the parents in order to facilitate the (creative) intellectual development of the child. Klein’s practical solution is to answer children’s questions “absolutely truthfully and, when necessary, on a scientific basis suited to his understanding, but as briefly as possible” (1921, 3). Klein sometimes seems harsh, for example when telling a four-and-a-half year-old that there is no Easter bunny or Santa Claus, but she does also allow the children to retain a degree of their own explanation – “stories” – rather than insisting that the scientific explanations be immediately and wholly adopted.

Perhaps this goes some way to explain the ubiquity of orphans in magic realist literature and in children’s literature more generally – the protagonists, and the children who are invited to identify with them, are free to indulge their imaginations and explore the world on their own terms, liberated from the authoritarianism of parental omnipotence. When, for example, Harry Potter is living with the Dursleys,

his Muggle Aunt and Uncle, he is forbidden to explore his magic powers. “*Don’t ask questions* – that was the first rule for a quiet life with the Dursleys” (Rowling 1997, 20). Significantly, when Harry is permitted to explore his magical side, it is not in an environment in which he can wholly indulge his omnipotent phantasy, but in the more controlled “third space” of Hogwart’s, where there are still some rules governing behaviour. Klein argues that by thus allowing a degree of uncertainty, the epistemophilic instinct of the child – from which I think Winnicott developed his notion of creativity – is allowed to operate and more securely establish a relation to the “reality-principle”:

It seems to me as though in this case the child’s urge to knowledge, being earlier and more strongly developed, had stimulated his feebler reality-sense and compelled him by overcoming his tendency to repression to make sure of the acquisition which was so new and so important to him. This acquisition, and especially the impairment of authority which went with it, will have renewed and so strengthened the reality-principle for him as to enable him to carry on successfully the progress in his thinking and knowing that began simultaneously with the influencing and overcoming of the omnipotence-feeling. This decline of the omnipotence feeling that is brought about by the impulse to diminish parental perfection (which certainly assists in establishing the limits of his own as well as of their power) in turn influence the impairment of authority, so that an interaction, a reciprocal support would exist between the impairment of authority and the weakening of the omnipotence-feeling.

(Klein 1921, 16-7)

This passage also demonstrates to me how, for Klein, a balance between reality and fantasy, and never the total ascendancy of either, is the most productive force for change, a theme that I return to below. Thus, in insisting upon the maintenance of paradox, hesitation and uncertainty, the fantastic resists the (rationalist, Enlightenment) impulse to impose knowledge and kill the “natural curiosity” and “impulse to inquire.” Klein in fact explicitly endorses the use of such stories to

stimulate the child's intellectual development; referring to Grimm's tales, she says "I am of the opinion [...] that with the assistance of analysis there is no need to avoid these tales but that they can be used directly as a standard and an expedient" (1921, 52).

While I do agree therefore with much of Todorov's conceptualisation of the fantastic, there are many typically structuralist deficiencies in it that need to be redressed. First and foremost, we need to deny Todorov's wish that we exclude from our analyses such silly irrelevancies as psychology, politics and the subject. As I stated with regard to Lacan in Part I, just as Saussure insisted upon a synchronic analysis that eliminates the psychological, anthropological, historical, physical and physiological, Todorov too wishes to isolate the object of his study, desubjectifying it in order to create a knowable science. Todorov, following Frye, insists that "Literary studies are to be undertaken with the same seriousness, the same rigor evinced by the other sciences [...] A consequence of this first postulate is the necessity of removing from literary study any value judgement concerning the works in question" (Todorov 1973, 9). And, reflecting a Lacanian privileging of the signifier, Todorov conflates the importance of language in subjective experience: "For language is, in fact, the form par excellence, and the structuring agent, of man's relation with other men. Or, as Henry James says in 'The Question of Our Speech': All life therefore comes back to the question of our speech, the medium through which we communicate with each other, for all life comes back to the question of our relations with one another" (Todorov 139).

Todorov considers three functions of the fantastic: First, that it "produces a particular effect on the reader;" second, that the fantastic "serves the narration," for example, by maintaining suspense; and finally, that the fantastic has a "tautological function: it permits the description of a fantastic universe, one that has no reality outside language" (92). Todorov then notes how these functions of the fantastic parallel three functions of the sign as conceived by structuralism: the pragmatic, the relation of the sign to its user; the syntactical, dealing with signs' relations to each other; and the semantic, dealing with the sign's relation to the referent. The core of my objections to Todorov lies in his *explicit* denial of this first, and I think most vital,

function of the fantastic and of the sign. Todorov declares, “We shall not concern ourselves here with the first function of the fantastic, for it derives from a psychology of reading quite alien to the strictly literary analysis we are undertaking” (92). This is fair enough, I suppose, in that we all have the right to limit our terms of study according to our historically and culturally determined interests. However, Todorov, by ignoring the reader, eliminates the subjective element and thus depersonalises the experience of reading, therefore mis-understanding the experience. Like Lacan and Saussure, Todorov accepts the primacy of subjectivity and subjective perception in the object of his analysis, but then proceeds to show us how we can eradicate this infinite variable so as to placate our insecurities and defend ourselves from the uncertainty that subjectivity invokes.

Todorov therefore echoes Lacan in his attempt to scientise subjective experience. Quoting Frye, he says

“The poet, like the pure mathematician, depends not on descriptive truth, but on conformity to his hypothetical postulates... Literature, like mathematics, is a language, and a language in itself represents no truth, though it may provide the means for expressing any number of them.” Thus the literary text participates in tautology: it signifies itself [...] Literature is created from literature, not from reality, whether that reality is material or psychic.

(Todorov 1973, 10)

When Todorov claims that “literature does not refer to anything outside itself” (59) he is negating the *potentiality* that literature offers readers: not that, of course, literature *must* refer to a recognisable world, but literature is always derived from and has consequences for the subject that lies outside the text.

But Todorov does acknowledge, again like Lacan, grudgingly, that the subject does have a role to play in the construction of meaning, “for the fantastic requires, it will be recalled, a reaction to events as they occur” (60) and this reaction is necessarily subjective. His own first criterion of the fantastic, that it provoke “hesitation in the reader,” means the fantastic itself is a “kind of reading” (32) that ultimately makes the categorisation of the fantastic dependent not upon formal

elements of the text but on the reader's response. A ghost haunts Todorov's laboratory, as subjectivity always seems to have a inevitable and niggling tendency to upset a purely scientific, objective approach. So Todorov, like structuralist-inspired postmodernism, can only define this kind of reading *negatively* – it “must be neither ‘poetic’ nor ‘allegorical’” (62) – because without the subject, having rejected the reaction of the reader, he has nothing upon which to erect his foundations.

As a result of this attempt to reify his object of study, Todorov falls victim to dualist thinking, splitting subject and object, mind and matter, psyche and body. We know via Winnicott and Fairbairn that the creation of such sharp distinctions is a defence mechanism and, although at times necessary in the day-to-day functioning of the subject, is not conducive to play, where these artificial dichotomies must be abandoned. Todorov is correct when he says that the fantastic is about challenging boundaries, but as he relies on a structuralist dualism he is only capable of conceiving of his challenge in narrow sense, as mere “transgressions.” For Todorov, in the fantastic

we are working with an adult simulacrum of infancy. But this is in fact what happens in the literature of the fantastic: the limit between matter and mind is not unknown here, as it is in mythical thought, for instance; it remains present, in order to furnish the pretext for incessant transgressions [...]

Another consequence of the same principle has still greater extension: this is the effacement of the limits between subject and object. The rational schema represents the human being as a subject entering into relations with other persons or things that remain external to him, and which have the status of objects. The literature of the fantastic disturbs this abrupt separation.

(Todorov 1973, 116)

There is some truth in this, although the extent to which Todorov and I are talking about the same thing is limited due to our different understandings and conceptualisations of how the subject and object relate to each other. The literature of the fantastic does disturb the abrupt separation of subject and object, but this is

ironically a separation perpetuated by the likes of Todorov himself, adhering to “the rational schema.” Todorov also foreshadows Jackson’s more explicitly Lacanian-influenced analysis by only recognising the *dissolution* of boundaries that are enacted in fantastic literature – a tendency derived from a belief in primary narcissism. Todorov – though as much influenced by Piaget as Lacan and orthodox psychoanalysis – believes that “in early mental development, there exists no precise differentiation between the self and the external world” (118), a state of infantile fusion with the mother, wherein the infant imagines the mother merely to be an extension of his own nascent self (an idea, as I explained in Part I and will address again below, largely rejected by object-relations psychoanalysts). Todorov also seems to maintain other Lacanian fallacies, such as the belief that the key and climactic moment in the infant’s development is the subject’s “accession to language,” and the privileging of language all out of proportion.

In examining where Todorov’s analyses, and those of formalists and like-minded psychostructuralists, fall short, I believe that it makes it more obvious what an object-relations perspective can bring to our critical culture. Todorov’s analyses of magic realism commit some of the very same “crimes” that I believe literature in general, and certain critical evaluations, must seek to avoid: namely, the objectification and erasure of the subjective element.

The Psychostructuralist Approach: For and Against Jackson and the Limits of “Transgression”

The task of redressing Todorov’s apolitical and decidedly a-subjective understanding of the fantastic is taken up most notably by Rosemary Jackson in her 1981 study, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. I wholeheartedly agree with her overall assessment of Todorov: “One of the major shortcomings of Todorov’s book on the fantastic is its reluctance to engage with psychoanalytic theory and, related to this, a relative lack of attention to the broader ideological implications of fantastic literature” (Jackson 1981, 61). Jackson goes some way in answering Todorov’s

apolitical conceptualisation of the fantastic by demonstrating an awareness that the political and the unconscious influences and effects of the fantastic are intricately related. While I am wholly in agreement with Jackson's general conceptualisation of the fantastic as a mode capable of deep political and psychological consequences for its readers and its cultures, it is perhaps equally obvious where my objections lie: predictably, my problems with Jackson's analysis are a consequence of her understanding of psychic processes being derived solely from the Lacanian psychostructuralist model of subjectivity. In using only a Lacanian approach to redress Todorov, she falls victim to Lacan's, and ironically Todorov's, structuralist limitations. Jackson finds herself in the unenviable position of trying to resurrect the subjective element in a theory of the fantastic using a methodology that is itself purged of the subjective element, a task rather like trying to fill an aquarium while standing in the middle of a desert with a punctured hose.

For Jackson, the political power of the fantastic lies in its ability to transgress the established order and to represent subjective desire, based on the *telling and expelling* formula of orthodox psychoanalysis. While Jackson's inclusion of psychological considerations is a marked improvement on Todorov, we must examine the nature of the transgression and desire in which she places so much investment. Exactly what is being "subverted," what is being "transgressed"? What, for that matter, is meant by "desire"? Jackson's emphasis on transgression is similarly derived from Lacan and his specific conceptualisations of psychoanalysis and the subject. This transgression is "certainly not the same as the one the patient commits with the expectation of being punished or punishing himself" (Lacan 1959-60, 2) but a reference to the morbid enjoyment of the sexual object denied to the subject by the law of the father. Lacan derives his notion of transgression from both Freud's ideas on the Oedipal prohibition, the killing of the father: "the great myth that he places at the origin of the development of civilization" (Jackson 1981, 2), and on the death instinct, which seeks to go "beyond the pleasure principle." What the subject transgresses is the law that places limits upon pleasure, which means for Lacan a transgression against the symbolic order.

Jackson's psychoanalytic approach is also a Lacanian inheritance derived

from Freud's early theories of repression and the oversimplistic belief that the conscious acknowledgement of all unconscious thoughts and feelings is the only means through which psychoanalysts can treat their analysands. Freud's first conception of psychoanalysis as a "talking-cure" rested upon the epistemologically-centric assumption that his analysands could be cured simply by "replacing what is unconscious by what is conscious" (see, for example, 1916-17, 486), by putting the ego where the id was (*Wo es war, soll Ich werden*), by making conscious unconscious desires. This limited conception of psychoanalysis has been expanded upon by Kleinian and Independent British psychoanalysts – and to a lesser degree Freud himself – who recognised and emphasised the importance of other aspects of analysis, such as the transferences, containing, holding. And just as simply replacing id with ego is a very limited conception of what psychoanalysis can offer subjects and culture as a whole, so too simply articulating desire, "making visible the un-seen, of articulating the un-said" (Jackson 1981, 48), is a limited conception of the possibilities offered by fantastic literature.

As Lacan in large part derives his notion of transgression from Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, which traces the origins of the incest taboo, and for Freud, *civilisation itself*, to the initial act of transgression against the Father, Lacan glowingly regards transgression as "something worthy of our praise, *felix culpa*, since it is at the origin of a higher complexity, something to which the realm of civilization owes its development" (1959-60, 6). Although Lacan does say that it would be a fallacy to assume he wishes to embrace Sade's extremism or that Sade is the progenitor of psychoanalysis (1959-60, 191), he – and subsequently Jackson – radically overestimates the potential that such empty transgressions have for the subject. It is difficult to tell to what degree Lacan is being ironic or genuine when he muses:

One can acknowledge that in no other literature, at no other time, has there been such a scandalous body of work. No one else has done such deep injury to the feelings and thoughts of mankind. At a time when Henry Miller's stories make us tremble, who would dare rival the licentiousness of Sade? One might indeed claim that we have there the most scandalous body of work ever written.

(Lacan 1959-60, 200)

Lacan then identifies Sade's work as "experimental literature" that seeks to cut the subject "loose from his psychosocial moorings – or to be more precise, from all psychosocial appreciation of the sublimation involved" (201) as if this were a desirable goal towards which to work. Jackson follows Lacan by claiming that "Sade's fantasies are the most extreme articulations of a desire for transgression in our cultural history" (1981, 74). *Jouissance*, experienced only through transgression, is thus elevated by Lacan and his followers (including not only his explicit followers like Jackson but a whole cultural spirit that is associated with the French academy in 1968) to a first commandment, a moral imperative: There can be no duty more noble, no philosophy more profound, than that which transgresses the imposition of the symbolic order, or anything "Other" that stands in the way of realising narcissistic desire by forcing repression of libidinal impulses.

I would likewise suggest that Jackson's contention that magic realism serves its readers psychically by offering an opportunity to regress to a infantile psychic state considers only a limited conception of the possibilities offered by psychoanalysis and magic realism:

The fantastic can be seen as corresponding to the first stage in Freud's evolutionary model, the stage of a magical and animistic thought mode when primitive man and the young child have no sense of difference between self and other, subject and object worlds. Fantasy, with its tendency to dissolve structures, moves towards an ideal of *undifferentiation*, and this is one of its defining characteristics. It refuses difference, distinction, homogeneity, reduction, discrete forms.

(Jackson 1981, 72)

I would not deny that for some people the appeal of an artistic work may lie in the potential for regression that it offers. However, I reject the equation of the fantastic with this "first stage in Freud's evolutionary model" – if Jackson shares Todorov's meaning of the term (although it sounds more here as if she means the "marvellous"). I assume that Jackson is referring to the stage of primary narcissism, of phantasied undifferentiated fusion with the mother, and so it was therefore unlikely that I would

agree with this assertion of Jackson's either. However, more substantially, while I think that magic realist literature does offer occasions to challenge and dissolve boundaries between subject and object, self and other, I think Jackson goes too far in saying that it "refuses difference" and "distinction." She does not at all seem to appreciate how the fantastic, like the potential space, can *also* offer moments of self-distinction. It can eradicate boundaries but it can also provide us with limits – limits to our being, spaces for idiomatic articulation, moments of ontological realisation. As a potential space, magic realism offers opportunities to *negotiate*, which must allow for movement in (at least) two directions.

Carter's Sadeian Experiment

Vengeance. Transgression. Glory! Eugénie de Mistival offers her arse to her mother and invites her to kiss it.

(Carter 1979b, 124)

I cannot offer such a critique of those overly-enamoured of transgression without addressing Angela Carter's "exercise in cultural history," *The Sadeian Women*. It might seem odd that I am so scathing with regard to Sadeian transgression when, to many, Carter shows a similar devotion to the "man of pleasure's" sexual libertine principles. There has been a great deal of controversy surrounding Carter's *Sadeian Women*. Lorna Sage remarks that this work "got her into great trouble in 1979 and for years afterwards, though radical feminist attacks on her for bad faith carry less conviction these days in the face of the range and carnival good humour of the later work" (1994, 16-7). For many, however, the perception that Carter tried to construct here – and in some of her early fiction – a Sadeian feminism is unforgivable. I could understand how for some Carter is uncomfortably ambivalent in her at times sympathetic readings of Sade. For example, in the "Polemical Preface," Carter speaks of the

terrorist of the imagination, a sexual guerrilla whose purpose is to overturn our most basic notions of [sexual] relations, to reinstate

sexuality as a primary mode of being rather than a specialised area of vacation from being and to show that the everyday meetings in the marriage bed are parodies of their own pretension [...]

The pornographer as terrorist may not think of himself as a friend of women; that may be the last thing on his mind. But he will always be our unconscious ally because he begins to approach some kind of emblematic truth [...]

(Carter 1979b, 21-2)

Carter has a “conviction that the pornographer Sade can be made over into an ally in the task demystification” (16). But I think that Carter is both accurate and sufficiently restrained in her limited praise of Sade. She is, in some way, coming from a mid-twentieth-century cultural milieu that produces Lacan’s own conceptualisation and glorification of *jouissance*, although Carter does not take long to recognise the limitations of such an approach. Linden Peach suggests that two of Carter’s early novels, *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) and *Heroes and Villains* (1969), both tell the story of “an adolescent girl who has lost one or both of her parents after an act of transgression on her part” (1998, 72). These early examples illustrate the Lacanian belief in the guilt that is inherent in an experience of *jouissance*, but they also demonstrate the ultimate futility of transgression. One can detect a significant shift in Carter’s thought after – sometimes I think even during – *The Sadeian Women*. For example, although Carter in 1979 identified Blake and de Sade as like-minded “great guerrillas of the Age of Enlightenment” (Sage 1994, 12), in the 1990 introduction to *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales* she can look back: “When I was a girl, I thought that everything Blake said was holy, but now I am older have seen more of life, I treat his aphorisms with the affectionate scepticism appropriate to the exhortations of a man who claimed to have seen a fairy’s funeral” (Carter 1990, x).

Sade is unique and useful for Carter only in that he rejects the conception of women as walking incubators and the idea that sex is only for procreation. With Sade’s help, Carter can declare the death of the goddess, the ideal mother:

To deny the bankrupt enchantments of the womb is to pare a good deal of the fraudulent magic from the idea of women, to reveal

us as we are, simple creatures of flesh and blood whose expectations deviate from biological necessity sufficiently to force us to abandon, perhaps regretfully, perhaps with relief, the deluded priesthood of a holy reproductive function. This demystification extends to the biological iconography of women.

(Carter 1979b, 109-10)

Carter recognises, however, that this transgression still supports the dominance of bourgeois rationalism and a thoroughly patriarchal conception of women; Sade's phallic mother is still defined by the penis and can acquire just temporary advantage by wielding only a phallic weapon. Juliette can cast off the shackles of oppressed sexuality only by turning herself into the "profane whore," governed by control and rational systems and by dressing as a man. She is "an advertisement of the advantages of free enterprise" and the "benefits of a free market economy" (1979b, 101). So Sade, the *enfant terrible*, actually supports a dominant order, re-enforcing the capitalist order and the socio-sexual marketplace, idealising a conception of Woman. As James Henderson observes with regard to theology, "Just as the mediaeval Christian needs Satan to allow him to keep hold of his concept of a loving God, so the toddler wants a quality of menace in his father to maintain the longed-for image of his mother as good, warm, and gratifying" (1975, 112). Sade's transgressions of the conventional woman do little but affirm such an idealised, paranoid-schizoid invention.

Carter notes that Sade's conception of transgression, which "was essential to his idea of pleasure [...] is always intellectual, never sensual" (28), and any glimpse of Carter's work reveals that she always values the sensual above the intellectual. Carter recognises that "transgression initially disrupts but finally restores the status quo [...] For Eugénie's transgression is authorised" (130-1). Transgression does not merely *give way* to the status quo but *actively* restores it. And of course Eugénie's transgression is authorised: All transgression is authorised, because as Klein (and Foucault) also realised, it is necessary for an authority to define what it is that is transgressive, a concept that I think is also implicit in Lacan's conceptualisations.⁷ Carter further demonstrates that the Enlightenment's reason and Sade's unreason do

not stand in opposition but side-by-side. She points out that the political pamphlet included in Sade's *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, "*Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, if you Would Become Republican*" was "extracted from its pornographic context and republished by the followers of the Utopian, Saint-Simon" during the revolution of 1848 (119). Aidan Day observes:

What Sade's work reveals, for Carter, is the dead-end of a concept of reason that is founded on the egocentricity of the Cartesian paradigm of personal identity [...] Sade draws this egocentric individualism time and again in a pornography which, as Carter says, allegorises the Enlightenment's assumption of a Cartesian dualism of self and other [...] The self and the other in Sade are, for Carter, mutually confirming opposites. Both sides, licked into a framework of rigid dualisms – reason and unreason, aggressor and victim, annihilator and annihilated – confirm egoism and a lack of humanity and communality.

(Day 1998, 97-8)

Reason and unreason both serve the master of bourgeois individualism. The libertine maxim that one should "Have no other curb than your tastes, no other laws than those of your own desires, no more morality than that of Nature herself" (Carter 1979b, 119) is certainly not antithetical to eighteenth-century bourgeois ideology, nor would it be out of place in a twenty-first-century advert. Carter most succinctly puts it when she says that Sade, "Instead of constructing a machine for liberation [...] substitutes instead a masturbatory device" (132). Her final word on Sade is that he is "still in complicity with the authority which he hates" (136).

Carter also recognises that Sade is of very limited use to her feminist cause. Justine and Juliette represent one of the oldest and most obviously artificial dichotomies, one the "holy virgin" and the other a "profane whore" (101). Thus partaking in Enlightenment values of reason, Sade is also (rather more obviously) still an ally of bourgeois patriarchy. Justine, for example, "is the object of a thousand different passions, some of them very strange, but she is the subject of not a single one" (49).⁸ Through the reason of the bourgeois market or Sade's sexual unreason, Justine is still a commodity in the sexual capitalist world. "Her final humiliation is to

realise that her value has never resided in herself but in the values of the open market” (74). And, finally, I find that in the larger context of Carter’s work, there is less room for ambiguity as her most evil characters, the Supreme-Beings-in-Evil – Dr. Hoffman and the Count of *The Infernal Desire Machines* and Rosencreutz and the Duke of *Nights at the Circus* – are all Sadeian in sexual, misogynist and bourgeois philosophical tendencies.

Klein and Foucault on Transgression’s Dependence, Transgression’s Dependents

But what does it mean to kill God if he does not exist, to kill God
who has never existed?

(Foucault 1963, 32)

Melanie Klein similarly recognises that transgressions demonstrate not a rebellion against and break with authority but, on the contrary, demonstrate an on-going *dependence* upon the authorities which the transgression pretends to oppose. This conception is central to her notion of depressive ambivalence, and develops directly from Freud’s own musings on the subject. Freud explains that “The hostile feelings are as much an indication of an emotional tie as the affectionate ones, in the same way as defiance signifies dependence as much as obedience does, though with a ‘minus’ instead of a ‘plus’ sign before it” (Freud 1916-7, 495) In her very first essay, Klein observes

We are apt to lay stress on the ‘courage’ of the thinker who, in opposition to usage and authority, succeeds in carrying out entirely original researches. It would not require so much ‘courage’ if it were not that children would need a quite peculiar spirit to think out for themselves, in opposition to the highest authorities, the ticklish subjects which are in part denied, in part forbidden. Although it is frequently observed that opposition develops the powers roused to overcome it, this certainly does not hold for the mental and intellectual development of children. To develop in opposition to any one does not

signify any less dependence than submitting unconditionally to their authority; real intellectual independence develops between the two extremes.

(Klein 1921, 22)

Transgression alone can shock, destabilise, temporarily decentre and expose, but transgression alone is merely a token gesture against authority which does not enact or force any significant change unless it becomes part of a larger, more significant movement. Irrational transgressions of reason or semiotic transgressions of the symbolic order do not constitute alternatives to reason or the symbolic.⁹ In fact, Klein says, transgression actually serves to support the dominant order. Lyotard's game theory also brings him to this conclusion: "everyone knows that a countermove that is merely reactionary is not a 'good' move. Reactional countermoves are no more than programmed effect in the opponent's strategy; they play into his hands and thus have no effect on the balance of power" (1979, 16). Even Lacan seems to recognise this, despite usually glorifying the power of transgression and breeding in some of his followers a unfounded optimism in the political power of *jouissance*. As I quoted in Part I, "It is the irony of revolutions that they engender a power all the more absolute in its action, not because it is more anonymous, as people say, but because it is more reduced to the words which signify it" (Lacan 1953, 46), which indicates that transgression cannot undo the symbolic – though for Lacan, nothing can.

Monleón, following Foucault, would concur with my Kleinian criticisms of Jackson's conceptualisation of the fantastic:

the exposition of the repressed is not necessarily a subversive act, if by subversion is meant a challenge to the causes of repression, a defiance of order, an assault upon the dominant ideology. If anything, it served precisely to help modify hegemonic discourse in order to justify the survival of bourgeois society, a fact that also explains why the fantastic only appeared after the bourgeoisie had consolidated its power. The questioning of order is not necessarily a subversive act. The perspective from which that questioning is undertaken as well as the implicit or explicit alternatives derived from such an action must

also be taken into account.

(Monleón 1990, 14)

He says further:

For Rosemary Jackson, the fantastic is by definition a subversive genre because it questions the dominant parameters for the definition of reality and because it voices what society has suppressed. This affirmation needs to be qualified: the questioning of dominant principles does not necessarily imply a “progressive subversion.” As modernism showed, the end of the realistic contract also opened the way for very reactionary interrogations of bourgeois society.

(Monleón 1990, 150)

Monleón’s objections to transgression are thus fundamentally the same as my own. First, he realises that merely voicing repression, putting ego where id was, does not make the fantastic subversive. Further, he recognises, with Klein, that merely questioning dominant parameters, that is, transgression, does not guarantee a “progressive” or lasting change. Jackson is more correct when she realises that “the most subversive fantasies are those which attempt to *transform* the relations of the imaginary and the symbolic” (91), but what she does not see is how the very structures of the imaginary, symbolic and real are constructed through the rational, bourgeois conception of experience that she wishes to undermine. This transformation, therefore, is mistaken as a *reversal* or rupture of “the process of ego formation which took place during the mirror stage” (90).

The oscillation between opposites, such as reason and unreason, is part of a manic defence to protect the subject against an unbearable dread. Although manic defences are also sometimes a normal part of human functioning, their use prevents movement into the depressive position – that is, they do not let us see the world in whole objects – but are still schizoid means of dealing with and reinforcing the established order. Jackson herself does acknowledge certain limitations of this transgressive function. “Fantasies,” she notes,

are not [...] counter-cultural merely through this thematic transgression. On the contrary, they frequently serve (as does Gothic

fiction) to re-confirm institutional order by supplying a vicarious fulfilment of desire and neutralising an urge towards transgression. A more subtle and subversive use of the fantastic appears with works which threaten to disrupt or eat away at the 'syntax' or *structure* by which order is made.

(Jackson 1981, 72)

Yet, despite this awareness, Jackson insists subsequently and throughout her book upon privileging this notion of transgression alone as some potent force for change.

Transgression, as I perceive it, is not an end in itself, but only one potential means through which real, significant change, such as (re-)ontologisation, can be realised. Jackson comes closest to appreciating this when she examines Foucault: "Fantastic narrative is preoccupied with *limits*, and Michel Foucault's writings enable us to place this concern historically [...] Foucault compares the kind of transgressive literature found in secularised fantasy to religion in previous ages. He claims for them both the same ontological function: an exploration of the limits of being" (Jackson 1981, 78-9). This "being," as understood by Jackson, however, is not ontological but entirely discursive. But Foucault is exposing the limits of discursive transgression upon subjective being – and transgression, he suggests, is always discursive.

In that zone which our culture affords for our gestures and speech, transgression prescribes not only the sole manner of discovering the sacred in its unmediated substance, but also a way of recomposing its empty form, its absence, through which it becomes all the more scintillating [...] From the moment that Sade delivered its first words and marked out, in a single discourse, the boundaries of what suddenly became its kingdom, the language of sexuality has lifted us into the night where God is absent, and where all of our actions are addressed to this absence in a profanation which at once identifies it, dissipates it, exhausts itself in it, and restores it to the empty purity of its transgression.

(Foucault 1963, 30-1)

It is when sexuality is constructed as a discourse, "cast into an empty zone where it

achieves whatever meagre form is bestowed upon it by the establishment of its limits” (29-30), that an authority is posited, limits set, and transgression possible. Although at times I find it hard to decipher, Foucault’s conceptualisation of transgression (perhaps a response to Lacan¹⁰) does support Klein’s. Essentially, Foucault does not see transgression as offering any real resistance to the authority it pretends to oppose, but as dependent on that authority for its very possibility.

Transgression, then, is not related to the limit as black is to white, the prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather, their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust. Perhaps it is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies, which lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation, its harrowing and poised singularity; the flash loses itself in this space it marks with its sovereignty and becomes silent now that it has given a name to obscurity [...]

Transgression does not seek to oppose one thing to another, nor does it achieve its purpose through mockery or by upsetting the solidity of foundations; it does not transform the other side of the mirror, beyond an invisible and uncrossable line, into a glittering expanse.

(Foucault 1963, 35)

But surely then magic realist fiction can and must offer something more than transgression if it is to be of any political use or if it is to serve the subject in the recognition of its being.

I realise that I am being harsh and dismissive, perhaps excessively so, towards this “transgression theory.” But this spirit of transgression involved other such Enlightened practices as the circulation of a petition demanding the decriminalisation of sex with children, signed by Sartre, de Beauvoir, Barthes, Foucault, Derrida and

others (Henley 2001). I mention this not to demonise these men and women or their struggles for political reformation but to further insist upon a *historicisation* of their ideas which are presently too often regarded as sacrosanct. Contemporary critical theory seems to have the greatest investment in transgression largely in the run-up to and during the 1960s movements against authority and authoritarianism (social, sexual, political), aggrandised in the quasi-mythical Paris uprisings of 1968.

Roustang points out that

Lacan was not the only one in France, in the 1960s, who dreamed of inventing a new form of rationality by giving ample space to madness, supposedly the only phenomenon able to reveal man in his essence. These people wanted to go much further than German Romanticism, which always maintained a certain distance between the relation to the world of dreams and fantasy as the necessary condition for creation, and the actual production of a work, which is subject to rules and assumes an order [...] Reason was seen as suffering from all kinds of ailments, and the repression it initiated had been done away with, so that the great revelation might take place. This was a kind of hyper-romanticism, which could well be another name for surrealism, for it was a question of paralysing the rational as irrational, and thus allowing an unprecedented form of rationality to appear on the horizon.

(Roustang 1998, 119)

But post-1968, while not without its own repressive practices, must be ready to fight these battles but also move beyond this narrow view. Ricarda Schmidt sees Carter's Dr. Hoffman as representing the *l'imagination au pouvoir* of the 1968 students' revolt – but although Dr. Hoffman offers hope to the city under control of the tyrannically rationalist Minister, he is, rather unambiguously by the end, the villain of the novel. David Punter reads *Hoffman* “as a series of figures for the defeat of the political aspirations of the 1960s, and in particular of the father-figures of liberation, Reich and Marcuse” (1985, 31; see also Schmidt 1989, 60-1). To this list we could add Barthes and Lacan. But critics like Punter seem to think that Hoffman is the hero of

the novel, a crusading manipulator of the “Real” (see Punter 1985, 33). Schmidt claims that such critics mistakenly believe that Desiderio kills Hoffman “because he is unable to recognise the liberating effects of the Doctor’s plans” (1989, 61).

It is therefore my wish to demonstrate that fantastic, magic realist, literature can do much more than merely *tell* or *expel* desire, as per Jackson’s orthodox psychoanalytic belief that simply rationalising the unconscious (Freud) or naming desire (Lacan) constitutes a “cure.” There may be some texts in which the simple articulation of desire or transgression of authority *is* the be-all and end-all, but I find that the texts that make this their focus conspicuously belong to another age and are simply not as complex or interesting as much magic realist fiction today. Contemporary magic realism moves beyond transgression, and I want to shift the measure of the fantastic’s political impact from the pseudo-subversion of transgression to the degree to which it can create potential spaces and enact significant change, both psychic and cultural.

Magic Realism as Potential Space: Uncertainty, Narrative Strategies and Time

There are many ways in which magic realism can be read in terms of potential spaces and transitional phenomena. In the follow section, I will explore a variety of these, focussing especially on narrative strategies and conceptualisations of time in magic realist novels.

Dialogic Narrative and Liminality

I'm telling you stories. Trust me.

(Winterson 1987, 5, 13, 69, etc.)

Don't believe that one.

(Winterson 1987, 23)

“What happened to the omniscient author?”

“Gone interactive.”

(Winterson 2000, 27)

First and perhaps most importantly, magic realist texts have the ability to open potential spaces by employing narrative strategies that themselves exhibit and invite playfulness and creative participation. Many of these qualities are commonly found among contemporary texts (which sometimes leads to uneasy distinctions between magic realism and postmodern literature), but can be found, I think, in a magnified form in the texts that I have analysed here. Jackson, Armitt and hosts of others focus on the transgressive qualities of language and the narrative structures, and while these are sometimes illuminating in their own way, I wish to shift the focus onto the narrative strategies that show evidence of the dialogism and play that I discussed in Part I, where the narrative voice invites creative participation of other subjects by opening potential spaces, gaps in both wholly objective (realist) and wholly fantastic (marvellous) discourses.

A dialogic narrative demonstrates that language is always shared, and that

meaning is generated in the creative, constructive play between subjects using language as the shared transitional object, and often in magic realist texts, explicit attention is drawn to these qualities of language. The dialogic narrative opens potential spaces for the generation of meaning by negotiating the paradoxes between self and other, subject and object, phantasy and reality. In such texts, the author, the readers and the characters participate in this play, and the text is presented as safe space in which this creativity will be facilitated, not squashed by the authority of one who insists upon compliance with a discourse that he or she aspires to exclaim monologically.

First person narration, so often to be found in the magic realist novels I have looked at, creates narratives that are explicitly and radically dialogic. Being personal, unreliable, delusional, drugged, obsessional or otherwise “flawed,” the first-person narrative is porous and subjective, punching holes in the very notion of a perfect, smooth objective discourse that seeks to seal the spaces for uncertainty and play. Lorna Sage, writing on Angela Carter’s fiction, observes the paradox of the “archaic powers of the narrator whose authority rests precisely on *disclaiming* individual authority” (Sage 1994, 2). As Todorov says, the

represented (“dramatised”) narrator is therefore quite suitable to the fantastic. He [sic] is preferable to the simple character, who can easily lie [...] But he is also preferable to the non-represented narrator, and this is for two reasons. First, if a supernatural event were reported to us by such a narrator, we should immediately be in the marvellous; there would be no occasion, in fact, to doubt his words. But the fantastic, as we know, requires doubt [...] Secondly, and this is related to the very definition of the fantastic, the first-person narrator most readily permits the reader to identify with the character, since as we know the pronoun “I” belongs to everyone.

(Todorov 1973, 83-4)

Whether the “I” is explicitly spoken by the narrator, or we are given a limited third-person narrator that focuses upon a single character, the invitation extended to the reader to identify with a character is an important aspect of the fantastic. Often this

character is the seemingly “average man” Todorov identifies, to whom magical things happen –even Harry Potter lived as an ordinary Muggle before learning of his identity as a famous wizard. This invitation is also extended in countless other texts, as Walser in *Nights at the Circus*, our “rational reader-in-the-text” (Williams 1995, 94), and Nicholas in *The Magus* are also quintessential rationalists whose scepticism must be overcome before they can engage creatively with their worlds. Todorov saw this “integration of the reader into the world of characters” as the (first) prerequisite of all fantastic literature, and the first or limited third person narration heightens the uncertainty of the (implied) reader through identification.

Winterson also warns against the tyranny of an authoritative voice and “the danger of automatic writing. The danger of writing yourself towards an ending that need never be told” (2000, 53). Stories that are concluded are closed, monolithic in structure and meaning. Winterson warns against the seductive satisfaction such writing strategies entice us towards.

At a certain point the story gathers momentum. It convinces itself, and does its best to convince you, that the end in sight is the only possible outcome. There is a fatefulness and a loss of control that are somehow comforting. This was your script, but now it writes itself.

Stop.

(Winterson 2000, 53)

The omniscient author, Winterson feels, must “go interactive,” leaving spaces in stories and narrative structures for the readers who are, ideally, networked co-conspirators in writing the maps that detail real and imagined adventures (see below). A story is thus “a tightrope between two worlds” – “always you, always me, always this story” (2000, 119). Her prescription is to “Break the narrative. Refuse all stories that have been told so far (because that is what the momentum really is), and try to tell the story differently – in a different style, with different weights – and allow some air to those elements choked with centuries of use, and give some substance to the floating world” (2000, 53). Leave gaps, uncertainties, spaces in the narratives into which others can plug themselves and their own experience. These are the characteristics of the narratives demanded by Bakhtin’s dialogism and the

irresolvable paradoxes of magical realism.¹¹

A first-person narration expands the possibilities for uncertainty in a magic realist text. When Nicholas Urfe begins *The Magus* unremarkably relaying the fact that “I was born in 1927, the only child of middle-class parents, both English [...]” (Fowles 1977, 15), we do not doubt later that Nicholas is telling us, as accurately as he can, of deceptions that he suffered under Maurice Conchis. The juxtaposition of “magical” events emerging from this realist narrative therefore challenges our rationalist expectations to an even greater extent, and we are left with the uncertainty that either these supernatural beliefs are to be taken literally as truth, which we will always doubt, or that our narrator is in fact unreliable, despite having previously convinced us otherwise. When in the opening pages of David Mitchell’s *Ghostwritten* (1999) the narrator boasts of telepathic powers, we assume we are listening to a narrator suffering from fanatical religious delusions or misinterpretations of the uncanny, though over time we come to doubt our own certainty. Upon first relating to the reader that a turbot in an aquarium smiled at him, George Singer, the narrator of John Murray’s *John Dory*, breaks off his narrative temporarily:

At this point let’s just pause and pose the obvious questions.

Let’s marshall the proper forensic detail. Had I been drinking? Was I hallucinating? Was I without my prescription spectacles? Had I a long history of mental instability? Was it a whimsical trick of the light or a crassly poetic example of emotion projection?

No, emphatically, is the answer to all of those [...]

(Murray 2001, 22)

Interestingly, the narrator’s daughter – a “young psychologist of twenty-eight who has already published weighty books on child development and Melanie Klein” – greets her father’s revelation not with rational disbelief but “playful scepticism” (2001, 23). Joanne Harris shows that alcohol-induced uncertainty is not necessarily a sign of degradation or delusion. In *Blackberry Wine*, Harris shows us wine itself talks.

It ventriloquizes. It has a million voices. It unleashes the tongue, teasing out secrets you never meant to tell, secrets you never even knew. It shouts, rants, whispers. It speaks of great things, splendid

plans, tragic loves and terrible betrayals. It screams with laughter. It chuckles softly to itself. It weeps in front of its own reflection.

(Harris 2000, 9)

While in this novel wine really does talk, a bottle of blackberry wine assuming the burden of first-person narration, this is of course a metaphor for the magic that can be inspired by the potions and alchemy of everyday magic – a topic to which I will return later.

A powerful example of first person narration heightening the uncertainty of a magic realist work can be seen in Patrick McGrath's gothic-revival novel *Martha Peake* (2000). In this novel, a polyphony of first-person voices weaves loose narrative threads and ideas, as much if not more often based on the imagination of our narrators as on fact. In the very first sentences of the novel, we are told that the writing of a history is a "black art," resurrecting the dead and reanimating their bones (McGrath 2000, 3). Our narrator, Ambrose Tree, competes with his uncle William to tell a story that each sees in his own way, that each *needs* to see in a particular way. We cannot trust the uncle, who, despite having first-hand knowledge of events, we suspect of insincerity, he is dying, his memory failing, his intake of drink and opium increasing and his moral and ideological outrage at the liberal revolution in the American colonies clashes with the new generation, represented by his nephew, who shares the idealisation of the romantic tide sweeping Europe. Ambrose, beginning the narrative with some tendencies towards eighteenth-century rationalism like his scientific uncle, reviews the facts, and begins to doubt his uncle's story:

His story, it is true, had held together well enough, given the generous assistance of a sympathetic imagination like my own; but I had detected certain omissions, certain small inconsistencies, and anomalies, and all at once the old man's cavalier references to the vagaries of a failing memory seemed suspect.

(McGrath 2000, 56)

Ambrose also begins to suspect that his uncle is withholding information in order to cover up his own complicity in a ghastly, grotesque tragedy. We soon also begin to suspect Ambrose's reliability as a reader/listener as he falls ill and is dragged under

the spell of narcotics,. His uncle's narrative only comes to us from the pages of Ambrose's notebook – "A few fevered jottings, clawed from the chaos that illness wreaks in the mind, and from which a full rich body of memory springs forth, at leisure;" it is only long after he had recovered that he subjects these reports to "the rigours both of reason and of the sympathetic passions, and thus rendered coherent" (130).

When his uncle is unable to relay Martha's experiences in America, having no first hand knowledge of these events or, more accurately, being unwilling to tell the story in a manner satisfying to Ambrose, the generous assistance of Ambrose's imagination multiplies and Ambrose takes it upon himself to tell the story he wishes to hear from the tantalising fragments available to him.

I began to feel that all was not lost; that with the aid of these crumbling scraps, and the exercise of my own sympathetic passions, there might yet be a way of coming at the knowledge of what Martha Peake did in America, and what was done to her; and I came at last to the decision that, like Martha, I would go on alone. I would write her story myself. Armed with these fragments I would trust my own intuitive grasp of the drift and meaning of her experiences in America, and give them life with my pen.

(McGrath 2000, 147)

Although Ambrose more-or-less accepts that this story is complete patchwork of guesses and conjecture, he is nevertheless surprised and dismissive when his uncle criticises or contradicts his account. But the once rationalist, fact-driven Ambrose accepts a degree of uncertainty in the more noble endeavour of telling, or imagining, the story:

All this I discussed with my uncle, and he supposed, he said, that this was how it might have happened, there was little here he could take exception to. It was *plausible*, he allowed, his tone suggesting that plausibility was but a poor cousin to *truth*. But truth being a prize beyond our grasp – as I then said to him – then plausibility, surely, was as good as we could hope for?

(McGrath 2000, 167)

The two narratives are thus set into competition. As Uncle William “rambled, often erratically, over the matter at hand, with many digressions and, as always, a frequent application to the Hollands-and-water,” Ambrose, later in his room, “gave literary flesh to what I had heard, bringing to bear upon his few sticks of ill-remembered fact the full powers of imagination – intuition – sympathy – and art [...] Thus did his sticks come to life; thus did they flower” (181). As the novel progresses, Ambrose more frequently interrupts his uncle’s narratives with his own digressions and *vice versa*. They become increasingly hostile to one another and one another’s stories. Thus we have two narrators, neither of whom we can trust and outside of whose stories we have no external, objective confirmation of facts. And we therefore have two narratives, and nowhere can the reader locate the “truth” with any certainty.

Finally, most contemporary authors that we might identify as magic realist demonstrate a keen awareness of postmodernism, psychoanalysis, structuralism and other critical and philosophical discourses that we normally take to be the preserve of literary critics, and seek to create texts that resist our often cant-laden readings and restrictive strategies. For example, *Nights at the Circus* resists a purely Bakhtinian reading of the circus as carnivalesque; *The Magus* resists a purely Jungian reading of subjectivity and analysis; *Tipping the Velvet* flirts with and frustrates queer theory at every turn. This drags the literary critic from the comfort of a jargon-induced stupor into a creative, although perhaps anxiety-ridden, paradox-filled play. As both Todorov’s definition of fantastic literature and Winnicott’s conception of the potential space indicate, paradox must be allowed to exist *without closure*, without resolution, and this includes not only the reader’s uncertainty as to the ontological status of events that they read about, but should also include an uncertainty on the part of the literary critic as to how they may “brand” what it is they are reading. Again, while this may be something we can say of a great deal of contemporary literature, it is perhaps exemplified in magic realism; the mode itself resists classification, as either a realist or marvellous, and sometimes even as a strictly defined “magic realist” work.

Time in Magic Realist Narratives

Some sort of temporal uncertainty or displacement, for either characters or readers, is present in almost all the novels I consider here, and this too can open potential spaces. Todorov equates the fantastic with the *present*, in that the present is a “pure limit between the past and the future” (1973, 42). The fantastic is like the present in that it must negotiate an ambiguous space between the marvellous, which is like the future in that it involves unknown phenomena not yet seen or still to come, and the uncanny, the past that can explained by known fact.¹² But also for Todorov, “time seems to be suspended, it extends beyond what one imagines to be possible” (118). Todorov’s position here sits very well with the orthodox psychoanalytic approach to the fantastic, which regards these temporal eruptions in much the same way they regard the transgressions against the established symbolic order. Jackson theorises that “Chronological time is [...] exploded, with time past, present and future losing their historical sequence and tending towards a suspension, an eternal present” (1981, 47). Fantastic narratives are thus often regarded via structuralism and orthodox psychoanalysis to be ahistoric and/or atemporal (see also Armit 1996). But this is only true in that a *particular* conceptualisation of time is suspended, those constructions typical of the patriarchal, bourgeois Enlightenment.

Freud’s conceptualisations of the past’s bearing upon the present began a radical shift in our conceptions of time and linearity. However, orthodox psychoanalytic theory implicitly complies with notions of time that can firmly be situated within the Enlightenment notion of *progress*, a myth that was central to the bourgeois conception of the world. Monleón shows how the Enlightenment ushered in a new era that

departed significantly from the medieval idea of a single divine creation to outline a world of progress, change and constant transformation. These efforts at establishing history fell, on the one hand, within the broader trend consolidating bourgeois culture as the ultimate expression of civilization. But it also opened the way for the possibility of envisaging history as a process, a journey within

different and contradictory stages, a procession whose characteristics are in constant transformation. The seeds that allowed bourgeois society to conceive of itself as another link in the chain of time were thus sown.

(Monleón 1990, 44)

We can see glimpses in the early post-Enlightenment fantastic narratives and gothic literature of this myth coming under assault by the forces of irrationality. The myth of progress being as unstable as the bourgeois order that it propped up, there was a constant, underlying fear that the processes of evolution would eventually find a replacement for bourgeois hegemony. Darwin, Marx and Freud, world wars and other catastrophes force us to accept the possibility that the march of progress has not gloriously culminated in the bourgeois civilisation but that this form of social organisation was itself transitory, a stage in the process and not the *telos*. Marx, adopting himself the bourgeois voice of reason and turning it against itself, articulated this fear with the theory of the dialectic movement of history, similarly based upon the myth of progress and positing instead the rise of the proletariat as the end of history. And perhaps the insecurity of the myth explains the nineteenth century obsessive fear of criminals, savages (for example, “lower” races) and human animalisation (for example, masturbation, transgressing the incest taboo) stemming from the possibility that the evolution of the human species might also not inevitably progress forward, but backward, the human race “devolving” into a pre-civilised form, to medieval epistemologies or oral/anal/genital fixations.¹³ Freud’s own obsessions are indicative of this, and the contemporary cry to “Objectify your desire!” suggests that we other Victorians are perhaps not as different as we would like to believe. “No order is permanent; the new reign of the monstrous is perfectly plausible; bourgeois civilisation is not the culmination of historical development but just another link in the chain of evolution” (Monleón 1990, 93).

For Freud, Lacan and classical psychoanalysis in general, although one can become fixated upon a particular stage of development, a lack of progress is always pathologised and there is always the attempt to draw the subject into compliance with the inevitable march of subjective evolution (development). In Freud’s conception of

the oral, anal, genital model of infantile development, the subject follows a linear, predestined pattern through various stages, and any return to or fixation upon any one stage is regarded as a pathological “fetish” or “regression.” The initiation into the Oedipal stage, especially as it is misconceived by Lacan in the bar between the symbolic and the imaginary, is also indicative of this belief in progress. Just as the bourgeois order posits capitalism as the *telos* of history, and Marxism (the rational voice of socialism) posits the rule of the proletariat,¹⁴ so too Freud and Lacan imagine the phallic stage and symbolic order as the end-point in subjective development. Of course, for both there is the threat of regression, and this is appropriately pathologised.

Some psychoanalytic theorists have attempted to subvert these categories by highlighting the niggling threat to this patriarchal system posed by the influence of the irrational leftover: the pre-Oedipal experience, the real. However, and perhaps this is obvious at this point, the rigid demarcation between pre-Oedipal and post-Oedipal stages is dependant upon the theoretical structures of the Oedipal myth for legitimacy, as the real is entirely constructed from the leftover of the symbolic (and is hence deemed “impossible”). How significantly can “pre-Oedipal” experience challenge the Oedipal norm when the very categorisation of experience as *pre-Oedipal* accepts and supports the normalisation of the Oedipal?

Like Lacan’s real, time and history in the fantastic are too often regarded as the impossible, the ahistorical, the Nebulous Time of the subject who exists only for himself without relation to the outside world – usually conceived in terms of a primary narcissistic fusion with the mother (for example, Jackson and Armit). And of course, it would be naïve of me to ignore the existence of texts that do seek this “realm of pleasure.” However, these texts share with the idea of primary narcissism a belief in such a non-existent atemporal space of pre-Oedipal bliss, as if transgression or subversion of the patriarchal order of time and progress was itself enough to undo it. Most of the contemporary texts I examined for this study, however, acknowledge that such a subversion is futile and ultimately unproductive, for example, Carter’s Nebulous Time in *Infernal Desire Machines*, or Nan’s period as a kept mistress of a rich Sapphist in *Tipping the Velvet*. Ironically, the “seasonless routines of Felicity

Place” (Waters 1998, 298) are induced by Diana (the Roman goddess of seasons¹⁵), and it Diana’s gift of a wrist watch that forces Nancy to negotiate the paradoxes of time. While at first she does not wind this watch, seeing it as merely a piece of jewellery and useless in the eternal pleasures of Felicity Place, she later discovers the importance of both forms of time – the “old order of things” *and* the “*timeless* quality of [her] new life” (282-3).

Rather than looking at these texts simply in terms of the historical versus the ahistorical, temporal versus the atemporal, therefore, I wish to examine these fantastic narratives in light of the need to find a balance between these two conceptualisations of time. In the Kleinian narrative of infantile development and adult experience, Klein maintains Freud’s developmental stages, and some sort of evolutionary development *is part* of human experience. However, Klein posits in addition to this progression a model in which we can observe a constant vacillation between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions. Again, while temporal suspension may represent a transgression of the laws of time, I find that it shows a deep-seated dependence upon – and hence support for – the patriarchal, bourgeois conceptualisation of progress. Klein’s conceptualisation, on the other hand, represents a real re-evaluation. Rather than following the direct linearity and evolutionary progress of phallic logic as suggested by Freud and Lacan, a Kleinian approach emphasises the necessity of an ongoing *negotiation* between positions. Jo Nash succinctly explains that

Klein and Bion both argued that there is no natural linear temporal path of development where there is always a straightforward transition, as maturity increases, from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position. Rather, all intersubjective relations oscillate between these two positions all our adult lives. They both argued that it is not possible to achieve permanent depressive position relations between adults [...] Linear concepts of time as a “climactic” yardstick of developmental progress are elided by oscillations between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive position. Instead psychodynamic developmental time is cyclical, involving a continuous dynamic

process of regressive recovering and renewal, driven by the recognition of inevitable loss, the depressive “mourning,” that underpins all creative psychological change.

(Nash 1999, 172)¹⁶

The undoing of the “phallogentric psychic economy driven by the dominant phantasy of the omnipotent powers of the penis-phallus” (Nash 1999, 172) likewise for Nash serves to undermine the phallic rationality that is supported by this fundamental developmental schema (see Nash 1999 and Part I of this study). Klein also significantly re-cast Freud’s developmental *stages* in terms of *positions*. A position, Juliet Mitchell says, “is an always available state” (1986, 116), or as Villanelle explains in Winterson’s *The Passion*, “The future is foretold from the past and the future is only possible because of the past. Without past and future, the present is partial. All time is eternally present and so all time is ours” (Winterson 1987, 62). Notice she says that *all* time is “eternally present,” not just the pre-Oedipal, pre-symbolic experience.

Although Klein initially maintained the classical orthodox position with regard to the Oedipal complex, she significantly modified this in her later work in some ways which are important here. Klein shows that the Oedipal complex, or constellation, and subsequently the genesis of the super-ego, begins much earlier than Freud has initially envisioned. (The preference expressed by many contemporary object-relations theorists for the term and conceptualisation of the Oedipal *constellation* over that of the Oedipal *complex* itself a revision of rigid, linear categories in this regard.) Whereas Freud posited that the super-ego arose in response to the internalisation of the threat posed by the father in the genital phase, Klein sees the genesis of the Oedipal phase in the pre-genital (oral and anal) stages of development and the super-ego, therefore, to originate from earlier, maternal, persecution. This view is sternly resisted by orthodox psychoanalysis, not only as a contradiction of Freudian theory, but more significantly, I suspect, as it significantly diminishes the importance of the Father and the penis in the psychic development of the infant and the singular, phallic logic of reason. The Freudian and Lacanian fulcrums of the Father’s law, castration anxiety and penis envy all therefore assume a

secondary importance as a consequence of this Kleinian revision, which upsets the patriarchal psychoanalytic tenets of linear evolution and the possibility of fatherly, objective language (as opposed to maternal care) as a basis for conducting psychoanalysis.¹⁷ Klein's reconceptualisation of the Oedipal complex and the super-ego, setting it so early and as a gradual process where no severe breaks or end-point are clearly discernible, has also had the effect of drastically eroding the convenient boundary between the pre-Oedipal and the Oedipal to the point where, I think, the distinction (like Winnicott's conceptualisation of the psyche-soma) is "not to be distinguished except according the direction from which one is looking" (Winnicott 1949, 244).

It is important to note that Kleinian theory is not positing a simple *ahistorical* transgression of the Enlightenment conceptualisation of time. Juliet Mitchell, in her introduction to a collection of Melanie Klein's essays, falls into this trap, making the mistake of failing to see how Klein's theory marks a substantial shift in this regard. Klein is *not* offering us a conceptualisation of "pre-Oedipal" time as *ahistoric*. Mitchell's belief, that "infancy is a perpetual present" (1986, 26), which I think she derives from Lacan, ignores Klein's important contribution that more accurately reflects infantile experience and *negotiating* these notions of time. Mitchell's reading of Klein maintains the very patriarchal constructions of history that I have described Klein as working against. Mitchell thinks that "Psychically speaking, there is no past until after the repression of Oedipal wishes by the castration complex" (1986, 26), which reaffirms the penis as the centre of human psychic life that Klein sought to displace. For Mitchell, "The castration complex destroys the phantasy of an eternally satisfying relationship with the mother," which Kleinians and object-relations theorists know does not exist: Castration "introduces the command," issued by the father, "that the Oedipus complex be over and done with [...] because of the Oedipus and castration complexes, only humans have yesterdays" (Mitchell 1986, 26) – a patriarchal fallacy that Klein works to undermine. Mitchell therefore reads Klein wholly within the orthodox psychoanalytic position. Her belief in the supreme tragedy of the castration complex, the primacy of the father in the Oedipal prohibitions and the implicit over-importance placed upon language all undermine

Klein's significant deviations from Freud and his orthodox followers.

The solution to the oppressive rationalist, patriarchal progression of time lies, I think, in another negotiation in a potential space, between the extremes of historical progress and ahistorical infinitude. "Naming the new woman's history 'herstory'", Linda Gordon correctly realises, "does us no favours" (Gordon 1986, 20). Wanting to negotiate a space between patriarchal history and a conception of women's narratives as *ahistoric*, Gordon represents what Kristeva describes as a "third generation" of the feminist movement, who "do not exclude – quite to the contrary – the *parallel* existence of all three in the same historical time, or even that they be interwoven one with the other" (Kristeva 1979, 209).¹⁸ Echoing Angela Carter's re-examination of fairy tales, Gordon recognises that "most historiographical progress – perhaps most intellectual progress – proceeds by rearranging relationships within old stories, not by writing new stories. The old stories have been ours, too" (Gordon 1986, 20-1). And uncannily echoing Winnicott, Gordon says

I would like to find a method in between. This in-between would not imply resolution, careful balance of fact and myth, or synthesis of fact and interpretation. My sense of a liminal method is rather a condition of being constantly pulled, usually off balance, sometimes teetering wildly, almost always tense. The tension cannot be released. Indeed, the very desire to find a way to relax the tension is a temptation that must be avoided. Neither goal can be surrendered. It is wrong to conclude, as some have, that because there may be no objective truth possible, there are not objective lies. There may be no objective canon of historiography, but there are degrees of accuracy; there are better and worse pieces of history. The challenge is precisely to maintain this tension between accuracy and mythic power.

(Gordon 1986, 22)

Most importantly, Gordon shares the recognition with Winnicott that the negotiation of paradox must give rise to anxiety, and that this anxiety is not to be relieved. The desire to find a way to relax that tension is a defence mechanism employed by worshippers of reason and unreason alike.

Object-relations theory can, I argue along with Nash, work to enact and support this significant and necessary epistemological shift in how we perceive time and history, and this shift is mirrored, I think, in most of the literature I examine here. The f/phantasy of an imaginary union is shared by orthodox psychoanalysis and texts that do not seek anything other than to indulge the phantastic desires of the subject – we can call this the “fantasy of phantasy.” Contemporary magic realist fiction, like Kleinian psychoanalysis, erodes the artificially defended boundaries of time, highlighting the paradox of subjective experience.

Fevvers, Carter’s winged(?) protagonist in *Nights at the Circus*, tells us that “I never docked via what you might call the *normal channels*, sir, oh, dear me, no; but, just like Helen of Troy, was *hatched*” (Carter 1984, 7):

Hatched; by whom I don't know. Who *laid* me is as much a mystery to me, sir, as the nature of my conception, my father and my mother both utterly unknown to me, and, some would say, unknown to nature, what's more.

(Carter 1984, 21)

By “hatching” Fevvers, Carter is offering a view of a character who lies outside the patriarchal pattern of history as it is conceived by the Oedipal constellation, but without offering instead a simple transgression of Oedipal relations. She is raised by half-a-dozen mothers, but avoids the explicit censure of the father, represented only by Ma Nelson’s sometimes-working clock, toy sword, and Lizzie’s rationalist Marxism. Similarly, we eventually witness Walser’s transformation, or rebirth, by his own “hatching” at the novel’s conclusion, quite literally, *under* Fevvers. Fevvers says:

Let him hand himself over into my safekeeping, and I will transform him. You said yourself he was unhatched, Lizzie; very well – I’ll *sit* on him, I’ll hatch him out, I’ll make a new man of him. I’ll make him into the New Man, in fact, fitting mate for the New Woman.

(Carter 1984, 281)

Thus, when Fevvers and Lizzie, whether by pure magic or by invention, arrest the march of the phallic Big Ben while they relate their narrative to a still sceptical Walser, they are not simply adding yet another spectacular dimension to their

narrative and Fevvers' credibility as a "legitimate" wonder. They serve notice that their narrative is not one to be driven by the singular logic of Walser's much-loved rationality, a phallic conception that attempts to exclude the possibility of play by casting its monolithic shadow of the father upon the city for which it is the centre, driving force of progress. (The extent to which the city of London is itself a space where reason or potential play reigns I address below.) Carter, like Klein, thus cracks the rock upon which the Western philosophical tradition of rationalism is constructed by working outside a particular conceptualisation of linear development and the myth of "progress" – but not simply transgressing it. In this way, Carter recasts the mythic phallic thrust of history and offers *in addition* an alternative history of cyclicity and progress.

The Chance sisters are another example of a negotiation of Oedipal dictates: They are the "wise children" that know their father, challenging patriarchal and bourgeois lineage. Dora Chance announces early in her narrative that the grandfather clock dominating her front hall is "the only castrato grandfather clock in London" (Carter 1991, 4), and similarly does not feel the need to "legitimise" her self or her story by reference to rationalist time. They are the illegitimate daughters of the legitimate stage, but they do not literally contravene the incest taboo. Dora makes do with her Uncle Perry, her other father.¹⁹ Nan in Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* relates a similar story, with a significant difference:

Although I didn't long believe the story told to me by my Mother – that they had found me as a baby in an oyster-shell, and a greedy customer had almost eaten me for lunch – for eighteen years I never doubted my own oysterish sympathies, never looked far beyond my father's kitchen for occupation, or for love.

(Waters 1998, 4)

Although Nan may be situated outside the traditional Oedipal conflict, it is seemingly not necessary, as her father does not appear as the phallic father who needs to be evaded (for example, her *father's* kitchen). Kitty Butler, Nan's lover, also evades the Freudian Oedipal triangle: "She had been born, she said, in Rochester, to a family of entertainers. Her mother (she did not mention a father) had died while she was still

quite a baby, and she had been raised by her grandmother” (39). This invites further parallels with Carter’s *Wise Children*, especially when Nan and Kitty take up residence in Brixton, also the home of Nora and Dora Chance. Waters is trying to subvert Freudian theories of homosexuality as a mis-take in Oedipal identification, and perhaps she is also paying tribute to Carter.

The failure to recognise this alternate view of history, and positing a “perpetual present” is instead characteristic of a space, a void, where creativity is negated – for Carter in *Infernal Desire Machines*, this is “Nebulous Time,” or in *Nights at the Circus*, this is Siberia, where none of the natives “knew in what way their past differed from their present” (Carter 1984, 258); “rather, they inhabited a temporal dimension which did not take history into account. They were a-historic. Time means nothing to them” (265). And the “perpetual present” for the pre-Oedipal infant in narcissistic fusion with the mother recalls – and as I will argue later is criticised by Carter – the city under the influence of Dr. Hoffman’s desiring machines. In this “kingdom of the instantaneous” there is always and only the promise of the realisation of one’s narcissistic desire (Carter 1972, 18). Dr. Hoffman only transgresses phallic time, betraying a dependence on the existing order; he does not offer an alternative to it, as Klein and Carter do.

“Jeanette,”²⁰ the protagonist of Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, was also a “foundling,” adopted by her mother (see Winterson 1985, 3-4; 98). Jeanette similarly avoids the Oedipal triangle, as her father does not really figure in this early life-history, and Jeanette’s relationship to her mother provides ample evidence to support Klein’s (and Freud’s very late) assertion that the mother is not only the first but also the most harsh prohibiter. Jeanette’s knowledge of her adoption was key, she explains, in that it represented the first time in her life she experienced any sort of “uncertainty.” “Uncertainty to me was like Aardvark to other people. A curious thing I had no notion of, but recognised through second hand illustration” (1985, 98). Her strict religious upbringing teaches Jeanette that “Uncertainty was what the Heathen felt, and I was chosen by God” (98). As with the uncertainty regarding her sexuality, the uncertainty inflicted upon Jeanette by this “Awful Occasion” is at first rejected and despised; it is however, her status as an adopted

child – and later her sexuality – that provides an opportunity to crack the smooth surface of her mother’s authoritarian, religious discourse.

There are other temporal events and situations in magic realist fiction that create potential gaps in the monolithic march of patriarchal, rationalist time, and I can only begin to point to some here. The very years in which *Nights at the Circus* and *Tipping the Velvet* are set, that is, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, are meant to place the characters, along with the reader, in an uneasy time of anxious uncertainty (without wishing to concede anything to the popular and politically naïve pseudo-theory that our age is characterised by “millennial anxiety”). Fowles’ *The Magus* also revisits the borders of history, as all periods and historical eras are to be found on Bourani, visited by the ghosts of Victorian girls and Nazi soldiers.

A solar eclipse inspires many mythologies, and features in many magic realist texts. It represents a suspension of time, a moment when other versions and visions of history can be explored in a space that is not dominated by the usual march of the sun across the sky. The birth of Villanelle, the web-footed daughter of a Venetian gondolier in Jeanette Winterson’s *The Passion* (1987), coincided with the eclipse of the sun. In Pauline Melville’s *The Ventriloquist’s Tale* (1997), it is during a solar eclipse that a brother and sister escape to the jungle and indulge their incestuous desire. In *Nights at the Circus*, the narrator describes how “Everywhere [Fevvers] went, rivers parted for her, wars were threatened, suns eclipsed [...]” (Carter 1984, 11). However, as these examples demonstrate, solar eclipses are temporary transgressions against time. It also demonstrates that such transgressions cannot be permanent – as the cessation of the earth’s rotation would imply.

The Setting of Magic Realist Novels: Reason, Unreason and Between

Magic realist literature explicitly and forcibly draws attention to the epistemological *and* ontological limits of experience, to the vicissitudes of *me* and *not-me*, subjective and objective – but this literature, especially in its most contemporary manifestations, also negotiates between the generic categories of “magic” and “realism.” Often these novels are set in a location that further explores or represents this necessary paradox. In the following section, I want to look at some of the spaces that are offered in magic realist novels and the attempt to negotiate between the vicissitudes of bourgeois, patriarchal, capitalist reason and simple transgressive unreason. I will first examine how rationality and irrationality are represented and can be located in magic realist texts, but I wish to demonstrate how a third, potential space is employed in contemporary magic realist narratives as a third, meaningful alternative to the established order.

The Spaces of Reason

I was a young girl, a virgin, and therefore men denied me rationality
just as they denied it to all those who were not exactly like
themselves, in all their unreason.

(Carter 1979, 165)

In many early gothic and fantastic narratives, critics have pointed out how the worlds of reason and unreason can be clearly located in the text, usually in clearly demarcated spaces that can often be recognised from one text to another. For example, although Monleón points out that the symbols of the bourgeois world are absent in the earliest post-Enlightenment fantastic narratives, the city increasingly becomes the focus of rationality in magic realist fiction from the gothic onwards, a reflection of the increasing purge of unreason and the metamorphoses of cities into sanctuaries of rational, correct thinking. Again following Foucault, Monleón points out how cities were structurally and architecturally transformed through the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to become such spaces. Since the eighteenth century the city has become the spiritual home of rationality, an island of reason, encircled by unreason in the urban periphery and backward, rural life. Even as unreason invades and infects the alleys and sewers and trade unions of the cities in the nineteenth century, the city remains the ideal and idealised space of reason, the irrational kept largely in “‘the unknown country’ of the bas-fonds” (Monleón 1990, 63).²¹ Although I find Monleón overestimates the success of this challenge to the bourgeois order, he recognises that “Urban life was, without any doubt, a standard for civilisation, at least when applied to certain quarters; but urban life also means enduring the pestilence of concentration, or the possibility of catching ‘*la maladie anglaise*’” (67).

This location of reason is still found in contemporary magic realist texts from around the world. The city in many texts is the cultural home of the rationalist and/or imperial oppressor and, as such, negates the internal cultural objects. Melville’s *The Ventriloquist’s Tale*, set in South America, explains how the city was built so as to control the irrational natives found there. Joanne Harris depicts Lansquenet-sous-Tannes as a construct of the French Enlightenment reason: “the town planners had a fierce republican streak” (1999, 39). Vianne tells us as we imagine a town, like Paris, planned in minute detail to conform to the highest logic. “Knowledge is currency here” (1999, 14), Vianne realises immediately. Most overtly, in Carter’s *Infernal Desire Machines*, the unnamed city is the target for the Dr. Hoffman’s assault because it is the home of disembodied rationalism, and hence, Carter, via her narrator Desiderio, explicitly links this form of disembodied rationalism with patriarchy, capitalism and desubjectification.

It was a solid, drab, yet not unfriendly city. It throve on business. It was prosperous. It was thickly, obtusely masculine. Some cities are women and must be loved; others men and can only be admired or bargained with and my city settled serge-clad buttocks at vulgar ease as if in a leather armchair. His pockets were stuffed with money and his belly with rich food. Historically, he had taken a circuitous path to arrive at such smug, impenetrable, bourgeois

affluence; he started life a slaver, a pimp, a gun-runner, a murderer and a pirate, a rakish villain, the exiled scum of Europe – and look at him lording it! The city was built on a tidal river and the slums and the area around the docks still pullulated with blacks, browns and Orientals who lived in picturesque squalor the city fathers in their veranda'd suburbs contrived to ignore. Yet the city, now, was rich, even if it was ugly; but it was just a little nervous, all the same.

(Carter 1972, 16)

The city is shown as a product of bourgeois capitalism and is identified as male – the son of patriarchal rationality. Like the subject, the city that marginalises and represses the unwanted, threatening objects – the blacks and browns and Orientals – fears these objects' return. Hoffman's Ambassador describes this return of the repressed thus: "And if you disintegrate the images with your lasers and your infra red rays, they only revert to their constituent parts and soon come together again in another form which you yourself have rendered even more arbitrary by your interference" (Carter 1972, 37). The city, although hyperbolised throughout the novel, accurately reflects so many in Western Europe and the Americas.

The radically rationalist city and the social institutions which support it are thus established as a manic defence against the hostile or indifferent world. As Winnicott insists, however, this does not mean that they cannot also provide a facilitating space for an experience of subjectivity. As Desiderio explains, some cities are women, facilitating, while others are men, oppressive and demanding. Some cities, like mothers, are capable of facilitating and holding and offering space for creative experience – for example, representations of St Petersburg, Venice or turn-of-the-century London – these I examine in the following sections. The Minister's city is the latter, a patriarchal offering certainty and a defence against the hostile world beyond reason and the city limits.

The world, that is, of earthquake and cataclysm, cyclone and devastation; the violent matrix, the real world of unmastered, unmasterable physical stress that is entirely inimical to man because of its indifference. Ocean, forest, mountain, weather – these are the

inflexible institutions of that world of unquestionable reality which is so far removed from the social institutions which make up our own world that we men must always, whatever our difference, conspire to ignore them. For otherwise we would be forced to acknowledge our incomparable insignificance and the insignificance of those desires that might be the pyrotechnic tigers of our world and yet, under the cold moon and the frigid round dance of the unspeakably alien planets, are nothing by toy animals cut from coloured paper.

(Carter 1972, 161-2)

In the sternly patriarchal city there can be no “love,” as such a father and his law *governs* only false selves. Again with echoes of Winnicott’s seed metaphor, Desiderio asks us to “Consider the nature of a city”:

It is a vast repository of time, the discarded times of all the men and women who have lived, worked dreamed and died in the streets which grow like a wilfully organic thing, unfurl like the petals of a mired rose and yet lack evanescence so entirely that they preserve the past in haphazard layers, so this alley is old while the avenue that runs beside it is newly built but nevertheless has been built over the deep-down, dead-in-the-ground relics of the older, perhaps the original, huddle of alleys which germinated the entire quarter.

(Carter 1972, 17)

Like the disembodied ideas and defences of rationality, these new avenues of thought bury the pathways that are the original foundations of the organic development of the city. The alleys, these original paths, are pushed to the side and neglected, repressed. What Hoffman’s machine threatens to do, which is so unfathomable to Desiderio and Minister, is to crack the smooth surfaces of the avenues and piazzas that guide the disembodied rationalist through the safe, ahistorical city. Once Dr. Hoffman’s assault upon the city has begun, “Those bluff, complaisant avenues and piazzas were suddenly fertile in metamorphoses as a magic forest” (17).

Within a city, therefore, there exist simultaneously facilitating spaces and houses of rationalist horror. Fevvers’ relations and experience of Mother Nelson’s

Academy are immediately contrasted with the brothel run by Our Lady of Terror, Madame Schreck. Whereas Mother Nelson both fosters Fevvers' engagement with the potential space and offers others a place of whole-object integration, Madame Schreck represents the unmediated indulgence of narcissistic phantasy and offers only part-object relations. Or perhaps those that come to Schreck are rationalists who are cut off from reality, bringing their "phantasy-lives to a standstill by taking refuge in the phantasies of the dark, empty mother's body" (Klein 1930, 227). Fevvers explains that Schreck "had some quality of the uncanny about her, over and above the illusion" (Carter 1984, 58):

You must understand this: Nelson's Academy accommodated those who were perturbed in their bodies and wished to verify that, however equivocal, however much they cost, the pleasures of the flesh were, at bottom, splendid. But, as for Madame Schreck, she catered for those who were troubled in their... souls.

(Carter 1984, 57; ellipsis in text)

For my purposes, this suggests that, despite the commodification at work in the social-sexual transaction of prostitution, Nelson's had at least the aim of providing a temporary re-ontologisation, an experience of psyche-somatic integration, whereas Madame Schreck's fosters "unhealthy" schizoid relations with oneself and others. It is a site of paranoid splitting and regressive phantasies, although Fevvers asserts that "there was no terror in the house our customers did not bring with them" (62), for example, Christian Rosencreutz, who buys Fevvers from Madame Schreck. The opportunity Madame Schreck offers for the indulgence of schizoid living is evident in the qualities attributed to the "freaks" that Madame Schreck hires to populate her house: a woman with eyes where nipples should be; a toy-like diminutive woman; a Sleeping Beauty.

Madame Schreck strikes me as a dead mother, who André Green describes as incapable of fostering the creativity of the children in her care. Because she is so narcissistically obsessed with her own mourning of the lost object, she cannot receive their projections and her children are unable to construct meaning. The dead mother sounds like an ideal mate for Sade himself: Green lists amongst the characteristics of

the dead mother complex “the releasing of secondary hatred, which [...] brings into play regressive wishes of incorporation, but also anal features which are coloured with manic sadism where it is a matter of dominating, soiling, taking vengeance upon the object, etc.” (Green 1986, 152).²² The dead mother’s children are also characterised by auto-erotic excitation, the “search for pure sensual pleasure at the limit, without tenderness, ruthless [...] There is a precocious dissociation between the body and the psyche, as between sensuality and tenderness, and a blocking of love” (152), which acutely describes the men who frequent Madame Schreck’s establishment. Further, this psyche-somatic splitting and quest for lost meaning creates a “compulsion to think,” an “overcathected intellectual capacity” (152) that, like Fairbairn’s concept of intellectualisation, are characteristic of Enlightenment subjects from Sade’s manor to postmodern living rooms.

Like Justine and Juliette, Madame Schreck serves her rationalist Sadeian master. Rosencreutz is the sadistic libertine who “goes to the orgy to enhance his notion of his unique and supreme self” (1979b, 146). He wears a medallion engraved with the symbol of a phallus with “little wings attached to the ballocks thereof [...] Around the shaft of this virile member twined the stem of a rose whose bloom nestled somewhat coyly at the place where the foreskin folded back. Whether the thing was ancient or I could not tell, but it represented a heavy investment” (70). Of course, Rosencreutz’s symbol(ic) is both ancient *and* modern, as it is the universal icon of the patriarchal wish – the single, monolithic penis soaring to all heights of privilege above the (non-represented) female. Ironically, Rosencreutz longs for his penis to have the powers of flight and life already possessed by Fevvers, and it is these powers that he must steal from her in order to acquire them for himself.²³

Rosencreutz, we learn, suffers from outrageous paranoid-schizoid phantasies, which manifest in not only paranoid delusions of a conspiracy of women against men (a remnant, perhaps, of maternal persecutory fears), but also psyche-somatic splitting and phantasies of omnipotence (these all, of course, are intricately related). Rosencreutz may seem to be the evil anti-thesis of Walser’s rationality, yet both employ the same psychic defence mechanisms – splitting, projection – to deal with the anxieties that present themselves and threaten to overwhelm them. He is another

disciple of Sadeian libertinism, and thus still a product of reason that he pretends to oppose. Rosencreutz is a Kleinian nightmare come to life in late nineteenth-century London. He believes in the perfect, unattainable mother's body, yet also fears the aggressive retaliatory attacks that the mother will inflict upon him. There is a fear of the nameless dread and frustration at the limitations (for example, eventual degradation and death) of the body. Rosencreutz practises the black magical arts as opposed, I suppose, to the magic that is helpful and in fact necessary in the construction of subjectivity. He believes that he can and must suck "efflorescence" from the bodies of young women (phantasies of introjection). Rosencreutz perceives Fevvers to be "Azrael, Azrail, Ashriel, Azriel, Azaril, Gabriel" (75), the Angel of Death or the persecutory object whom he must incorporate in order to control and subsequently destroy in order to guarantee the survival of his good objects, omnipotence and immortality.

Paradoxically, it *seems* that it is Fevvers' status as an object of liminal complexity that makes her the object of Rosencreutz's obsessions and makes him believe that she can save him from his nameless fears. It is Rosencreutz who hails Fevvers as the "Queen of ambiguities, goddess of in-between states, being on the borderline of species, manifestation of Arioriph, Venus, Achamatoth, Sophia" (81). He sees her as a

creature half of earth and half of air, virgin and whore, reconciler of fundament and firmament, reconciler of opposing states through the mediation of your ambivalent body, reconciler of the grand opposites of death and life, you who come to me neither naked not clothed, wait with me for the hour when it is neither dark nor light, that of dawn before daybreak, when you shall give yourself to me but I shall not possess you.

(Carter 1984, 81)

But Rosencreutz does not see Fevvers as fostering these paradoxes but as a *reconciler*. In wishing to possess Fevvers and obliterate these paradoxes he demonstrates that reconciliation is *appropriation*. In order to deal with the paradoxes before him, Rosencreutz must reconcile, appropriate and destroy – thus guaranteeing

the ascendancy of immortality *over* materialism, life *over* death, and his phantasy *over* reality. He wishes to destroy, to devour Fevvers, the Angel of Death, in order to protect his own omnipotent phantasy, and he seeks to destroy and devour women in general in order to guarantee that it is only his phallus that has the power to rise above the thorns that threaten to drag him down. Perhaps Winnicott's concept of *annihilation* best describes this omnipotent impulse, when the destruction is carried out not in the hope that the object will survive – and therefore be loved – but with the express intent of confirming omnipotent phantasy; “annihilation,” Winnicott tells us, means “no hope” (see 1971, 93).

Similarly, the Grand Duke from whose clutches Fevvers must escape as the circus prepares to leave St. Petersburg some hundred pages later wishes to possess Fevvers not as a transitional object but as his own entirely *subjective object*. “You must know,” the Grand Duke informs Fevvers, “I am a collector of all kinds of *objets d'art* and marvels. Of all things, I love best toys – marvellous and unnatural artefacts” (187). The Duke's identification of Fevvers as “marvellous” and “unnatural” recalls to the reader Walser's recognition that Fevvers needs to be *not* regarded as such. Fevvers must sustain her liminal status if she is to retain her powers (as a confidence artist) and her subjectivity. By identifying her as “marvellous,” the Duke reveals that he does not regard Fevvers as a like-subject, nor as a transitional object available for *use*,²⁴ but as a magical object, a product of his omnipotent phantasy which he wishes to possess entirely and to which he wishes not to grant any degree of autonomy. He wishes to possess Fevvers as he possesses the “hollow woman,” part of his “clockwork orchestra”; mechanical objects that he employs as an (musical) instrument and was obtained by his ancestors. This orchestra “had the authentically priceless glamour of objects intended only for pleasure, the impure allure of the absolutely functionless” (188). As intended only for pleasure, these objects can serve no function as transitional objects aiding the negotiation *between* pleasure and reality, but only serve the omnipotent, narcissistic pursuit of pleasure.

Multitudes of characters who embody the ideals – and failures – of Enlightenment rationalism can be found in the texts I examine: Father Reynaud in Harris' *Chocolat*, Napoleon in Winterson's *The Passion*, Ambrose Tree's Uncle

William and his employer Lord Drogo in *Martha Peake*, the Dursleys, Harry Potter's oppressive aunt and uncle, being other striking examples.²⁵ They all, in some way, belong to a Society of Reason, the organisation constructed by the youthful (and self-admittedly misguided) Maurice Conchis in Fowles *The Magus*. Their manifesto is a rallying-cry for these figures:

THE SOCIETY FOR REASON

We, doctors and students of the faculties of medicine of the universities of France, declare that we believe:

1. Man can progress only by using his reason.
2. The first duty of science is to eradicate unreason, in whatever form, from public and international affairs.
3. Adherence to reason is more important than adherence to any other ethos whatever, whether it be of family, caste, country, race, or religion.
4. The only frontier of reason is the human frontier; all other frontiers are signs of unreason.
5. The world can never be better than the countries that constitute it, and the countries can never be better than the individuals that constitute them.
6. It is the duty of all who agree with these statements to join the Society of Reason.

(Fowles 1977, 189)

Let me respond point-by-point: 1) This demonstrates the patriarchal exclusivity of the Enlightenment: "Man" is the first word of the first law. It is also the bases of "progress," the patriarchal, Enlightenment mark of time. 2) The first duty of reason is to eradicate unreason: indeed, "reason" only comes into being when it defines and expels that which is "unreasonable" and *vice versa*. The decision to eradicate unreason from public and international affairs creates a private *maternal* sphere of unreason. 3) Adherence to reason must come first and foremost, infiltrating all other discourses: that is why Marxist socialism, reasonably articulated and maintaining some form of power, is more acceptable to bourgeois values than "libertarian-

socialism” (anarchy) and why, as I explain below, Desiderio is so shocked and disappointed when he meets Dr. Hoffman. The only truly acceptable politics is a politics of reason. 4) The frontier is created by the construction of reason itself (refer to point 2). 5) A typical bourgeois privilege of the individual, eradicating the foundations of collectivity. 6) This last point underscores the necessity of universalising and normalising Reason, since it only works when its illusory transcendency is presumed by all.

Perhaps “the most rational man in the world” (Carter 1972, 24), the most extreme proponent of pathological rationalism is to be found in *Infernal Desire Machines*, the Minister of Determination, who embodies institutional manipulation and patriarchal reason, and who we are meant, *initially*, to regard as the anti-thesis of Dr. Hoffman. In the Minister, we glimpse a relic of the early, pre-twentieth-century Enlightenment. The Minister “believed in the existence of objective reality and that this reality could be directly accessed. It wasn’t a matter of human beings representing this reality in their minds: they could access it pure. Reality for the Minister was finite and quantifiable [...]” (Day 1998, 66-7).

The Minister had never in all his life felt the slightest quiver of empirical uncertainty. He was the hardest thing that ever existed and never the flicker of a mirage distorted for so much as a fleeting second the austere and intransigent objectivity of his face even though, as I saw it, his consisted essentially in setting limit to thought, for Dr. Hoffman appeared to me to be proliferating his weaponry of images along the obscure and controversial borderline between the thinkable and the unthinkable.

(Carter 1972, 22)

The Minister’s entire being is subsumed into maintaining the city’s rationalist surface, a project made especially difficult due to Dr. Hoffman’s machines attacking the city. By commanding his Ministry and the Determination Police, he maintains the rigid literal “defences” of the city, building walls of intellectualisation and reason, barbed wire and an arsenal of projecting weaponry in order to keep at bay any element that threatens the rationalist, affect-less stability of the city. His phallic

singularity is the “Key to the City,” explained in one of the “Seven Wonders of the World” exhibits that Desiderio visits outside the city:

Exhibit Six: THE KEY TO THE CITY

A candle in the shape of a penis of excessive size, with scrotum attached, in a state of pronounced tumescence. The wrinkled foreskin was drawn far enough back to uncover in its importunate entirety the grossly swollen, sunset-coloured tip as far as a portion of the shaft itself and, at the minute cranny in the centre, where a wick must have been lodged, burned a small, pure flame. As the viewer watched, the candle tipped forward on its balls and pointed to one accusingly.

I was struck with the notion that this was supposed to represent the Minister’s penis.

(Carter 1972, 46)

The Minister’s politics, his so-called “theory of names and functions,” are constructed to prevent any “disturbances and no usurpation of names or ranks or roles whatsoever” (24). The Minister sees it as his mission to stop the spread of “infection” – for the city’s threat, like the threat to reason itself, does not come from an external source, but is *internal* – “if the city was in a state of siege, the enemy was inside the barricades, and lived in the minds of each of us” (12). His apparent nemesis Hoffman also recognises the unstable nature of these defences: “I used the capital city of this country as the testing ground for my first experiments because the unstable existential structure of its institutions could not suppress the latent consciousness as effectively as a structure with a firmer societal organisation” (211; note too that Dr. Hoffman himself is a product of the city).²⁶ The Minister embodies disembodiment, he is “not a man but a theorem, clear, hard, unified and harmonious” (13). Or, as Hoffman’s Ambassador recognises,

You [the Minister] are in the process of tabulating every thing you can lay your hands on. In the sacred name of symmetry, you slide them into a series of straightjackets and label them with, oh, my God, what inexpressibly boring labels! Your mechanical prostitutes welcome their customers in an alien gibber wholly denied to the human tongue

while you, you madame, work as an abortionist on the side. You murder imagination in the womb, Minister.

(Carter 1972, 37)

Like a dystopian morality-tale, Carter portrays the Minister as a figure enforcing institutional compliance through means that are easily perceived as allegories for existing structures and practices. In the city's defence, the Minister employs the Determination Police, Reality Testing Laboratories and a highly structured set of practices and codified laws that further entrench his rationalist defences. For example, "the Determination Regulations Page Four, paragraph I c," under which Desiderio is charged, states that "Any thing or person seen to diverge significantly from it or his own known identity is committing an offence and may be apprehended and tested" (62) and invites comparison's with Bentham's – and Foucault's – panopticonism.

Postmodern Rationality: Mistrusting the Ambiguity of Mirrors

If prohibition has a meaning, it is that images are deceitful.

(Lacan 1959-60, 196)

"Silly old Bataille," she said.
To mistake fantasy for reality, she meant.
Lucky you, my good woman, I thought, who can so
thoroughly distinguish between them.

(Ward Jouve 1994, 138)

The Minister orders the destruction of all mirrors, "because of the lawless images they were disseminating. Since mirrors offer alternatives, the mirrors had all turned into fissures or crannies in the hitherto hard-edged world of here and now and through these fissures came slithering sideways all manner of amorphous spooks" (Carter 1972, 12). Todorov points out that the "mirror is present in [E. T. A.] Hoffman's tale whenever the characters must make a decisive step toward the supernatural, and this relation is attested to in almost all fantastic texts" (Todorov 1973, 121). Jackson re-iterates, "Many Victorian fantasies employ the device of a

lens or mirror to introduce an indeterminate area where distortions and deformations or 'normal' perception become the norm. Lewis Carroll's Alice moves *through* the looking glass into the paraxial realm, where anything can happen" (Jackson 1981, 44). It is this step towards the super-natural that the Minister wishes to prevent his citizens from making. Mirrors offer a chance to reflect upon one's self, to see one's self as a whole-object, containing an inner world, that the Minister needs to deny to the inhabitants of the city he defends:

"Reason," which rejects the marvellous, knows this very well, for it also renounces the mirror [...] "Reason" declares itself against the mirror which offers not the world but an image of the world, matter dematerialised, in short, a contradiction of the law of non-contradiction [...] Vision pure and simple reveals an ordinary world, without mysteries. Indirect vision is the only road to the marvellous [...] Eyeglasses and mirrors become the image of a vision that is no longer the simple means of connecting the eye to a point in space, which is no longer purely functional, transparent, transitive [...] Moreover we find the same fruitful ambiguity in the word "visionary;" which designates a person who both sees and does not see, and thus implies at once the higher degree and the negation of vision.

(Todorov 1973, 122-3)

However, the mirror is also where the narcissist becomes fixed upon his image. Citing E. T. A. Hoffman, a distant relative of Carter's doctor, Todorov maintains that "Real wealth, true happiness (and these are found in the world of the marvellous) are accessible only to those who manage to see themselves in the mirror" (Todorov 121). The mirror is also the medium through which Lacan's infant enters towards the realm of the imaginary. For Lacan (1966), the satisfaction derived from the coherent, whole image in the mirror is a mere illusion and initiates subjective alienation and splitting. As Desiderio proves, the satisfaction in the mirror *is* merely an illusion, but a *necessary illusion* to achieve balance and subjective ambivalence through creativity and the realisation of subjective ontology.

There is another reading we may take from the mirrors as they are employed

by Lacan and the Minister in *Infernal Desire Machines*, readings that make the connection between Enlightenment rationality and contemporary postmodern endeavours. Dylan Evans, in situating Lacan within the Western philosophical tradition, invites an intriguing parallel with Carter's radically rationalist Minister: "Lacan has a Cartesian mistrust of the imagination as a cognitive tool. He insists, like Descartes, on the supremacy of pure intellection, without dependence on images, as the only way of arriving at certain knowledge" (Evans 1996, 83). Thus despite his protestations to the contrary, as I stated in Part I, Lacan can be seen neatly donning a mode of thought entirely characteristic of the bourgeois Enlightenment. Like the Minister, he wants to break all the mirrors, to murder imagination in the womb.²⁷ Contemporary critics often show how the mirror in fantastic narratives functions like Lacan's imaginary. But what they overlook is the mistrust Lacan himself had for mirrors, and thus how the concept of the imaginary is to be disregarded as a place potentially productive for the subject in evading or repairing the damage done by the symbolic. Those critics who have tried to redeem the imaginary sphere as an implicit subversion of the symbolic do not seem to appreciate that the construction of the imaginary itself is a product of privileged symbolic reason. But mirrors, although often a place of narcissistic self-indulgence, are also "ambiguous things" (Carter 1974, 70). Carter's narrator in "Flesh and the Mirror" observes: "The mirror annihilated time, place and person; at the consecration of this house, the mirror had been dedicated to the reflection of chance embraces. Therefore it treated flesh in an exemplary fashion, with charity and indifference" (Carter 1974, 70).

As I stated in Part I, for most British psychoanalysts, the notion of a "pure intellection" is a defence (Winnicott's false-mind psyche, 1949; Fairbairn, 1940) that is a severe detriment to the analytic work; for Lacan (and other orthodox schools), the use of disengaged, disembodied rationality is a necessary precondition to their scientific endeavours in analysis. It is tempting to believe that Carter is addressing Lacan, and post-structuralist and psychostructuralist theory in general. Carter was certainly familiar with a great deal of literary theory. *The Sadeian Women* cites Adorno and Horkheimer, Barthes, Bataille, de Beauvoir, Breton, Bettelheim, Norman Brown, Fanon, Foucault, and, significantly Freud, Lacan and Klein. Lorna Sage

(1994) points out how Barthes and Foucault were, at various stages, key influences on Carter. But Sage also says that Carter “distrusted cultural traditions – 1950s New Critical and 1970s poststructuralists alike” – which suggests that she did not much approve of the scientisation of literary analysis. Ward Jouve also relates an anecdote that suggests Carter had no love of French post-structuralism:

My feeling is that both *The Passion of New Eve* and *The Sadeian Woman* lend themselves so readily to being read as counter-tracts to French theory of the seventies – Lacan, Cixous in particular – that it is almost certain she knew exactly what she was doing. I once introduced Angela Carter to Hélène Cixous in London – they were doing a *mano a mano* – and Carter professed terror at the encounter. I now wonder whether her terror had something to do with coming face to face with what she had attacked.

(Ward Jouve 1994, 163)

For example, in *Infernal Desire Machines*, in response to a propaganda broadcast by the Minister, when he praises “inflexible rationalism” as the city’s best defence, Hoffman points out that “Reason cannot produce the poetry disorder does [...] And he thinks I only operate in the gaps between things and definitions! What scant respect he shows for me!” (206). Perhaps Carter is suggesting that as the Minister underestimates Hoffman, relegating him to the gaps, Lacan underestimates everything subjective that lies outside language by relegating it to the real. For Lacan, that which “impels us to seek the reality of the subject beyond the Language barrier” is an “illusion” (1953, 72) – which for Lacan, unlike Winnicott, is always negative, an obstacle (like the transference) to successful analysis. Like Pinel, like Lacan, the Minister wishes to confine and exclude that which he cannot *rationaly* contain.

Carter offers further critique of the general scientific endeavours to rationalise subjectivity. The war eventually turns in the Minister’s favour when Hoffman loses his samples, the means through which he controls the desires of Nebulous Time, and the Minister completes his computer bank and institutes a programme he calls the “Rectification of Names” (193): A “philosophic” and “ideological” weapon, he attempts to control what is real by naming the objects with a scientific, and

sterilising, precision, “So, you understand, that no shadow would fall between the word and the thing described” (194). By thus killing the potentiality of meaning to emerge through play, the Minister insists that citizens whom he defends comply with the language he imposes upon them, as if creating an *algebra* of experience.

Albertina explains further:

He set up a new slogan, “If the name is right, you see the light.” He is a man of great intellect but limited imagination. Which is why he can hold out against my father [Hoffman], of course. Once the names were right, he thought perfect order and hence perfect government on his own Confucian terms would follow automatically. So he dismissed all his physicists and brought in a team of logical positivists from the School of Philosophy in the National University and set them to the task of fixing all the phenomena compiled by his computers in the solid concrete of a set of names that absolutely agreed with them. Ironically enough, their task was made all the easier because of the flexibility of identity produced in the state of nebulous time.

(Carter 1972, 194)

Under this system, as under radical postmodernity as envisioned by post-structuralist theory, *reality becomes the sign*. As Albertina points out to Desiderio, the Minister “has not got enough imagination to realise that the most monstrous aberrations are bound to flourish in soil once it has been disinfected of the imagination” (Carter 1972, 194). Reason produces irrational monsters, grateful to and dependent upon their rationalist fathers for their existence.

When Dr. Hoffman creates a new molecular structure to counter the Minister’s new counter-weapon, the city’s chief physicist, Dr. Drosselmeier, who had a “three-star reality rating” discovers that the modified unreality atom is “the sphere of looking glass, like a reflective tear” (Carter 1972, 23). In response, the Minister conceives of a new means of reality testing, one which best suits his paranoid-rationalist needs, “an immense computer centre which would formulate a systematic procedure for calculating the verifiable self-consistency of any given object. He

believed the criterion of reality was that a thing was determinate and the identity of a thing lay only in the extent to which it resembled itself” (23). Perhaps Carter is again playing with Lacan, who similarly identified the origins of the unreal imagination in the mirror and attempted to construct an algebraic, mathematic system for conceiving of subjectivity.

These characters are enacting a defence and trying to establish *certainties*. They are unable to tolerate paradox and need reconciliation. In order to achieve this, both Rosencreutz and the Duke must *objectify* Fevvers, turn her into an object within their own fantasies. As with their forefather Sade, they construct a phantasy in which “the subject itself becomes an *objet de luxe* in these elaborately choreographed masques of abstraction, of alienation” (Carter 1979b, 146). Carter’s reading of Sade and his representatives in novels recalls my criticism of Lacan from Part I: like Rosencreutz, the Duke and the Count, Lacan seems unable to deal with the paradox that is subjectivity, and creates instead an *objet de luxe* through an elaborately choreographed masque of abstraction and alienation.

The Spaces of Unreason: The Inadequacy of Transgression

Rather, since Sade and the death of God, the universe of language has absorbed our sexuality, denatured it, placed it in a void where it establishes its sovereignty and where it incessantly sets up as the Law the limits its transgresses.

(Foucault 1963, 50)

There is always a city. There is always a civilisation. There is always a barbarian with a pickaxe. Sometimes you are the city, sometimes you are the civilisation, but to become that city, that civilisation, you once took a pickaxe and destroyed what you hated, and what you hated was what you did not understand.

(Winterson 2000, 17)

The apparent “other” side of the magic realist narrative are the spaces of pure unreason. However, as I have already stated, I think many authors and theorists overrate the subversive potential of unreason and irrationality as it is entirely dependent

upon the discourses of reason and can only provide a token transgression. Zipes points out that initially there was resistance to fairy tales by the rationalist bourgeois for its

implicit and explicit critique of utilitarianism. The emphasis on play, alternative forms of living, pursuing dreams and daydreams, experimentation, striving for the golden age – this stuff of which fairy tales were (and are) made challenged the rationalistic purpose and regimentation of life to produce for profit and expansion of capitalist industry. Therefore, the bourgeois establishment had to make it seem that the fairy tales were immoral, trivial, useless and harmful if an affirmative culture of commodity values supportive of élite interests were to take root in the public sphere.

(Zipes 1979, 14)²⁸

Other epistemologies, other ways of regarding the world thus need to be *confined* and *suppressed* (not necessarily *repressed*) by the bourgeois order, and it is this demarcation and confinement of unreason that, for many, gives rise to the contemporary fantastic. For Monleón, “The basic setting [...] the central spatial metaphor that sustains gothic literature is confinement: dark rooms, labyrinthine halls, and secret passages populate its pages” (33).²⁹ For example,

In *Otranto*, as in Gothic literature in general, unreason materializes (or threatens to do so) within the walls of its own epistemological frames: castles, monasteries, old abbeys, dungeons. It is not the lighted street, nor in the vastness of nature, neither in the city nor in the country, where reason is challenged: it is, rather, within the symbols of feudalism that the representation of unreason emerges.

(Monleón 1990, 32)

Unreason remains confined to designated spaces, safely hidden away and negated as a threat to the rational order, and the sphere of reason becomes the public sphere. (See also Foucault 1965, 1975). The ubiquitous castle hides the evidence of ancient epistemologies and links with the past, “weapons, the ancestral portrait gallery, the family archives and in particular human relationships involving dynastic primacy and

the transfer of heredity rights. And finally legends and traditions animate every corner of the castle and its environs through their constant reminders of past events” (Bakhtin 1981, 246).

The ruins of gothic castles also demonstrate the inevitable march of time, reinforcing the bourgeois structures of progress, demonstrating that time can erode all foundations, even those of the bourgeois Enlightenment. The horrors in the nineteenth-century fantastic, once the gothic monsters of medieval epistemology, are transformed into the enemy from within, the “projection of progress,” the rise of those inevitable elements that are residual to reason. Instead of dragons and ghosts, it is the working classes and poor of the cities that are the spectre haunting Europe. Consequently, but also paradoxically, by the nineteenth century, the discourses of reason themselves are also increasingly identified as a threat to the very order that it supports. Frankenstein creates his monster not by manipulating the ancient dark-arts but by employing the most sophisticated science and reason. Marx’s later work does not use the rhetoric of passion and revolution so much as he employs cold, calculating science. Freud, too, articulates the chaos of the unconscious, always appealing to the scientific grounding of his research.³⁰

The point I wish to make here, and that I find constantly made by contemporary magic realist texts, is that unreason does not, in itself, produce as effective a resistance to or transformation of the rationalist social order as some would hope. As I stated with regard to transgression earlier, unreason is most often, as Klein would say, a schizoid response that further reinforces the dominant order rather than a significant challenge to it. As many critics suggest, the carnival is celebrated so as to better extract the continued compliance the next working morning. (However, I suggest below other ways we may read Bakhtin’s carnival.) Carter, following Zipes, interestingly points out how the Brothers Grimm sought to collect fairy tales not to upset the bourgeois social order but to actually help create it.

Their [the Grimms’] work in collecting fairy tales was part of the nineteenth-century struggle for German unification, which didn’t happen until 1871. Their project [...] envisaged popular culture as an untapped source of imaginative energy for the bourgeoisie; “they

wanted the rich cultural tradition of the common people to be used and accepted by the rising middle class,” says Jack Zipes.

(Carter 1990, *xvi*)

So what becomes of unreason in contemporary magic realist literature? The nature of unreason has *always* been the *internal* threat posed to reason. In the early Enlightenment, this may have been the unacknowledged residual epistemologies of the medieval era; in the nineteenth century, it was the downtrodden workers of the cities and the poorer classes that were left out of the new industrial economy and emergent rational discourses of unreason. Contemporary magic realism represents unreason as coming from all directions: from the ancient or barbaric epistemologies (*Chocolat, Beloved, Affinity, Harry Potter*), from the proletariat (*Nights at the Circus, Perfume*), from reason itself (*Infernal Desire Machines, The Magus*). The threat of unreason also comes from further within human consciousness: it has moved from existing in the past, to living in the alleys of our cities, to being embedded in our own, rational minds, in the form, for example, of the unconscious. Jackson makes a similar argument on “the *internal* origin of the other” (54). Through her Lacanian lens, the other is always regarded as, for example, “otherworldly”, “evil”, “Satan, the devil, the demon... etc.” (53). These beings are also increasingly oriented *within*: “The demonic is not supernatural, but is an aspect of personal and interpersonal life, a manifestation of unconscious desire” (55); “the ‘other’ is no longer designated as supernatural, but is an externalisation of part of the self” (55); “Danger is seen to originate from the subject, through excessive knowledge, or rationality, or the misapplication of the human will” (58). I suspect that the correspondence between Jackson’s Lacanian theory and my object-relations approach here is due to the general psychoanalytic project that – regardless of doctrinal orientation – looks first and foremost at the processes of the internal world (for example, repression, splitting). However, unlike Jackson’s Lacanianism, object-relations refuses always to see the “other” as either solely a projection of one’s imagination or as an always hostile, evil Being.

And, perhaps the more fashionable identification as our culture fetishes language, unreason today is identified as being “beyond” language, or pre-linguistic –

but we should be careful with such conceptions. Just as we recognise that competing epistemologies and the urban proletariat are themselves *purposefully* constructed as irrational by rationalist discourses to serve bourgeois hegemony, we should likewise regard the demarcation of the “linguistic” as re-enforcing a rationalist hegemony. The separation of language from that which is “beyond language,” and the latter’s confinement to the maternal, to the real, and its exclusion as “unscientific,” serves the same master as the division between reason and unreason. And the appearance of unreason and the extra-linguistic in the fantastic is a containment that *may* subvert, but also *serves*, reason/unreason, linguistic/extra-linguistic, object/subject, mind/affect dichotomies.

Monleón states that “The formulation of unreason, a search for a language that could express it, would become the new paradox of the fantastic” (102). But rather than trying to find a language of unreason to challenge the discourses of rationality, however, should we not reject the Enlightenment’s very distinction as ideologically self-serving? Merely finding a transgressive language for unreason will only further serve to entrench the bourgeois order and the distinctions that serve it. Contra Monleón, I see the new fantastic as not so preoccupied with epistemological concerns, instead recognising that it is the Enlightenment obsession with epistemology and reason itself that has precipitated current crises of subjectivity. An investigation of the spaces of irrationality and unreason depicted by many contemporary magic realist authors I think will demonstrate how simple transgression of the present order is deemed insufficient.

So unreason is often to be found, from the nineteenth century, right in the very heart of the rationalist order – the city. (I mean the “heart” only metaphorically, because obviously disembodied minds do not possess hearts.) And into eighteenth century Paris – the crown jewel of rationalism! – was born Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, the unscented future murderer of *Perfume* with the most fantastic powers of smell. In Carter’s *Nights at the Circus* and Waters’ *Tipping the Velvet*, London at the turn of the twentieth century houses a plethora of brothels, a subculture of licentiousness, lesbian tea-ladies, socialists and, in Waters’ *Affinity*, a network of dubious spiritualists and genuine fraudsters. In a hidden alley in Muggle London, accessed

only through a secret passage in the Leaky Cauldron pub, lies Diagon Alley, the centre of commerce for wizards across England.

In stark contrast to these enclosed, suffocating cities, many contemporary magic realist texts set the forces of unreason in vast, empty landscapes where phantasy thrives. Such spaces are found in abundance in *Nebulous Time* in Carter's *Infernal Desire Machines*, where desire and phantasies rule unchecked and all-powerful, where all linear time is dissolved and all time instantaneous. In these spaces, omnipotent phantasy is unhindered by any external control or reality. The "acrobats of desire" realise the rationalist dream as their minds' desire completely overcomes their restraining bodies; they are beings with no respect for the somatic. A magical, literal example of splitting, of the triumph of the mind-psyche, Desiderio describes how

four times a day they transcended their own bodies and made of themselves plastic anagrams [...] Their figures flowed into one another so choreographically it was impossible to see how they extricated or complicated themselves. They did not give out any odour of sweat [...] And then Mohammed, the leader, took his head from his neck and they began to juggle with that until, one by one, all their heads came off and went into play [...] After that, limb by limb, they dismembered themselves. Hands, feet, forearms, thighs and ultimately torsos went into a diagrammatic multi-man whose constituents were those of them all [...] And then, the *pièce de résistance*, they began to juggle with their own eyes.

(Carter 1972, 113-4)

Thus, although the wholly irrational *Nebulous Time* looks radically different from the Minister's ultra-rationalist city, the effects upon subjectivity are the same: splitting, disintegration, desubjectification, depersonalisation and the privileging of the mind-psyche and its products – reason, language, desire. This should not come as a surprise because, as I stated earlier, we are only meant *initially* to regard the Minister as the antithesis of Hoffman. Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that the Doctor and the Minister are cut from the same Enlightened cloth. Hoffman's tools are also those

of Minister – defensive splitting and an unshakable faith in rationalism – and therefore both the city and Nebulous Time are products of Reason. Just as Foucault describes the relation of transgression to the limit as “a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust” (1963, 31), Desiderio describes how in the city under Hoffman, “It seemed each one of us was trapped in some downward-drooping convoluted spiral of unreality from which we could never escape” (Carter 1972, 20). Carter transforms E. T. A. Hoffman from the writer whose brand of fairy tales Todorov sees as exemplary of the fantastic to the Doctor, the “powerhouse of the marvellous” (201), unable to tolerate any uncertainty and as positivistic (in his own way) as his nemesis, the Minister.

Just as postmodern culture privileges the signifier, has created ideas, subjects and pseudo-symbols that lack depth and meaning, Hoffman’s Nebulous Time is depicted as “a period of absolute mutability when only reflected rays and broken trajectories of an entirely hypothetical source of light fitfully reveal a continually shifting surface, like the surface of water, yet a water which is only a reflective skin and has neither depth nor volume” (99). Peach also notices how Hoffman produces “meaningless plurality,” a “postmodern, consumer-oriented world dominated by media images” (1998, 101). Hoffman’s transmitters have been bombarding the city with “sufficient radiation to intensify a symbol until it becomes an object according to the law of effective evolving, or, if you prefer a rather more explicit term, complex becoming” (Carter 1972, 208) – echoing Robert Young’s suggestion that in the postmodern, the subject has been de-ontologised at the expense of the ontologisation of the signifier. Hoffman’s philosophy is, in this respect, “not so much transcendental as incidental. It utilises all the incidents that ripple the depthless surfaces of [...] the sensual world. When the sensual world unconditionally surrenders to the intermittency of mutability, man will be freed in perpetuity from the tyranny of a single present” (99-100). Day also sees parallels between Nebulous Time and postmodern theory, suggesting that as the proprietor describes Nebulous Time to Desiderio, he “sounds like a postmodernist theorist going on about the depthlessness of the signs, the depthlessness of the representations that constitute the world and which make untenable any idea of autonomous, objective reality” (Day 1998, 78). If

the Minister is a caricature of our modernist rationalist predecessors, Hoffman is the demonic embodiment of our postmodern theory, exposing how postmodernity itself is successor to and complicit with Enlightenment rationality. Unlike the Minister, Hoffman does not maintain an idle belief in the absolute knowability of external reality or in metadiscourses; however, Hoffman does show an unwavering faith in the discourses of science.

Hoffman seems to make the sterilised city fertile, and in some respects opens spaces in the city in which the citizens can play – an acceptance of the limited role that mere transgression can enact. But instead of moving the city from one oppressive extreme into a mediating potential space, he goes too far in the opposite direction, creating his own form of enslavement. Upon finally gaining entrance into Hoffman's stronghold, Desiderio realises that in fact, "the magician's castle was not the home of unreason at all but a school for some kind of to me incomprehensible logic" (204). Just as the Minister's rationality sterilises the city by negating the potential for creative play, Desiderio in the end finds Hoffman's castle similarly "sterile" (210). Here is another illustration as to why the model of the dialectic does not work as a model to explain Winnicott's conceptualisation of the third space. The "synthesis" of competing thesis (in this case, rationality and compliance with external reality) and antithesis (retreat into a wholly phantastic, internal universe) does not become a creative, ontologising third space. Instead, we are faced with the Minister's oppressive vision or that of Hoffman. Hoffman's old physics professor, of all people, is humiliated at the lengths to which Hoffman has tried to take his war. It would seem that the similarity between the Minister and Hoffman is not lost on the Minister himself as he offers the following parable:

"A man made a pact with the Devil. The condition was this: the man delivered up his soul as soon as Satan had assassinated God. 'Nothing simpler,' said Satan and put a revolver to his own temple."

"Do you cast Dr. Hoffman as God or Satan?"

The Minister smiled.

"As my parable suggests, the roles are interchangeable," he replied.

(Carter 1972, 38-9)

Hoffman's castle, like the city, is a haven of rationalist certainty, safely hiding Desiderio away from the threats of uncertainty and liminality that exist between the castle's defences and those of the city. Desiderio declares, "Here, everything was safe. Everything was ordered. Everything was secure" (197).

The city under Hoffman's control becomes entirely abstracted from external reality and creates a world that corresponds only with individual phantasy. Apparitions of the dead, lost objects, return as if they exist in reality; the city becomes a "kingdom of the instantaneous" where desires are immediately gratified; "it had become the arbitrary realm of the dream" (18). In such a world dominated by narcissistic internal phantasy, transitional objects become ineffective and unnecessary. Desiderio announces the arrival of mendicants who sell charms and talismans to protect the citizens of the city from the hallucinations inspired by Dr. Hoffman, but these objects, potentially for use in the transitional space, remain wholly magical. These beggars and their wares "possessed only the most dubious reality status [...] Sometimes the talismans they sold vanished with them even though they had already been stowed away in the household shrines of their purchasers; and sometimes not" (18). The transitional object, Winnicott tells us, must exist at least to some extent in the external world. Without the soothing presence of the transitional object, anxiety experienced in the city is increased, an anxiety intensified by the presence of other unwelcome, entirely foreign objects.

The most obvious flaw of Hoffman's thinking, and any theory that similarly over-inflates the importance of desire, is to confuse phantasy and desire with the subject itself. Hoffman is right to a *degree*, of course, that the desires and phantasies manufactured by his machines are necessary for being, but this desire is not the "essence of being" (210), unless you assume (as some psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic critics do) that all subjects are driven solely by narcissistic drives. Hoffman echoes some orthodox psychoanalysts and postmodern theorists:

"Inside the reality modifying machines, in the medium of *essential undifferentiation* [...] Eventually a multi-dimensional body is brought into being which operates only upon an uncertainty principle [...] Once

these undifferentiated yet apprehendable ideas of objectified desire reach a reciprocating object, the appearance is organically restructured by the desires subsisting in latency in the object itself. These desires must, of course, subsist, since *to desire is to be.*”

(Carter 1972, 211).

It is this explanation of his theory that forces Desiderio to recognise the true nature of Hoffman's theory: “So *that* was the Doctor's version of the cogito! I DESIRE THEREFORE I EXIST. Yet he seemed to me a man without desires” (211). This conceptualisation of being – “I desire therefore I am” – is shown by Carter to be not dissimilar from the “I think therefore I am” that is the condition of Enlightenment, bourgeois subjectivity. In this sense, we may see yet another parallel between Hoffman and the Minister, in that each, although pretending to save or liberate subjective experience, actually depersonalises and desubjectifies the subject. It is at this point that Desiderio recognises that Hoffman “had examined the world by the light of the intellect alone and had seen a totally different construction from that which the senses see by the light of reason [that is, the Minister]” (212-3).

Hoffman proclaims himself to be a liberator, but he does not try to liberate desire. He tries to quantify it, to objectify it, study it, to create a mathematical formula through which he can understand it, control it. “He penned desire in a cage and said: ‘Look! I have liberated desire!’ He was a hypocrite” (208).³¹ Desiderio admits that he too is a hypocrite, and perhaps we must ask if postmodern and psychostructuralist theory is similarly hypocritical, albeit “on a less dramatic scale” (208). Carter demonstrates that Hoffman, like the postmodern “liberators” of the subject, or more accurately, subjective desire, pretends to perform a radical reversal of the Cartesian *cogito* while in reality only re-articulating a conceptualisation of subjective experience that similarly depersonalises and negates the possibility of creative, ontologising experience by flipping from one (paranoid-schizoid) extreme to another. While both the Minister and Hoffman – and, for example, Descartes and Lacan – regard the world through seemingly opposite lenses, the starting place and effect are shared: The Minister and Descartes through the reason of *cogito ergo sum* and Hoffman through the transgressions of *agitamus ergo sumus*. Perhaps Carter has

some contemporary theory in mind when Desiderio says, “Indeed, I knew from my own experience that, once liberated, those desires it seemed to me he cheapened as he talked of them were far greater than their liberator and could shine more brightly than a thousand suns and yet I did not think he knew what desire was” (Carter 1972, 213).

Like Hoffman, one might initially regard Father Reynard, the spiritual leader of Lansquenet, as a Father of unreason, as religion usually represents the irrationality of faith and ancient epistemologies. However, again we see that the apparent border between reason and unreason is itself a convenient myth. Father Reynard devoutly obeys the law of his father – both his God and the *mon père* that he speaks to throughout the text. This also invites comparisons with Lacan, who not only deifies Freud but *le loi-de-père*. Reynard is guided by his “armoured certainty” (53). He complains that Vianne’s treachery – making and selling chocolates – will undermine the values and system he relies upon.³² “Soon” he worries, “they will be [...] celebrating the *inner self*” (162); another interesting comment in light of the Lacanian denial of the sphere of interiority as at least partly constitutive of subjectivity. Interestingly, Vianne remarks how the rationalists in the village remind her of “those small flat pralines shaped to look like tightly closed oysters” (54). Of course Nan, in *Tipping the Velvet*, takes great pride in her ability to prise open oysters.

In *Nebulous Time*, Desiderio meets a Count, a Sadeian “erotic traveller,” describing himself as “a connoisseur of catastrophe,” who travels the world so as to witness disasters of human suffering and death: the eruption of Vesuvius, the bombing of Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Dresden (122). In this figure, like her analyses of Sade himself, Carter demonstrates the futility of transgression as an effective response to reason. Desiderio finds this traveller’s “quality of being” and self-centred determination like that of Minister – that is, rationalist; Desiderio “can hardly describe to you the man’s appalling, cerebral lucidity” (126). Albertina later reconfirms this view, claiming that

the Count’s rapacity was its purely cerebral quality. He was the most metaphysical of libertines. If he had passions, they were as lucid and intellectual as those of a geometrician. He approached the flesh in the

manner of one about to give proof to the theorem and, however, exiguous those passions seemed to him, they were never unpremeditated [...] His desire became authentic because it was so absolutely synthetic.

(Carter 1972, 167-8)

In fact, while Desiderio suspects that the Count is really Hoffman in disguise, Albertina, who is herself disguised as the Count's servant Lafleur, once thought that the Count was really the Minister in disguise. This demonstrates again how the monsters of reason and unreason are not to be distinguished from one another except according to the direction from which one is looking. In an interesting twist on Goya's capricho "The sleep of reason produces monsters," Carter shows how the opposite may hold true, emphasising the co-dependency of reason and unreason. Lafleur/Albertina reminds him that "Master and slave exist in the necessary tension of a twinned actuality" (147), before challenging him "You were a man in a cage with a monster. And you did not know if the monster was in your dream or you were the dream of the monster" (148).

When the Count makes the declaration, "I am entirely alone. I and my shadow fill the universe" (148) he seeks to negate the existence of the other, which has real, *ontological* consequences for Desiderio and Lafleur.

Lafleur gasped at that and so did I for I felt myself instantly negated. To my horror, I discovered I immediately grew thinner and less solid. I felt – how can I describe it? – that the darkness which surrounded us was creeping in at every pore to obliterate me. I saw the white glimmer of Lafleur's face and held out my hands to him imploringly, beseeching him to go with me together into the oblivion to which the Count had consigned us, so that I should have some company there, in that cold night of non-being.

(Carter 1972, 148)

The ideal narcissist, the Count cannot see or interact with a world outside himself, but this is also the bourgeois, isolated individual. Day describes this Count as "a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* of the Cartesian model of personal identity – the *solus ipse*,

‘himself alone’ paradigm – with its emphasis on individual, subjective transcendence. In his ‘infernal egoism’ the Count seeks to expand his subjectivity to fill the universe” (1998, 94). Carter shows how this subject, the product of Enlightenment reason, is also the subject as conceived by Lacan and by much postmodern theory. The Count is shown as being under constant threat from a figure that relentlessly hunts him, a monstrous “black pimp.” Day notes,

The problem is the shadow. Caught in the subject-object paradigm of identity the Count defines himself in relations to and in contrast with an “other”, an object which, in order that he may define his subjectivity to himself, he views as devoid of subjectivity, lifeless. This is how he views the human objects of his sexual lusts. They are not subjects: merely meat upon which his subjectivity operates. In order fully to realise his egoistic subjectivity, in order to become an absolute self, he must suspend the subject-object dualism and unite with the other. But the other – that *different* thing, that thing against which he defines his imperious subjectivity – is lifeless. So to join with the other is to find annihilation.

(Day 1998, 94-5)

As Monleón and Jackson suggest, the Count’s nemesis – his other – demonstrates how the monstrous threat in the fantastic has moved increasingly inward, from ancient epistemologies to internal, unconscious processes. The monstrous, threatening “other” for the Count is the radical other of Lacanian and postmodern theory with whom there can be no *intersubjectivity*. But – and this point must be clear – in depicting such a relationship between the Count and his nemesis, Carter is not confirming the normalising, universalising relationship between self and other as conceived by Lacanian and postmodern theory. On the contrary, with her illustration of the Count, she pathologises the narcissistic subject and theory that give rise to such a conceptualisation. Jackson, for example, thinks that

In a general shift from a supernatural to a natural economy of images, the demonic pact comes to be synonymous with an impossible desire to break human limits, it becomes a *negative version* of desire for the

infinite. In the modern fantastic, this desire expresses itself as a violent transgression of all human limitations and social taboos prohibiting the realisation of desire.

(Jackson 1981, 57)

This certainly may be said of the Count – however, it fails to highlight that which Carter seeks to demonstrate in the Count: the futility of such transgression of human limits, how such transgression actually perpetuates the rationalist order (“social taboos”) and alienate the psyche-soma (“human limitations”) and the futility of a “modern fantastic” and theory of a modern fantastic that conceives of the subject for whom transgression is the ultimate and greatest good.

For Lacan, the inaccessibility to the Other is the lack that drives subjectivity. We become “subjects” when, entering the symbolic, we abandon all hope of union with the Other, although the subject must always deny that it is dependant upon the Other for its identity. For the Count, too, the Other is what drives him on, what defines him, although to maintain his subjectivity he constantly flees from this Other. Albertina explains that,

When he reached a final reconciliation with the projective other who was his self, that icon of his own destructive potential, the abominable black, he had merely perfected that self-regarding diabolism which crushed and flattened the world as he passed through it [...] But his insistence on the authority of his autonomy made him at once the tyrant and the victim of matter, for he was dependent on the notion that matter was submissive to him.

(Carter 1972, 168)

For Jackson, “One of the central thrusts of the fantastic is an attempt to erase this distinction itself [between the ‘I’ and the ‘not-I’], to resist separation and difference, to re-discover a unity of self and other” (52). While this may be true to varying degrees (and perhaps more true of the pre-World War II literature that is Jackson’s focus), in this instance Carter is using the notion of such a union to critique the orthodox psychoanalytic conceptualisation of the subject itself.

This description of the Count also invites a Kleinian reading by which we

might see that the Count actually fears the split-off, projected and persecutory portion of himself which constantly threatens to return by forcing him to see himself as a whole object. In the Lacanian reading above, the Count is seen suffering from an epistemological crisis of self-identity – am I the omnipotent being I know myself to be? A Kleinian perspective, however, would de-naturalise this sort of crisis, and also permit us to see that the anxiety the Count feels toward this hunter is precipitating an ontological crisis that challenges his subjective existence. Lafleur explains:

A sage of ancient China, the learned Chuang Tzu, dreamed he was a butterfly. When he woke up, he was hard put to it to tell whether a man had dreamed he was a butterfly or a butterfly still dreaming he was a man. If you looked at the situation objectively for a moment, my dear Count, you might find that the principal cause of your present discomfort is a version of Chuang Tzu's dilemma.

(Carter 1972, 147-8)³³

I suspect here that Carter is playing with the perception of the postmodern critic, the victim of an ideology of narcissistic individualism who constructs theories of subjectivity based on negativity only, on absence. The Count holds “the passionate conviction he was the only significant personage in the world. He was the emperor of inverted megalomaniacs but he had subjected his personality to the most rigorous *discipline of stylisation* [...] He could say nothing that was not grandiose. He claimed he loved only to *negate the world*” (123; emphasis mine). The emphasis on stylisation suggests a privileging of signifiers and presentation over substance and materialism. The Count says, “I have devoted my life to the humiliation and exaltation of the flesh. I am an artist; my material is the flesh; my medium is destruction; and my inspiration is nature” (126). The “flesh” is to be regarded as a part-object, split off from the psyche-soma. The traveller is interested only in the subject as an object, capable of suffering – and its potentiality to satisfy his sadistic desire. The problem for this traveller is the same as so many of those who wish so desperately only to “transgress” authorities that theoretically, by their own negation, can no longer exist: “I should like to speak an ultimate blasphemy and then bask in the security of eternal damnation but, since there is no God, well, there is no

damnation, either, unfortunately. And hence, alas, no final negation" (123-4).³⁴

The whore-house to which the erotic traveller takes Desiderio is very similar to Madame Schreck's, in terms of physical space (see 130) and in that it reduces the human body and sexuality to its part-object constituents. The Madame in *Infernal Desire Machines* says, "My house is a refuge for those who can find no equilibrium between inside and outside, between mind and body or body and soul, vice versa, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera" (131-2). The Madame dresses the traveller and Desiderio in tights that, when put on, leave their genitals exposed. Desiderio observes that "the garb grossly emphasised our manhoods while utterly denying our humanity" (130). The exposed phalli representing these two men is particularly appropriate here, as Carter is certainly drawing parallels between individualist narcissism, disembodied rationalism and patriarchy. As the men are reduced to part-objects, so too, predictably and necessarily, are the women who work the house:

There were, perhaps, a dozen girls in the cages in the reception room [...] Each was as circumscribed as a figure in rhetoric and you could not image they had names, for they had been reduced by the rigorous discipline of their vocation to the undifferentiated essence of the idea of the female. This ideational femaleness took amazingly different shapes though its nature was not that of Woman; when I examined them more closely, I saw that none of them were any longer, or might never have been, woman. All, without exception, passed beyond or did not enter the realm of simple humanity. They were sinister, abominable, inverted mutations, part clockwork, part vegetable and part brute.

(Carter 1972, 132)

As "figures in rhetoric," "undifferentiated," and "ideational," these women represent the paranoid-schizoid (omnipotent, disembodied) phantasies of the men who visit the house. They are "Women" constructed only through patriarchal discourse. Like Rosencreutz, who buys Fevvers from Madame Schreck, the Count needs to destroy women in order than he may live, that is, in order that he can maintain his omnipotent phantasy.

He took on a ponderous and ecclesiastical gait, as if it were a kind of mitre that he wore – he, the Pope of the profane, officiating at an ultimate sacrament, the self-ordained, omnipotent, consecrated man-phallus itself; and when he snatched a candle from a monkey’s paw and used it to ignite the rosy plumage of winged girl, I knew he was about to preach a sermon and she was to be his text.

(Carter 1972, 133)

In losing their humanity, many of these women’s bodies are topped with the heads of beasts (zebras, giraffe, stags). “One leafy girl was grown all over with mistletoe but, where the bark was stripped away from her ribcage, you could see how the internal wheels articulating her went round” (133). A “fusion of dream-states,” “meat,” “beasts” are all terms used literally to describe these freakish women.

In Nebulous Time on the way to the coast of Africa, the Count, Desiderio and Lafleur are captured by pirates, and later a tribe of centaurs, yet more figures who embody paranoid-schizoid depersonalisation: The centaurs split-off and project their bad selves, their human halves, denying human reason and preferring to live as beasts.³⁵ There is a ritualisation of guilt and reparation, mimicking similar practices in human religion. The pirates’ beings are entirely subsumed by that of their leader as they constantly use splitting, idealisation and, projective identification. And, like the Count, both groups are brutally misogynist: the pirates wield swords as phallic-substitutes, part-objects through which they experience the world.

Though their use required great skill, it needed no finesse for the most telling stroke was a murderous, chopping blow that easily *split a man in half*. It was impossible to fence [that is, play] with such a sword. It was equally impossible to defend oneself *except by attacking first*. They were weapons which *denied forethought, impulses of destruction* made of steel. And the pirates themselves, so slight, so silent, so cruel, so *two-dimensional*, *seemed to have subsumed their beings to their swords*, as if the weapons were their souls or *as if they had made a pact with their swords to express their spirit for them*, for the flash of the sword seemed by far a more expressive language than the staccato

monosyllables that came so grudgingly to their lips.

(Carter 1972, 150-1; emphases mine)

These phallic swords can be contrasted with Ma Nelson's sword that Fevvers wields in *Nights at the Circus*. Still a symbol of Ma Nelson's power and order – the connections between Britannia, Nelson and Empire also being drawn into the image – this is a maternal phallus, not a conquering symbol of male potency but a friendlier transitional object, still offering protection. Unlike the pirates, Fevvers can “fence” with her sword. Ma Nelson's “plaything” (83) is only a “toy” (181), but it saves Fevvers from Rosencreutz, although the Duke that Fevvers faces in St. Petersburg breaks it, leaving her “defenceless” (191). Without any phallic symbol, they are lost in the void of Siberia (a world like *Nebulous Time* of complete phantasy). Fevvers “knew she had mislaid some vital something of herself [...] When she lost her weapon to the Grand Duke in his frozen palace, she had lost some of the sense of her own magnificence which had previously sustained her trajectory” (Carter 1984, 273).

The violently and oppressive patriarchy of *Nebulous Time* radically metamorphoses and distorts the concept of the “mother” from the nurturing, facilitating sort that helps create potential spaces. In fact, this distinction, between facilitating, playing and threatening, persecuting and devouring mothers typical of schizoid phantasy may be the sign-post one can use to discriminate between potential and wholly phantastic spaces. The leader of an army of women Desiderio and the Count encounter on the African Coast explains this metamorphoses in language that illustrates a transformation from a Winnicottian playing mother into a Kleinian mother of paranoid-schizoid phantasies.

“Why, you may ask, have I built my army out of women [...]? Gentlemen, if you rid your hearts of prejudice and examine the bases of the traditional notions of the figure of the female, you will find you have founded them all on the remote figure you thought you glimpsed, once, in your earliest childhood, bending over you with an offering of warm, sugared milk, crooning a soft lullaby while, by her haloed presence, she kept away the snakes that writhed beneath the bed. Tear this notion of the mother from your hearts. Vengeful as nature herself,

she loves her children only in order to devour them better and if she herself rips her own veils of self-deceit, Mother perceives in herself untold abysses of cruelty as subtle as it is refined.”

(Carter 1972, 160)

Carter makes the further suggestion here that it is these persecution phantasies that men carry with them from their infancy that lead to their fear and subsequent oppression of women – which further emphasises, through the Count, Hoffman (and the Duke and Rosencreutz from *Nights*) the link between patriarchal power and rationalist psyche-somatic splitting. This representation of “mothers” is also evident in the time Desiderio spends with the River People. Although one of Desiderio’s “mothers” is found on the river – more often representing a transitional space – his time with the River People should be regarded as part of Nebulous Time: it seems to exist in a continuous present, dominated by the inability to symbolise, and the actualisation of paranoid-schizoid phantasies and sexual desire, including the realisation of Oedipal wishes.³⁶ Women on the river suffer from the patriarchal forces of unreason just as the women of the city suffer from the patriarchal forces of reason: all the women of the tribe moved in a detached manner, “like benign automata” so “it was quite possible to feel they were not fully human” (73); Mama’s gestures are found by Desiderio to be performed in “stiff, exact gestures, as if these gestures were the only possible physical expressions of hospitality, solicitude or motherly care” (73). Desiderio is given a doll to play with, but this object cannot function transitionally; the doll, and his 9 year-old bride to be, are woman of his fantasy, not real subjects in their own right. Desiderio explains that all river people were

somehow frozen in themselves. Even the method of pouring a drink was hallowed by tradition and never altered [...] And in this lack of self, I began to sense a singular incapacity for being, that sad, self-imposed limitation of experience I recognised in myself and must also, like my cheekbones, be my inheritance from the Indians.

(Carter 1972, 87)

The language of this tribe, and also that of the tribe of centaurs, is particularly

revealing. Desiderio informs us that in these languages “words depended not so much on pronunciation as intonation” (70). The centaurs’ language has neither grammar or vocabulary, but is just the play of sounds. For the river people,

the problem of the particular versus the universal did not exist and the word “man” stood for “all man”. This had a profound effect their societization. Neither was there a precise equivalent for the verb “to be”, so the kernel was struck straight out of the Cartesian nut and one was left only with the naked, unarguable fact of existence, for a state of being was indicated by a verbal tag which could roughly be translated as “one finds oneself in the situation or performance of such and such a thing or action” [...] The tenses divided time into two great chunks, a simple past and a continuous present [...] There was also a marked absence of abstract nouns, since they had very little use for them. They lived with a complex, hesitant but absolute immediacy.

(Carter 1972, 71)

My ear again picks up language that echoes Winnicott’s seed metaphor. I take this to mean that the defences that are the seed’s shell are removed, leaving only the exposed kernel that would wither without at least some form of protection. This seems to be a reverse of the “normotic” or postmodern subject, who focusses upon the shell to the point where the kernel withers in impenetrable outer coating. The river people, it would seem, live a psychotic existence of continuous present (or “simple past”), immediate sexual and phantastical gratification.

The river people could be said to be transgressive of the order dominating the city but again this reinforces that the understanding that their irrationality offers no solution to the rational city. The river people cannot learn the language and ways of the imperialists that Desiderio tries to convey to him, and they have a fundamentally different way of conceiving of the world. Desiderio says of Nao-Kurai, “he could not think in straight lines; he thought in subtle and intricate interlocking circles” (79). And ultimately, Desiderio must leave the river people as they intend to eat him, literally, in order to gain his magical powers, the ability to read and write showing how the rationalist discourses of the imperialist are introjected by native populations.

But again these inhabitants of Nebulous Time resemble our postmodern subjects. Nao-Kurai is also enamoured of the “very shapes of the letters [...] He fell to musing on the angularities and traced and retraced them, chuckling to himself with pleasure, until they became cursive abstracts, beautiful in themselves but utterly lacking in signification” (Carter 1972, 79).

In Nebulous Time, a zone of the unlimited actualisation of phantasy, Albertina shows herself to be her father’s daughter by acting as the consummate scientific rationalist. Desiderio explains that Albertina

had become engrossed in the problem of the reality status of the centaurs and the more she talked of it, the more I admired her ruthless empiricism for she was convinced that even though every male in the village had obtained carnal knowledge of her, the beasts were still only emanations of her own desires, dredged up and objectively reified from the dark abysses of the unconscious.

(Carter 1972, 186)

This again demonstrates the similarity between radical defences, from extreme dependence on rationalism to the extreme regression into internal phantasy. Albertina here also reflects the postmodern subject (perhaps the product of her father, the postmodern theorist) who confuses the “reality” of the external world and the “reality” of the internal world. This trend to objectify the subjective, to reify human consciousness, in many ways perfected by certain forms of psychoanalysis, is characteristic of our cultural experience and our treatment, in both theory and practice, of the subject.³⁷ Regressing into a world of phantasy, such as Nebulous Time, provides the same defence, that of certainty, rather than liminal uncertainty. Albertina ultimately draws Desiderio too far into the world of omnipotent phantasy. She gives Desiderio a scrap of paper with the following quotation from de Sade, “My passions, concentrated on a single point, resemble the rays of a sun assembled by a magnifying glass; they immediately set fire to whatever object they find in their way” (Carter 1972, 97).

In *Nights at the Circus*, the third section of the novel finds Fevvers, Walser and the rest of the Imperial Circus in a hostile, uncontained void of Siberia that is

largely devoid of objects. As Fevvers herself takes over more of the narrative voice in this section, she asks:

How do they live, here? How do they cope with it? Or aren't I the right one to pop the question, I'm basically out of sympathy with the landscape, I get the shivers on Hampstead bloody Heath. As soon as I'm out of sight of the abodes of humanity, my heart gives way beneath me like rotten floorboards, my courage fails. Now parks, I love, and gardens. And small fields with hedges and ditches round 'em and useful cows in 'em. But if you *must* have a wild hillside, let there be a least a sheep or two posed picturesquely on an outcrop of rock, ready to have its wool wounded off, something like that [...] I hate to be where the hand of Man has badly wrought and, here, we are on that broad forehead of the world that had the mark of Cain branded on it when the world began, just as the old man at the station who come selling us the bears he'd carved had 'convict' branded on his cheek.

(Carter 1984, 197)

As the transitional object facilitating potential spaces, Fevvers recognises that this is not *her* space, that she is “basically out of sympathy with the landscape.” The abodes of humanity are where subjects live and play and work; in small spaces of peace and tranquillity, such as parks and gardens, she can still feel comfort, but the vast emptiness of Siberia is foreign space and goes against Fevvers' being – it is a place where there is no play, no opportunity for uncertainty and the spectacle upon which she thrives.³⁸ Here, Fevvers begins to lose her phenomenal shine, her capacity as a privileged, special object aiding the negotiation of space. Her wing is broken; she is unable to fly; her hair loses its blonde lustre; she begins, in short, to look less “fantastic.” Reflecting on her close escape from the Grand Duke at the end of her time in St. Petersburg, Fevvers reflects: “‘Nowhere’, one of those words, like ‘nothing’, that opens itself inside you like a void. And were we not progressing though the vastness of nothing to the extremities of nowhere?” (198). Fevvers further comments that “As soon as we turned our backs on the train,” the last symbol of the “real” world of objects, “it ceased to exist; we were translated into another world,

thrust into the hearts of limbo to which we had no map” (225).

The answer to Fevvers’ question, “How do they live, here? How do they cope with it” is answered by Walser’s fate and the characters that populate the Siberian void. First, we see in Walser a sort of rebirth, and, I think, a parody of the psychoanalytic theories of infantile development. In an inversion of both Klein and Lacan, Walser utters his first word, “Mama,” in response to his mother’s presence *before* he experiences the anxiety of absence. Once he has uttered his first word, “he discovers in himself sensation. He rubbed his hand on his belly in a circular motion and searched the absence that had been his memory but he could find nothing there to tell him what to say. So he kept rubbing” (222-3). This also closely resembles an inversion of the Kleinian theory of the infant’s first objects, where the first sensation experienced as a bad object by the infant is hunger, a sensation that is countered by the feeding presence of the mother, experienced as a good object. Language then comes to be used by the infant in response to this presence and absence of the mother/caretaker/breast. This re-birth, literally expressed here as a new beginning to the cycle of absence and presence, renews within Walser the anxieties of infancy. After one feeding, Walser’s “mother” (the escaped convict Olga) disappears forever, and Walser must, like the infant, adopt defences appropriate to counter this lost object.

Fevvers informs us that “the night around us contained nothing to assuage the infinite melancholy of these empty spaces” (228). Because there are so few objects within this void that make themselves available for play, Walser, together with his adopted tribe, and the Shaman, his “father” and spiritual guru, are constantly creating their own through vivid hallucinations. This is a world dictated and dominated by the products of phantasy. Their indifference to the world, Fevvers tells us, is masking a fear – “a spiritual infection of discontent, contracted from exposure to the unfamiliar, whose symptoms were questions” (254) or doubt, uncertainty. This situation is a defence organised by the tribespeople against the impending arrival of the railroad and the threat it poses to their way of life. The tribespeople thus retreat into phantasy as a defence against a world devoid of meaningful objects and away from the foreign world of Western civilisation that is encroaching upon their land. Carter also

suggests, however that through some accident the railroad might bring a useful degree of rationalism to awake the Siberian inhabitants from their phantastic slumber.

Upon first meeting the Shaman, “Walser entered an immediate fugue of hallucinations, in which birds, witches, mothers and elephants mixed up with sights and smells of Fisherman’s Wharf, the Alhambra Theatre, London, the Imperial Circus, Petersburg, and many other places. All his past life coursed through his head in *concrete* but discrete *fragments* and he could not make head nor tail of any of it” (238; emphases mine). Walser’s mind is filled with spaces and objects of his past but they are not connected, consistent with internal phantasy in paranoid-schizoid thinking, only fragmented part-objects not *symbolically representative* but thought to be concrete, real objects themselves.³⁹ And thus psychically positioned, Walser has lost all powers of self-reflection. After Walser’s rebirth, he is lost, both literally and metaphorically cut off from the rich spaces and play offered by St. Petersburg and London. The “snowy wastes” are described as “The empty centre of an empty horizon” (236). Walser “is a sentient being, still, but no longer a rational one; indeed, now he is all sensibility without a grain of sense, and sense impressions alone have the power to shock and ravish him” (236). Walser, under the guidance of the tribe’s Shaman

acquired an ‘inner life’, a realm of speculation and surmise within himself that was entirely his own. If, before he set out with the circus in pursuit of the bird-woman, he had been like a house to let, furnished, now he was tenanted at last, even if that interior tenant was insubstantial as a phantom and sometimes disappeared for days at a time.

(Carter 1972, 261)

In this void, objectless world, phantasy is the only mode of perception – there is no connection with an external, real world. Walser’s adopted tribe does not even believe him to be real, but merely a hallucination,

since, traditionally, the natives of those remote parts of Siberia regarded hallucination as a job of work [...] you might have said the

Shaman “lived in a dream”. But so did they all. They shared a common dream, which was their world, and it should rather be called an “idea” than a “dream”, since it constituted their entire sense of lived reality, which impinged on *real* reality only inadvertently.

(Carter 1972, 253)

This world of dreams that constitutes reality for the isolated tribe, then, is not corporeal, not material. By calling it an “idea” I think Carter invites a Marxist analysis of the idealists privileging their disembodied sense of reality over the material conditions of lived bodily experience, a reading emphasised by the increased ferocity with which Lizzie defends her Marxist, historical materialist position in Siberia. Because in this world there is no sense of illusion, no play, only hallucinations, magic never tempered by realism, there is no creative *use* of objects. Objects exist only as an extension of phantasy; the Shaman’s art of confidence trickery, like that of the capitalist Colonel and Herr M., cannot function transitionally as Fevvers’ does. The Shaman’s objects are not transitional but “fetishes” (238), again like the capitalists and the patriarchs.⁴⁰

As the Shaman’s mysticism demonstrates, there is a certainty that exists in accepting one’s phantasies for reality. The retreat into a phantastic world is, after all, a defence against the uncertainty and paradox of the potential space and the recognition of the whole object. But this certainty is acquired at the expense of creative play. “They knew the space they saw. They believed in a space they apprehended. Between knowledge and belief, there was no room for surmise or doubt. They were, at the same time, pragmatic as hell and, intellectually speaking, permanently three sheets in the wind” (253). We also learn that the tribe does not encounter foreigners, that is, there is no foreign element from external reality which enters into their world and demands that they alter their hallucinations as a good-enough mother would. A foreigner that did once stray into their camp could not be incorporated into their world and was expelled; having no understanding of anything outside themselves, they demonise this alien entity, identifying him, and any others who threaten their pure, untainted phantasy, as the “devil” – like the rationalist Enlightenment, this “irrational” tribe develops a system of demonisation, expulsion

and confinement against that which threatens their social order. Also, like much of our contemporary theory, the “other” is always a demon, an extension of our phantasy but also a threat to it – hell, after all, is the other. This tribe, then, exists in a permanent paranoid-schizoid position in that they only experience part object relations, do not recognise objects for what they are and are incapable of creative play. They cannot *use* objects but only possess them.

Postmodern (ir)Rationality: The Prestidigitation of Psychoanalysis

Carter also shows how the Shaman is worthy of membership in the Society of Reason, although she admits that of the “mad scientist” figures in *Nights at the Circus*, he is the most sympathetic (Haffenden 1985, 88). Again Carter uses this figure to demonstrate how reason and unreason are employed as a defence, and is of particular interest to me here as one may regard it to be addressing psychoanalysis itself. The Shaman

listened attentively to what Walser said after a dream because it dissolved the slender margin the Shaman apprehended between real and unreal, although the Shaman himself would not have put it that way since he noticed only the margin, shallow as a step, between one level of reality and another. He made no categorical distinction between seeing and believing. It could be said that, for all the peoples of this region, there existed no difference between fact and fiction; instead, a sort of magic realism. Strange fate for a journalist, to find himself in a place with where no fact, as such, existed! Not that Walser would have known what a journalist was, any more [...] his memories were incomprehensible to him until the Shaman interpreted them.

(Carter 1984, 260)

This provocative passage can surely be read in many different ways, but it suggests to me a relationship between Walser and the Shaman similar to that of the analysand

and the analyst. Perhaps we are to regard this psychoanalytic relationship as a potential space opening within the void of Siberia: and psychoanalysis itself is a sort of magic realism, capable of opening potential spaces of communication, caught between fact and fiction, frustratingly so where facts, as such, are elusive. However, there exists the frequently made accusation that psychoanalysis can become a controlling discourse that is overly scientific, creating a specialist discourse (as per Foucault, Bourdieu) that alienates subjects from their own experience. Carter's representation of psychoanalysis here I find to be typically ambivalent. On the one hand, she says that the

Shaman most certainly was *not* a humbug. He was the supreme form of the confidence trick – others had confidence in him because of his own utter confidence in his own integrity. He was the doctor and the midwife of the village, the dream-reader and the fortune-teller, the intellectual and the philosopher, to boot.

(Carter 1984, 263)

On the other hand, however, the Shaman is a rationalist like the rest: “He made no categorical distinction between seeing and believing [...] there existed no difference between fact and fiction” and he insists upon speaking *for* Walser, whose “memories were incomprehensible to him until the Shaman interpreted them” (263).

In many ways, with this representation Carter is critiquing psychoanalysis as a rationalist, epistemological-centric science that concerns itself only with language. Narrating, Fevvers describes:

The Shaman was the pedant of pedants. There was nothing vague about his system of belief. His type of mystification necessitated hard, if illusory, fact, and his mind was stocked with concrete specifics. With what passionate academicism he devoted himself to assigning phenomena their rightful places in his subtle and intricate theology! If he was always in demand for exorcisms and prophecies, and often asked to use his necromantic powers to hunt out minor domestic items which had been mislaid, these were frivolous distractions from the main, pressing, urgent, arduous task in hand, which was the

interpretation of the visible world about him via the information he acquired through dreaming. When he slept, which he did much of the time, he would, could he have written it, have put a sign on his door: 'Man at work'.

(Carter 1984, 252)

We again see here all of the trappings of the rationalist – pedantic, certain, factual, academic, patriarchal, theologic. It is this perceived necessity of objective, hard facts that lead to the importance of Walser's lessons in "the power of looking preternaturally solemn, as if he were the possessor of knowledge hidden from ordinary mortals," because this look is "a prerequisite for the whole performance; who would believe a giggling Shaman" (264). This myth of objectivity is perpetuated by the Shaman/psychoanalyst by mystifying the process like a religion – an observation often made of psychoanalysis in fiction (for example, D. M. Thomas' *The White Hotel*, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Salman Rushdie's *Grimus*, Ntozake Shange's *Liliana*, Marie Cardinal's *The Words to Say It*, Joanne Greenberg's *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*). Like psychoanalysis, the Shaman's main task is the "interpretation of the visible world via the information he acquired through dreaming." For the Shaman, as for Freud, the dreamwork is the royal road to the unconscious and the means by which to construct knowledge about the analysand's world. The Shaman and the members of his tribe, we are told, have a fantastic ability to scrutinise the landscape and to read the inscriptions thereupon, that is, the tracks of the few animals with whom they share their environment and upon whom they depend for their survival. Similarly, for Freud, psychoanalysis is the "suitable light" through which one could trace the inscriptions upon the mystic writing pad (Freud 1925a), tracking the marks left by the objects that he hunts – the histories, neuroses, traumas and fears of his analysands.

Carter is perhaps more scathing in her illustration of psychoanalysis when she sets out to explain what Walser must do in order to learn the Shaman's profession.

Fevvers tells us that Walser's lessons comprised three components:

- a) prestidigitation, or sleight of hand – the ability to conceal pebbles, sticks, spiders and, if any were obtainable, baby mice about his person

and produce them in the course of a diagnosis or an operation;

b) ventriloquism – the assumption of a high, squeaky voice of the special kind associated with the voices of spirits [or hysterics], and to ‘throw’ it, so it might seem as if it came from within the patient himself [...]

c) last but not least – the power of looking preternaturally solemn, as if he were the possessor of knowledge hidden from ordinary mortals

(Carter 1984, 263)

The implication is that not only is the Shaman/psychoanalyst a rationalist, but also a sort confidence artist of a dubious sort, like the Colonel or Herr M.. The tricks let the Shaman pull a diagnosis out of a hat, so to speak, a mystification that increases his power. Similarly, psychoanalysts are accused of practising ventriloquism, forcing their own discourses into the voices of their patients (again, see *The White Hotel, The Words to Say It*). And the solemnity of their look is to maintain the illusion of objectivity, an art still practised by those psychoanalysts who would prefer to deny or play down the importance of the countertransference, still clutching the antiquated idea(1) of objectivity and the myth of the analyst as a blank slate.

However, I find that Carter’s critique of psychoanalysis is aimed even more specifically. Fevvers also describes:

The world, dream, dreamed idea or settled conviction extended upwards, to the heavens, and downwards, into the bowels of the earth and the depths of the lakes and rivers with all whose tenants they lived on intimate terms. *But it did not extend laterally.* It did not, could not, take into account any other interpretation of the world, or dream, which was not their own one. Their dream was foolproof. An engine tuned fabrication. *A closed system. Foolproof because it was a closed system.* The Shaman’s cosmogony, for all its complexity of forms, impulses and states of being perpetually in flux, was finite just because it was a human invention and possessed none of the implausibility of authentic history. And “history” was a concept with which they were perfectly unfamiliar, as, indeed, they were with any

kind of geography except the mystically four-dimensional one they invented for themselves.

(Carter 1984, 253; emphases mine)

Here again there are the criticisms of rationalist certainty, but I cannot but help perceiving an implicit critique of the structuralist and post-structuralist language that tells us how language exists laterally in a closed system, that is, *synchronically*, concerned with the disembodied *langue*, irrespective of history and individual utterances. Saussure's presuppositions and exclusions were, I grant, necessary in the construction of a science of language, but also just as this tribe becomes confused as to what is real and what is phantasy, I believe that we have similarly lost touch with the reality of the subject when subjects are thus reduced by an "engine-turned fabrication." Furthermore, the Shaman owns a bag of objects (like a magician's bag of tricks), the most important of which is an amulet. Like Lacan's phallus, this amulet assumes a place of central, if not exclusive, importance in the Shaman's power. Again, one cannot help but think that Carter is at play, explicitly ridiculing and parodying the assumptions of Lacanian psychoanalysis: "In his amulet resided the whole source of his extraordinary powers. His father, from whom he had inherited it, assured him he must never, ever reveal the contents. He was so secretive about the contents of his amulet-bag it might as well have contained nothing at all" (257).

As if to emphasise the central importance of countertransference, the Shaman interprets the world and the images that present themselves to him according only to his own hallucinations and the dictates of his own phantasy. For example, upon hearing Walser sing a European song he learned from the Circus, the Shaman, "sure he interpreted the sounds correctly" while not understanding any of the words, kills a reindeer and stretches his skin between two poles in a sort of ritual sacrifice. Also, the Shaman operates entirely in his own language, and it is this that Walser must learn in order to communicate his dreams to his new spiritual guru. However, Walser's

gradual acquisition of the Shaman's language set up a conflict within him, for his memories, or his dreamings, or whatever they were, were dramatised in quite another language. When he spoke out loud in that

language, the Shaman paid him far more attention than he did when he asked for another glass of tea in proto-Finno-Ugric, because the Shaman assumed Walser's remembered English was the astral discourse that must be interpreted according to his own grand hypothesis, a set of conundrums that became perfectly scrutable with the aid of mediation and that distillate with which he continued to dose Walser.

(Carter 1984, 260)

Walser's adoption of the Shaman's language renders him unable to (re-)experience his dreams (and unconscious phantasies in general) in an idiom that would have personal meaning. The Shaman "was accustomed to seeing, or seering, and then persuading others that they say the same thing as he" (269). And the Shaman is incapable of understanding any experience that lies beyond his grand hypothesis. For example, there can be no interpretation of Walser's remembrances of the sea, as it is a concept entirely out of the Shaman's realm of experience: "he could not interpret *this* vision; he could not decide what the sea *meant* – although, as his grasp of the Shaman's language grew, he was able to make a few stabs at interpreting the dream material as he went along" (261), just as many ontological crises are incapable of being read by psychoanalysts whose language – or excessive privileging of language – does not include words or concepts for these malaises. It is when Walser and the Shaman begin to share a language and Walser begins to retrieve more of his own memory that the potential space begins to open and dialogue becomes possible. However, the Shaman maintains the privileged place of his own discourse and interpretations over those of his analysand. "Walser had learned to speak in images in order to recount his visions so that the Shaman would understand them but the Shaman understood them in his own way" (262).

Aspects of Carter's rational/irrational psychoanalysts are also embodied in other figures. Early in the war to defend his city, the Minister decides that Hoffman "has invented a virus which causes a cancer of the mind, so that the cells of the imagination run wild. And we must – we *will!* – discover the antidote" (Carter 1972, 22). Therefore, the Minister perceived the hallucinations that plague his city to be an

illness that must be *cured* – more specifically, an illness of the mind, whereby the mind is pulled away from rationality and the real world, and it is the Minister’s self-appointed task to use the powers of rationality to draw the citizens back to reason. Unsure as to how Dr. Hoffman is taking control of his city, the Minister “was forced to become an exorcist [...] and although he had a battery of technological devices to help him, in the last resort he was reduced to the methods of the medieval witch-hunter” (22). Again, in this description of the Minister, we hear the echoes of many clichés regarding psychoanalysis: paradoxically incorporating religion, superstition, exorcism, scientific objectivity and technology.

As each of these authors demonstrate, therefore, merely representing unreason does not effect a significant challenge to the established order. We therefore repeatedly find in contemporary magic realist texts a third space of play that attempts to negotiate these perilous extremes and to achieve, through the creative play of subjective being, a real challenge to the established social, political, economic (and literary) orders.

The Potential Spaces of Contemporary Magic Realism



“The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters”

Imagination abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters; united with her, she is the mother of the arts and the source of their wonders.

(Goya, *Los Caprichos*, 1799)⁴¹

There is a radical difference between trying to define the limits reason runs up against, and wanting to base reason in inviolable limits. In the first case, reason has its own domain, based on the principle of identity and the search for univocity; it recognises that this domain has frontiers, even if it strives to push them back. Reason is thus bordered by an exterior. In the second case, reason is no longer anything but an illusory superstructure, having no other justification than that of a system of defences prejudicial to the emergence of truth. Since these limits are foundational, and are intrinsically necessary to the field they define, the field truly no longer has any limits; it is bounded by nothing except itself, is subject to no determination, and, *a fortiori*, no rules.

A further step is taken in this direction once the theory claims to base itself, not even on limits, but on impasses – that is, on taking wrong roads [...] Establishing these impasses as foundational means condemning the entire field to sterility, and enclosing it – that is, if it were to accept any limits at all – in a sort of triumphant deadlock.

(Roustang 1998, 119-20)

A magic realism that seeks to create potential spaces does not simply transgress or subvert reason and does not therefore perpetuate the hegemony of the order that produces both reason and unreason, the thesis and its antithesis, but can (playfully) explore genuine alternatives. Monleón, for example, suggests at times that even the setting of the early gothic novel was neither that of exclusive reason or unreason, “Neither the city nor the country, but rather that no-man’s-land in which the rural and the urban world met; neither the image of an agricultural society nor the locus of mercantilism, but rather that belt on which a new economic order was basing its resources and to which it was relegating its residues” (33-4). This space for Monleón in the gothic is typified by ruins, “neither the projection of an Arcadian countryside nor the emblem of civilisation. They stood in a no-man’s-land where the ivy romanced the stone, where two worlds intersected” (35). Day notes how Carter’s feminism “is not *just* an inversion, as if the feminism of this novel were inscribed within what Carter termed a ‘female supremacist’ mode” (Day 192). Just as Klein does not merely “invert” the Freudian model but reconstructs it, so too many contemporary magic realist authors realise that a simple inversion would be both futile and counter-productive. Walpole’s gothic castle of Otranto is situated firmly in the irrational past; Carter’s bloody chamber is located in a castle “at home neither on the land nor the water, a mysterious, amphibious place, contravening the materiality of both earth and waves” (1979, 117).⁴² The panopticons of *Nights at the Circus* and Waters’ *Affinity* begin as places for the confinement and surveillance of women prisoners, but are transformed when love blossoms between the prisoners and the guards in Carter’s novel and a prisoner and a lady visitor in Waters’. As we have seen with regard to time, for example, it should not be a question of history *versus* herstory, evolution *versus* cycles, Freud *versus* Klein. In Siberia, Fevvers laments the loss of both Ma Nelson’s clock, which can be stopped and reset by Fevvers and Lizzie as they require, and Father Time, “who was once on our side” (Carter 1984, 226, 234). It is to insist, in Winnicottian fashion, not upon the rigid, *defensive* and *artificial* segregation of categories and perceptions, but upon a careful and ongoing *negotiation* between these. We do not want to imagine a situation imposed by Hoffman, who “set the timepieces free so that now they are authentically pieces of

time and can tell everybody whatever time they like” (1972, 33).

As with time, there is a recognition in contemporary magic realist fiction that all such defensive binaries need to be (re)negotiated. This can be seen most often as a negotiation between the artificial and defensive posturings of reason and unreason. Too often tales of magic realism or fantasy are seen as (and sometimes are) mere escapism, as with the carnival, regarded as only opium for the masses that actually permits further exploitation by the dominant order. In rejecting unreason as a solution to the tyranny of reason many contemporary magic realist authors are similarly dismissed as advocating the status quo, participating in a cultural industry that seeks to maintain the bourgeois order (see Zipes 1979). Many magic realist authors find themselves in a paradoxical position of writing stories that invite readers to indulge their imaginations, to at least admit the possibility of magical worlds, while at the same time decrying the rule of what are usually taken to be unreasonable forces in society. Rushdie, for example, in an open letter to the six billionth person born (1999), argues against belief in religious stories as the origin and meaning of life, paradoxically echoing the pleas of rationalist Enlightenment scientists for an abandonment of such antiquated, dangerous beliefs. “As human knowledge has grown, it has also become plain that every religious story ever told about how we got here is quite simply wrong. This, finally, is what all religions have in common” (Rushdie 1999). Expelling the uncertainty that appears so often in his fiction, Rushdie repeatedly dismisses these “sacred tales” as simply “wrong.” While Rushdie’s magic realist fiction could certainly be said to draw upon the epistemologies of the past, Rushdie here advocates a rejection of these in favour of what seems like a thoroughly modern, scientific approach to knowledge. “The ancient wisdoms are modern nonsenses. Live in your own time, use what we know, and as you grow up, perhaps the human race will finally grow up with you, and put aside childish things” (1999).

As I have suggested throughout this chapter, Carter also must confront this paradox – the “magic” in her fiction often sitting uncomfortably with her principles. “It’s an odd paradox, I know” she admits to Haffenden (92); “I’m a socialist damn it!” she insisted on another occasion. “What do I care about fairies?”⁴³ Carter wrote

that the early Enlightenment collections of *Histories or Tales of Past Times* placed the folkloric traditions in the past because of a sense that they *ought* to belong to the past, “where it posed no threat” and she describes herself as “saddened to discover that I subscribe to this feeling, too” (Carter 1990, *xi*). She told Haffenden:

Obviously the idea that my stories are all dreams or hallucinations out of Jung-land, or the notion that the world would be altogether a better place if we threw away our rationality and went laughing down the street, or even the one that schizophrenia is an enriching experience, that’s all nonsense. I *can* see how it must look to some readers, but the point is that if dreams are real as dreams, then there is a materiality to symbols; there’s a materiality to imaginative life and imaginative experience which should be taken quite seriously.

(Haffenden 1985, 85)

She then admits: “My villains are usually mad scientists, but I really don’t know why, since I’ve got nothing against science as such. The toy-maker, the puppet master, is the ideal villain” (95). And yet she uses magic, the mystical, in order to materialise, de-mystify.

Jeanette Winterson implicitly addresses this when examining the furore over naked pictures of children in a recent (2001) Saatchi exhibit. She realises, first, rather obviously, that “human nature is full of such contradictions” but that “The regular reformers, whether spiritual or social, teetotallers or icon-smashers, pressure groups or policy-makers, always want things in black and white. This or that is not who we are” (Winterson 2001).⁴⁴ Negotiating these paradoxes, providing constructive uncertainties, for Winterson, is the function of art: “Art works with contradictions, which is why zealous regimes such as Stalinism, fascism and puritanism hate it. *The News of the World* doesn’t seem too keen on it either” (2001).

There is the implication in these comments that there is a kind of “reason” that offers hope to the rational senselessness that too often dominates national and international politics and economics, but also a recognition that “reason,” and the Enlightenment project in general, has not panned out the way it was supposed to. Or, as Eagleton suggests, perhaps the project of modernity never really got off the ground

(1996, 63). This leads to another paradox: Many of these authors simultaneously write – in both their novels and critical writings – against the postmodern depersonalised, disembodied surface, a consequence of the Enlightenment’s epistemological-centricism, but they also wish to reclaim something of the Enlightenment *ideal* of reason. These authors seem to appreciate, with Eagleton, that “If we can and must be severe critics of Enlightenment, it is Enlightenment which has empowered us to be so” (1990, 8). Instead of a Reason that is divorced from affect, an epistemology that does not account for ontology, there is something to be gained from Bion’s work that seeks to re-unite this artificial dichotomy, to use reason as a means of *thinking about feelings*.

Aidan Day, in *The Rational Glass* (1998), emphasises Carter’s “materialist metaphysics” and provides a convincing wealth of evidence to show how in Carter’s works “reason” and “rationality” are qualities that are, for the most part, privileged – but not without important exceptions. Dr. Hoffman is, by the novel’s conclusion, clearly *the enemy*, regardless of how much Sadeian sympathy we might extend to him along the way as waging war upon the oppressed inhabitants of the city; Lizzie always wisely tries to get Fevvers to see reason, of the old-school Marxist variety; as stiflingly dull life with the Professors seems to Marianne, the chaotic Barbarians are more brutal and horrific. However, far from accepting an Enlightenment vision, Carter is playing with the very concept of reason and rationality, seeking alternative conceptualisations of reason that are not defined by bourgeois enlightenment. Day’s evaluation of Carter shares much with my object-relations psychoanalytic approach; he too finds that

Carter wants a reason defined outside the binary antagonisms of masculine and feminine, reason and unreason, thought and feeling. She wants a model in which reason and thought are not defined against unreason and feeling. She wants a model for the relationship between people that is based on the principle of reciprocity rather than self-definition by exclusion.

(Day 1998, 131)

Rather than psychoanalysis, Day examines Carter’s play of reason in terms of

Habermas' philosophical re-evaluations of the Enlightenment and postmodernity – an approach that is not without merit, but one that I approach suspiciously.⁴⁵

As I explored in Part I, my psychoanalytic bases produce a different approach to re-evaluating reason. First, the concepts of “rationality” and “reason” can be read in two ways. On the one hand, there is the (paranoid-)schizoid rationality that is the favoured crutch of the depersonalised subject who, splitting the object and the self, its mind from its body, and wishing to keep separate the subject and object, relies upon reason as a (pathological) defence mechanism in order to sustain its false-self in the face of uncertainty, a hostile, harsh environment demanding compliance. On the other hand, rationalism might also be the “mind in health,” the domain of the psychically mature, integrated subject in the depressive position that recognises whole objects and can more accurately respond to the world. Whereas the Enlightenment conception of Reason is based upon objectivity and disinterest, a healthy conception of reason engages the subject and the subjective element and is able to tolerate the uncertainty that this implies. At its best, reason, Eagleton reckons, “is related to generosity, to being able to acknowledge the truth or justice of another’s claim even when it cuts against the grain of one’s own interests and desires. To be reasonable in this sense involves not some desiccated calculation but courage, realism, justice, humility and largess of spirit; there is certainly nothing clinically disinterested about it” (1996, 123).

Day is correct when he states that Carter has a “passion for” and “commitment to reason” (12), although Day and Ricarda Schmidt, drawing upon classical psychoanalysis, regard “reason” as a negotiation between the super-ego and the id (Schmidt 1990; Day 1998, 83), and the belief that Carter is devoted to liberal-feminism is questionable. (“I’m a socialist damn it!” might have been her restrained response.) Carter’s apparent desire for a world ruled by reason does not, for example, extend to the patriarchal, controlling and depersonalising city in *Infernal Desire Machines* – as I state above, this is a damning polemic against the Enlightenment manifestation of reason in defence of capitalism and patriarchy. Carter, in both her fiction and critical writing, explicitly examines these two conceptions of rationality as a depersonalising defence mechanism of the split subject and of rationality as a

sober recognition of the whole object. Of course, these two visions of reason and rationality are, I think, intricately related in such a way that it is sometimes very difficult to distinguish between the two, and this too Carter seizes upon. Carter uses the terms reason and rationality to mean both a positive state of depressive ambivalence and judgement and also as a term indicating a depersonalising, desubjectifying defence mechanism employed by a non-integrated, paranoid-schizoid subject. It is placing their faith in reason, “however incoherently,” that protects Fevvers, Lizzie and others from the Circus from the Siberian storm (1984, 243), which suggests not an intellectual faith in the power of the mind to overcome the environment but an *emotional* engagement, a faith in the environment to perform a holding, containing function. As Carter states in *The Sadeian Woman*, contra Voltaire, reason cannot serve as one’s only guiding light, as “rationality without humanism founders on itself” (1979b, 35). Fevvers’ rationality is not the product of the patriarchal Enlightenment but, Carter suggests, is the result of good object relations and confidence bred from the safe and secure good internal object. Fevvers explains,

Now, when I call Lizzie a “witch”, you must take it with a pinch of salt because I am a rational being and, what’s more, took in my rationality with her milk, and you could say it’s too much rationality as procured her not altogether undeserved reputation, for when she puts two and two together sometimes she comes up with five, because she thinks quicker than most.

(Carter 1984, 225)

Fevvers’ rationality stems from the introjection and maintenance of the good object (milk) which develops into a recognition of whole objects: Lizzie is a witch, but she is also a rationalist – perhaps too much so, as her type of rationalism (ironically expressed through Lizzie’s adherence to Marxist theory) leads to simple mistakes and misrecognition of the world.

Elaine Jordan sees Carter as “rethinking the fables of Enlightened modernity” (Jordan 1994, 196). Day focusses on Carter’s deconstruction of the “Enlightenment’s grand narrative or metanarrative of reason” (68), assuming “Reason” to be a

monolithic structuring principle of the subjectivity of modernism that *post-*modernism has arrived to eradicate. Day, focussing on the perceived dissolution of the metanarrative and the proliferation of competing discourses, sees this “liberating” project as generally “postmodern.” However, I think that postmodernism’s success in overturning Enlightenment hegemony has been extremely limited. Postmodernism itself is still largely enamoured of and falls victim to the epistemologies and love of epistemology that dominate the Enlightenment. While the academic postmodern tries to undo the theoretical possibility of metanarratives, many of these narrative are as strong – if not stronger, further entrenched – in the world as a whole. By continuing to privilege the ontological status of the signifier above that of the subject, the postmodern subject has no recourse but to comply with this Enlightenment epistemology.

Although I usually avoid broadly mapping theories of individual development onto socio-cultural historical movements, I am tempted to do so here, mapping the development of the fantastic narrative since the Enlightenment onto the Kleinian development of the infant. Monleón traces the movement of the fantastic to a narrative mode that could be more accurately described as magic realist, noting that “The old polarization between good and evil that had been effective in the gothic tales disappeared with the progressive internalization of the demonic. As a result of this process, an epistemological uncertainty arose in bourgeois thought, a crisis that was articulated through and tamed by the fantastic” (Monleón 1998, 72). As Klein and Bion and Winnicott show, however, this uncertainty is not limited to epistemology, but goes to the very heart of our being as subjects. Whereas first, as in the eighteenth century, the bad object of unreason was projected, located outside the infant, by the nineteenth century there is an inevitable internalisation as the increasingly “rational” infant recognises that the bad object comes from inside. When faced with the whole object, the infant experiences ambivalence and uncertainty, and this ambivalence and uncertainty are also at the heart of magic realist narratives. Eventually, as the infant matures, the child learns to accept and tolerate the ambivalence and uncertainty of the whole object, thus moving beyond the schizoid position and embarking upon a better, more accurate relation with the world. This

movement is recognised and articulated by magic realist writers, if not by contemporary literary critics. It is perhaps also significant that when I wished to examine the vicissitudes of reason and unreason in the previous sections, Carter's *Infernal Desire Machines* offered the most obvious examples of the limitations of both extreme positions, and now that I wish to examine potential spaces that can negotiate between the polar opposites, it is Carter's later, and I think much more "mature" work, *Nights at the Circus* (1984) to which I turn most of my attention. In this section, I will examine some of these settings of magic realist novels that maintain those potential spaces that do not support the dominant (rationalist, bourgeois) order either by confirming the hegemony of reason or by pretending to offer a naïve transgressive solution of unreason, but by denying the rationalist categories themselves and maintaining uncertainties and paradoxes.

Re-acquainting Winnicott and Bakhtin I: Carnival as Liminal Space

In this investigation it is perhaps inevitable, though also very productive, again to draw Bakhtin into dialogue with Winnicott – specifically, how Bakhtin's conception of the carnival shares many qualities with a Winnicottian conception of magic realist literature as potential space. Many – including Carter herself – have criticised Bakhtin's conception of carnival along much the same lines as I have criticised that notion of transgression, that is, as a temporary subversion of authority, a safety-valve that only provides a fleeting illusion of change while in fact propping up the hegemonic order it appears to subvert. To some, carnival is only a temporary subversion of authorities, a transgression that does not really threaten the established order because of the accepted provision that at the carnival's conclusion, the normal social order will be re-established. There is some truth to such a reading, I think, but I also feel that in reading carnival through object-relations psychoanalysis and contemporary magic realism, we might gain another perspective, a more meaningful and lasting role for carnival as liminal space in which subjects can evade the demands of compliance, comforted by the knowledge that if the anxiety of creative

living becomes too great, they can always retreat to a world more familiar.

Briefly, for Bakhtin, the carnival, such as Mardi Gras, Hallowe'en or May Day celebrations, is a cultural event, often found thematically in literature, that promotes an inversion and parodies of the normal order, societal hierarchies. Bakhtin emphasises that the carnival is a folk ritual, not for the purposes of an individual or a social elite but for all classes. In carnival, there are "no footlights" – there is no distinction between actors and spectators, and everyone participates on equal footing. This can be read psychoanalytically as encouraging the play – dissolution *and* confirmation – of boundaries between subject and object and the intersubjectivity that characterises the paradox of experience in the third space. In psychoanalytic terms, carnival makes no room for the narcissistic indulgence (it is a *carnival*, not an *orgy*); instead, carnival seeks to improve the relations within society, to improve *object-relations*, and *strengthen the ego*, we might say. The ritualistic aspect of carnival can also aid in reducing the anxiety of liminality and creative living by offering a structure to the seemingly chaotic paradoxes and choices available in the third space.

Carnival also functions dialogically. Bakhtin historically links carnival to feasts, points out that cultural feasts are "linked to moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society and man" (1984, 9). Thus it is such breaks, gaps in the otherwise smooth, impenetrable power of social (or psychic) authorities that opportunities for carnival, for participatory creativity, are enabled. Also, as I suggested with regard to the dialogic nature of magic realist narrative, there are similar gaps in discourse that make the monologic, smooth discourses porous – and it is in these gaps that the potential for creativity exists.⁴⁶ The temporary suspension of social laws during carnival leads Bakhtin to theorise the possibility of a

special type of communication impossible in everyday life [...] special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating normal forms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times. A special carnivalesque, marketplace style of expression was formed which we find abundantly represented in Rabelais' novels.

(Bakhtin 1984, 10)

This is also to be found, I argue, in most magic realist novels under consideration here. A Lacanian reading of this might regard carnival as a suspension of *le loi-du-père* – the threat of castration that enables language by forcing subjects into the symbolic order – and a repetition of the (primary) narcissistic fusion between the infant and the mother that the father forever abolished. While some texts explicitly invite this reading, I would read Bakhtin here as describing the special communication, the play enabled by subjects participating in the potential space, where meaning is generated by dialogic, mutual construction and not dictated by social authorities or the dictates of rationalist discourses.

Re-acquainting Winnicott and Bakhtin II: The Grotesque Psyche-Soma

Finally, Bakhtin's theory of carnival shares with Winnicott's potential space the full and active participation of the body, or more accurately, the psyche-soma. For Bakhtin, the carnival is characterised by *grotesque realism*, an assertion of the base materiality of the body and its functions, especially those functions typically suppressed by the bourgeois order: shitting, fucking, farting, pissing, sweating, cumming...

In grotesque realism [...] the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all people. As such it is opposed to severance from the material and bodily roots of the world; it makes no pretense to renunciation of the earthy, or independence of the earth and the body [...] The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable.

(Bakhtin 1984, 19)

The grotesque body seeks to “‘embody’ the world, to materialize it, to tie everything in to spatial and temporal series, to measure everything on the scale of the human body” (1981, 177). Bakhtin’s Marxism (or perhaps more accurately, Stalin’s Marxism) prevents him from imaging a bodily-ego of the sort conceived by Winnicott, and this immediately thwarts my attempt simply to draw him into a simple psychoanalytic dialogue. However, while remembering to allow for differences, Bakhtin’s language with regard to the body echoes Winnicott’s seed metaphor: he says that the classical body has “‘neither core nor shell,’ neither an inner nor an outer,” while the contemporary body is “A core and a shell, an inner and outer, separated within it” (Bakhtin 1981, 135-6). Bakhtin states that “The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract” (19). As I have argued here, bourgeois individualism and Enlightenment rationalism have established a tradition of amplifying the dissociating and depersonalising defence mechanisms of the subject, pretending that we have no bodies and concluding that our whole essence or nature consists in thinking (Descartes 1637, 54).

Despite their initial ideological differences, the grotesque body nevertheless has much in common with what Winnicott calls the integrated psyche-soma. The grotesque body stands against the *classical body*, “the finished, complete man, cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development” (Bakhtin 1984, 25). The classical body, like the postmodern body, is nothing more than a smooth, impregnable, unadulterated surface. This is the body as envisioned by the split-off mind-psyche, the body as desired by the omnipotent narcissist or rationalist that phantasies an existence severed from the “material body and roots of the world.” Such a body is emptied of any subjective elements (Winnicott 1949, 1952; Bollas 1987, 1989; McDougall 1989). Bakhtin describes the classical body, like the depersonalised subject who seeks such a shell, as “isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies” with sharply defined, impenetrable defensive boundaries (1984, 29). And the classical body is the body of the authority that would present us with a smooth, unadulterated discourse. The grotesque body, on the other hand, like the dialogic porous narrative of magic realism, “is not a closed, completed unit; it is

unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits” (1984, 26). The grotesque body invites interaction by exposing its own openings, potential spaces for psychosomatically integrated, creative living.

The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities... the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose [...] This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body.

(Bakhtin 1984, 26)

Bakhtin, like Klein and British psychoanalysis in general, does not privilege the phallus as the most important sexual organ – it assumes its rightful place as one organ among many. For Bakhtin as for Klein and Winnicott, it is this whole, integrated body that forms the basis for the creative use of language. Bakhtin’s understanding of the language related to the grotesque body is limited to abuses, oaths and curses – this includes not only language that transgresses the law of the social order (fuck, *tabernac*), but also folk uses of language that are robbed of their meaning when authorised by the social elite. Bakhtin’s theory can thus complement both Klein’s belief that the aggressive phantasies of the infant initiate the use of symbols and Winnicott’s conceptualisation that the creative use of language must necessarily involve the integrated psyche-soma.

Although one must be careful in assuming a one-to-one correspondence here, *grotesque realism* is associated with *ambivalence* – life and death, good and bad, not merely the exultation of life over death, good over bad. As Sue Vice emphasises, “Bakhtin argues that dual images, combining praise and abuse, are characteristic of Rabelais, and of the ambivalence of grotesque realism, which may also blend comedy and tragedy [..] Praise and abuse here [...] are ‘the two sides of the same coin’, as Rabelais’ image of the token suggests” (Vice 1997, 158). As with the whole-object, there is an *uncomfortable* meeting of opposites, opposites that are normally kept apart by defence mechanisms that most often support the established order, but this re-

unification is ultimately integrating, renewing.

An interesting example of this opposition can be found in the 1988 Terry Gilliam film, *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, where we meet the King and Queen of the Moon, who have the ability to separate their heads from their bodies. The King's head – a mind-psyche – narcissistically boasts that when free of the distractions of the body, he is an omnipotent, all-knowing being, pondering the meaning and nature of the universe. Exemplifying the Enlightenment split, his mind-psyche is the ideal sought by bourgeois reason. His body, on the other hand, is always running around in a Bakhtinian grotesque fashion, lustily groping the Queen, ravenously devouring food and giddily expelling the results of his excesses. While the mind-psyche is content to exist in its own right and is always avoiding the body, the body jumps at every opportunity to seize the head, place it back upon its shoulders and thus integrate the psyche-soma. The head is terrified of such a possibility: “Flatulence and orgasms! I hate those faces you make me make!” Hence Bakhtin says that grotesque realism is *degrading*, “concerning oneself with the lower stratum of the body” (Bakhtin 1984, 24), “‘the lower part is the genital organs, the belly and the buttocks’. ‘Upward’ is heaven; ‘the upper part’ of the body ‘is the face or the head’” (Vice 1997, 155; see Bakhtin 1984, 21). Interestingly, however, in *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* the Queen's independent head and body are not similarly split as to their functions. Her head is still capable of lust – after our mini-hero Munchausen – and her body can still be cunning and thoughtful in avoiding the King's advances. This may be a re-articulation of a gender stereotype, but it also highlights the distinctively patriarchal nature of bourgeois rationalism.⁴⁷

Fevvers' is often described as bawdy, farting and burping throughout the first chapters. She does not feel ashamed of discussing sex, enjoying the blushes of Walser's discreet rationalism. It is the “dirty language” Fevvers disapproves of, recognising, like Bakhtin, that there is nothing indecent about in the body and processes, but only in the discursive constructs that we build up around them. She observes that “There is no element of the metaphysical about pissing, not at least, in *our* culture” (Carter 1984, 52). In addition, just when we and Walser are meant to be holding Fevvers in the greatest awe, marvelling at her magical splendour, a raunchy

fart usually brings us crashing back down to a harder realism. These bodily functions punctuate and penetrate the classical body and discourse, opening Fevvers' story up to the dialogic participation of others (Lizzie, Walser), preventing one from taking her story as complete, authoritative, smooth, whole, unassailable, and closed to others.

Bringing the high low, inverting an established hierarchy, features in many magic realist texts. In Murray's *John Dory*, for example, our narrator George Singer's best friend, Squinty Bar Radish – perhaps one of the greatest names ever to grace the pages of an English novel – is described as a “Rabelaisian incarnation as a student of cacation” (2001, 51). George and Squinty Bar must endure endless exceedingly tedious lessons in which their teacher, Miss Blood, makes her students recite from memory the proper way to address a titled clergyman who is the son of a duke or a marquess, a clergyman who is a baron, a clergyman who is the son of either an earl or a viscount or a baron and so on and so on. (“Reverend Lord,” “Reverend the Honourable” and “Reverend Sir,” respectively, in case you are interested.) In a wonderfully grotesque parody of this ritual recital that passed for learning in the 1940s, Squinty Bar turns his bare buttocks to George and manipulates the two cheeks with his index fingers to make the orifice act as the mouth of his teacher:

“Singer!” the twin cheeks demanded in a winsome falsetto.

“Tell me how you would address a duke's *arse*? A duke's son's arse? A duke daughter's arse? How would you address a clergyman's daughter's arse assuming she was a peer of the realm?”

“Please Miss,” I snickered, “that's a most imaginative play on words. I believe the proper form when you address a clergyman's daughter's arse is ‘Miss Right Reverend Dirty Back Passage.’”

“Mmm,” Radish's buttocks minced. “And how would you address her if she was titled?”

“That's easy, Miss. ‘Milady Right Reverend Bare Arse the Bandit Bart.’”

(Murray 2001, 71)

The scene continues in this vein, but I think this is sufficient to make my point. What

a Winnicottian analysis could add to this classical Bakhtinian grotesque scene is the element of imaginative play, particularly in the face of the compliance demanded from the stern system represented by Miss Blood. There is also the suggestion here that such a creative interruption of the established order can be more than a mere transgression, highlighting the ridiculous futility of that which the hierarchy takes so seriously. The laughter generated by the grotesque body not only subverts the student/teacher hierarchy, but also opens Miss Blood's authoritative discourse to the imaginative, dialogic play of George and Squinty Bar, letting them inject something of themselves into the world.

This is equivalent to what Bollas refers to in the analytic scene as “cracking up” (1995), those comical moments when the analysand's speech undermines the authority of the analyst. As if personally acquainted with Miss Blood, Bollas explains that the “The self that wants to master its narration is continuously slipping up in its intentions” (224). Humour that cracks up discourse is dangerous, Bollas says, because it threatens authority:

“Clowns, like minstrels and ‘comics,’ always deal with the same problem,” writes Dario Fo, “be it hunger for food, for sex, or even for dignity, for identity, for power. The problem they invariably pose is – who's in command, who's the boss?”

(Bollas 1995, 240)

It is not necessarily that comedy threatens to seize power, or itself constitutes a revolution, but such a cracking up exposes the gaps, the orifices, in a discourse that pretends it never farts or is unsusceptible to what comes flying out of others' arses. Bollas claims that mothers can use cracking up to “neutralize a power conflict” (240), thus enacting Klein's suggested lessening of the perceived omnipotence of the parents so as to foster the epistemophilic instincts of the infant.

The Carnivals, Circuses and Casinos of Magic Realism

“We came on the wind of the carnival” Vianne Rocher announces on the first page of Harris’ *Chocolat* (1999, 11). To the xenophobic villagers of Lansquenet, “we are a curiosity to them, a part of the carnival” (13). And, like so many of these narratives, it is a carnival – literal or metaphoric – that sets in motion the action, the first steps toward the potential space. As many criticise, the carnival in Lansquenet is only temporary and life soon seems to return to the status quo; all too soon

The carnival is gone. Once a year the village flares into transient brightness but even now the warmth has faded, the crowd dispersed. The vendors pack up their hotplates and awnings, the children discard their costumes and party-favours. A slight air of embarrassment prevails, of abashment at this excess of noise and colour. Like rain in midsummer it evaporates, runs into the cracked earth and through the parched stones, leaving barely a trace. Two hours later Lansquenet-sous-Tannes is invisible once more, like an enchanted village which appears only once every year. But for the carnival we should have missed it altogether.

(Harris 1999, 15)

The carnival comes and goes with little trace, but – if I can indulge myself with the metaphor – the water that seeps through the parched cracks can, under the right conditions, germinate the seeds. Carnival, as merely a transgression of authority, cannot itself enact change, but it can spark the creative element. I think that Zipes is correct when he observes with regard to the fairy or folk tale – and we may add literary carnival or even contemporary magic realist fiction – that “The end result is not an explosion or revolution. Literature and art have never been capable of doing this and never will be. But they can harbour and cultivate the germs of subversion and offer people hope in their resistance to all forms of oppression and in their pursuit of more meaningful modes of life and communication” (1979, 18). Vianne decides to stay in Lansquenet, a facilitating mother to bring some magic to the town, “if ever a place were in need of a little magic [...] And besides, the wind, the carnival wind was

still blowing” (19). She is “like a remaining slice of the carnival” (26) feared by Father Reynard and the authorities that sanction the carnival as temporary relief.

Carter’s *Nights at the Circus* offers one vision of a carnival, but while it may seem at times to be the most obvious example, Carter’s typical play frustrates any simple reading. Carter herself read Bakhtin’s work on carnival, but only after writing *Nights at the Circus*. In “In Pantoland” (1993) Carter joins a chorus of voices who criticise the temporality of carnival.

As Umberto Eco once said, “An everlasting carnival does not work.” You can’t keep it up, you know; nobody ever could. The essence of the carnival, the festival, the Feast of Fools, is transience. It is here today and gone tomorrow, a release of tension not a reconstruction of order, a refreshment ... after which everything can go on again exactly as if nothing had happened.

Things don’t change because a girl puts on trousers or a chap slips on a frock, you know. Masters were masters again the day after Saturnalia ended; after the holiday from gender, it was back to the old grind...

(Carter 1993, 389; ellipsis in original)⁴⁸

And Carter explicitly says of Bakhtin’s theory itself:

It’s interesting that Bakhtin became fashionable in the 1980s, during the demise of the particular kind of theory that would have put all kinds of question marks around the whole idea of the carnivalesque. I’m thinking of Marcuse and repressive desublimation, which tells you exactly what carnivals are for. The carnival has to stop. The whole point about the feast of fools is that things went on as they did before, after it stopped.

(Carter, quoted in Warner 1994, 254)

Notice that Carter recognises the futility of simple transgression: it is only “a release of tension not a reconstruction of order.” While her criticism of Bakhtin is legitimate, I want to demonstrate that her work reveals another aspect of carnival, one that demonstrates how carnival goes beyond simple transgression and can be employed to

effect lasting, meaningful change.

The circus perhaps involves more of a definite boundary between performer and spectator than an ideal Bakhtinian carnival, but the audience of the circus is invited to participate in the magic that the performers exhibit. Walser is transformed from mere observer to reporter *and* participant as a clown. As readers, we are invited to identify with Walser, who blurs that boundary between sceptical audience and participant when he himself runs off to join the circus. As Vice reminds us, “The whole point of carnival, and equally the dialogic novel, is that ‘the viewer [is] also a participant’” (Vice 1997, 187). Even as Todorov acknowledges, the reader’s participation, in the form of hesitation, is the first condition of the fantastic. It is not enough for Walser – for the (re-)ontologisation that he undergoes in the course of the novel – or for the reader to be a mere spectator: “Carnival is not a spectacle to be seen by the people; they live in it” (Bakhtin 1984, 7).

Walser becomes a clown, a figure that Bakhtin and Carter regard with ambivalence. On the one hand, Bakhtin sees the clown as the very embodiment of the transitional object, “representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season.” Clowns “represented a certain form of life, which was real and ideal at the same time. They stood on the borderline between life and art, in a peculiar mid-zone as it were; they were neither eccentrics nor dolts, neither were they comic actors” (Bakhtin 1984, 8). But clowns are also “life’s maskers; their being coincides with their role, and outside this role they simply do not exist” (1981, 159). This is true of Buffo:

am I this Buffo whom I have created? Or did I, when I made up my face to look like Buffo’s, create, *ex nihilo*, another self who is not me? And what am I without my Buffo’s face? Why nobody at all. Take away my make-up and underneath is merely not-Buffo. An absence. A vacancy.

(Carter 1984, 122)

The clown is in a unique position, like Walser, in that although clowns wear a mask, a false-self, “they see the underside and the falseness of every situation” (Bakhtin 1981, 159) – presumably an advantage that a more playful Walser wants to exploit in

his examination of Fevvers. The clown is, paradoxically then, a form “to portray the mode of existence of a man who is in life, but not of it, life’s perpetual spy and reflector” (161). Simultaneously exposing falsity and lies they also “grant the right *not* to understand, the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolise life; the right to parody others while talking, the right not be taken literally, not ‘to be oneself’” (163). Walser the clown can foster the paradox that gives life to the “*internal man*” that “could be laid bare only with the help of the clown” (164).⁴⁹

Walser-the-rationalist becomes a clown in order to fully experience the play offered by the liminality of the circus/carnival – clowns are both the life of the party and weary (postmodern) performers. The laughter of the carnival that the clowns generate is, Bakhtin says, universal in its scope; it is directed at everyone, including the carnival’s participants (Bakhtin 1984, 11) – perhaps especially the carnival’s participants and, as Carter shows, the clowns themselves (see Carter 1984, 116-25). This laughter is “uninfected by lies” (Bakhtin 1981, 236) and is “ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival” (Bakhtin 1984, 11-12).⁵⁰ This conceptualisation mirrors both the maintenance of productive paradox that characterises the third space and the psychic maturity of Klein’s depressive position that is capable of successfully accommodating opposing emotions.

Carter’s circus is “constructed to house permanent displays of the triumphs of man’s will over gravity and rationality” (1984, 105). It is a location of creative play where paradox is allowed to flourish against the tyranny of Enlightenment reason. But in the absence of clearly demarcated boundaries, it is not home to mere transgressive unreason. As the underlying location of the novel as a whole, the circus is the place we are invited to gape with awe and wonder at the normal made fabulous and the illusion of magical beings and events, but also where one can experience the “titillating contradiction between the soft, white shoulders of the lovely ladies [...] and the hairy pelts of the beasts in the ring” (1984, 105). It is a location wherein the Colonel, the capitalist who runs the circus, takes advice from an intelligent pig and can honestly lament not being able to reason with his simian employees, “Darned apes won’t listen to reason” (1984 183), while the apes constantly show themselves

to be more intelligent than their human oppressors – belying, therefore, the equation of reason with an achievement of an evolved, Superior Man.

The circus is a fertile repository of characters who, like Fevvers, challenge audiences' and readers' certainties. But more than merely challenging these certainties, the characters that populate Carter's circus encourage uncertainty and "hesitation" on the part of Walser and the reader with irresolvable paradoxes; if these characters are to be enjoyed and understood, the very foundations of bourgeois epistemology must be abandoned.⁵¹ The "inhabitant[s] of the magic circle of difference," are "unreachable... not knowable" (1984, 108). Fevvers, the marquee star of the show, asks her audiences the question "Is she fact or is she fiction," but, as Winnicott insists with regard to the transitional object, no decision on this point is ever expected. The Princess of Abyssinia, the tiger-enchanted, "looked like a child [...] but, close to, her face, though neither lined nor wrinkled, was ancient as granite" (106). Lamarck's *Educated Apes* turn Darwinian theory up-side-down, making scientific study of humans, "producing afresh in Walser that dizzy uncertainty about what was human and what was not" (110). Also, in Carter's *Infernal Desire Machines*, Desiderio first begins to learn of Dr. Hoffman's history and the theory behind his actions in a decrepit circus run by Hoffman's now-blind former physics professor. The circus/carnival offers a uncomfortable space in which we are invited to not just transgress, but to cast aside the boundaries, defences and hierarchies themselves.

Other contemporary novels similarly suggest the carnival as a potential space of liminality. In Morrison's *Beloved*, the (re-)emergence of Beloved from the river, and the (re-)ontologising experiences that are made possible as a result, occur while Sethe, Paul D and Denver are attending a carnival. It is here that Sethe first sees the possibilities offered to her: "A life. Could be" (Morrison 1987, 47). Through the facilitating presence of Paul D, who persuades Sethe to go to the carnival and, subsequently, to negotiate between her past and its reconstruction, Sethe re-integrates her psyche-soma – feeling the chokecherry tree on her back – enabling her to recover her history. Paul D makes possible the visit to the carnival, inviting Sethe to make space for him but not, he points out, exclusively for him. "That's the point. The

whole point. I'm not asking you to choose. Nobody would." (45). In *Beloved*, the carnival and the river from which Beloved emerges are seen as liminal spaces, where the normal (racist, patriarchal) rules that govern society are suspended and from which life emerges: in the river, Denver is born and Beloved re-born; in the carnival, Sethe.⁵²

In Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*, the images of the carnival and the river again come together in Venice, which seems to be less a city and more an uninterrupted carnival, filled with games and gambling. Here, the waterways offer the chance to build *bridges*. Villanelle explains:

We didn't build our bridges simply to avoid walking on water.
Nothing so obvious. A bridge is a meeting place. A neutral place. A casual place. Enemies will choose to meet on a bridge and end their quarrel in that void. One will cross to the other side. The other will not return. For lovers, a bridge is a possibility, a metaphor of their chances. And for the traffic in whispered goods, where else but a bridge in the night?

(Winterson 1987, 57)

Bridges in Winterson's Venice are thus spaces that not just connect two opposing sides (dialectical), but actually and actively create third spaces that negotiate between the two. However, again like potential spaces, "Bridges join but they also separate" (61); these spaces offer not only the chance to draw subjects together in potentially undifferentiated play, but the re-ontologisation offered by such creativity can also provide, through differentiation, a unique sense of self and a clear articulation of one's own boundaries. And like Winnicott, Winterson explicitly recognises the potential productivity of such paradoxes. Predicting that one day the Rialto bridge that prevents the two factions of the city warring will be forever "sealed," Villanelle realises that it "will be the doom of paradox" (1987, 61).⁵³ And although Capri, geographically speaking, is a genuine island, in Winterson's *The PowerBook* it becomes a liminal space, its mythical status creating an "idea of itself – an imaginary island and a real one – real and imaginary reflecting together in the mirror of the water" (2000, 87). Like Venice, Winterson sees the secret of Capri's success to be

“found in maintaining these tensions” of land and sea, height and depth, innocence and knowingness, poverty and riches “that have always lived on either side of the olive tree” (91).

As the circus lies at the heart of St. Petersburg in Carter’s *Nights*, it is the Casino that is the focal point of magical, creative experience in Venice. The casino is one of the few places in which our female heroine can find a job; she dresses as a boy, not to gain acceptance, but because it “was part of the game, trying to decide which sex was hidden behind tight breeches and extravagant face-paste [...]” (Winterson 1987, 54). (It could be said that the same game is being played in Waters’ *Tripping the Velvet* and, in a more “metatextual” fashion, in Winterson’s *Written on the Body*.) Villanelle recites the casino’s mantra throughout the book: “You play, you win. You play, you lose. You play” (Winterson 1987, 66). Winterson highlights the paradox and uncertainty of the potential space through gambling, suggesting perhaps that it does not matter so much whether you win or lose but merely that you’ve played the game, a clichéd truism that can also be said with regard to love:

Hopeless heart that thrives on paradox: that longs for the beloved and is secretly relieved when the beloved is not there. That gnaws away at the night-time hours desperate for a sign and appears at breakfast so self-composed. That longs for certainty, fidelity, compassion, and plays roulette with anything precious.

Gambling is not a vice, it is an expression of our humanness.
We gamble. Some do it at the gambling table, some do not.
You play, you win, you play, you lose. You play.

(Winterson 1987, 73)⁵⁴

Winterson’s novels seem to abound with such anonymous spaces, and we can often draw parallels between anonymity and potentiality, although these are by no means equated. Sage notices in Carter’s fiction, and perhaps contemporary magic realist fiction in general, a “nostalgia for anonymity” (1994, 2) that undermines the authority and certainty of the narrator. *Written on the Body*, for example, is one such space as the anonymous, androgynous – or, rather, bisexual, perhaps even poly-sexual – narrator allows Winterson and the reader to construct a cornucopia of potential

beings, sexualities, subjectivities and performance. Winterson's most recent novel, *The PowerBook* (2000), presents the characters revelling in the radical anonymity of sexuality and identity offered in cyber-space. Sexuality in *Written on the Body* and *The PowerBook* is both richly sensual and disembodied: the polymorphous sexuality invites a celebration of bodily pleasure that is not constrained by gender politics, identities or even biological specificity but invites readers to "Take off your clothes. Take off your body. Hang them up behind the door. Tonight we can go deeper than disguise" (2000, 4). More than merely being homosexual in a heterosexual world – or being heterosexual when the expectation is homosexual – these narrators deny all categorisation demanded by the Enlightenment binarism of sexuality. Talking about *The PowerBook* (2000b), Winterson openly spoke of admiring and desiring the anonymity offered by cyber-space and the plurality of subjectivities one can assume there. Her description of cyber-space in this respect immediately struck me as very similar to Villanelle's descriptions of Venice and the Casino.

Stories in The City as Potential Space

It should be possible to link the lessening of omnipotent manipulation and of control and of devaluation to normality, and to a degree of manic defence that is employed by all in everyday life. For instance, one is at a music-hall and on to the stage come dancers, trained to liveliness. One can say that here is the primal scene, here is exhibitionism, here is anal control, here is masochistic submission to discipline, here is a defiance of the super-ego. Sooner or later one adds: here is LIFE.

(Winnicott 1935, 131)

As I argued above, the city is most often the location of unwavering rationality and the logical home of compliance and the law of the father. However, cities generally receive an ambivalent treatment from contemporary magic realist writers, and thus the city sometimes becomes an important site of potentially creative experience. This is true of a vast range of city-scapes: from early nineteenth-century Venice to late nineteenth-century St. Petersburg to early twentieth-century Toronto to late-twentieth

century “Gothic north” Yorkshire⁵⁵ to early twenty-first century Tokyo. Carter cites cities as important spaces in the development of story-telling and creativity, pointing out that “Village girls took stories to the city, to swap during endless kitchen chores or to entertain other people’s children” (Carter 1990, xv). This is perhaps especially true of societal re-organisation taking place during the Industrial Revolutions, which would consistently show how the creation of cities, dictated and necessitated by the bourgeois mode of production, were also – again, necessarily – the sites of resistance (both significant and token) to the bourgeois order.⁵⁶

London is a site of such negotiation for Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*, *Wise Children* and Waters’ *Tipping the Velvet*, all of which illustrate the lives of music-hall stage performers in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century London. Peach points out that the “theatre in the seventeenth century was a much more carnivalesque institution than it is today. It was much more a free place for meeting and drinking with people and performances were characterised by more interaction between the actors and the audiences and within the audiences itself” (1998, 148). Although set two hundred years later, Carter and Waters capitalise on this more carnivalesque expression of the stage in their depictions of the music-hall which retains the more public and participatory aspects of theatre (in *Wise Children*, retaining the pre-Enlightenment theatrical traditions by reverting back to Shakespeare). As Winnicott chooses his example by fortunate coincidence in the epigraph above, we may say with regard to the music-hall performers that they are enacting a primal scene, that they are indulging in exhibitionism, in anal control, that they are submitting to masochistic discipline or that they are deficient in their super-ego – and each of these readings may be applied, to various degrees, to these novels. “Sooner or later,” Winnicott concludes, however, “one adds: here is LIFE. Might it not be that the main point of the performance is a denial of deadness, a defence against depressive ‘death inside’ ideas, the sexualisation being secondary.” The special place for subjective being offered by the stage is emphasised most emphatically in *Wise Children* when Dora and Nora go to Hollywood to star with their father in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Hollywood is for Dora a space of unrelenting (ir)rationalism, a fully magical “Land of Make Believe” (Carter 1991,

120):

What I missed most was illusion. That wood near Athens was too, too solid for me. Peregrine, who specialised in magic tricks, loved it just because it was so concrete. “You always pull a *live* rabbit out of a hat,” he said. But there wasn’t the merest whiff about the kind of magic that comes when the theatre darkens, the bottom of the curtain glows, the punters settle down, you take a deep breath [...] none of the person-to-person magic we put together with spit and willpower. This wood, this entire dream, in fact, was custom-made and hand-built, it left nothing to the imagination.

(Carter 1991, 125)

Dora’s preference for the stage over film is a preference for relations with other people over a narcissistic, self-gazing relation to the camera, and a preference for the reality of London, with its Brixton as well as its West End (with a river in between!) over the single-minded, self-indulgent phantasing of Hollywood. Carter writes of another such space in “The Erl-King” (1979). Here, in the woods, “there is a haunting sense of the imminent cessation of being [...] A young girl would go into the wood as trustingly as Red Riding Hood to her granny’s house but this light admits no ambiguities and, here, she will be trapped in her own illusion because everything in the wood is exactly as it seems” (186). Like Hollywood, it is too literal – there is no paradox, no illusion through which to generate meaning. And it is “This lack of imagination [that] gives his heroism to the hero” (1979, 205).

Hollywood is a magical space, but it is (Winnicottian) *illusion*, not pure magic, that Dora (and Carter) seeks. It is the intermingling, the paradoxes that are found in London. In paradox, symbols and meaning can flourish – Hollywood for Dora “was all too literal” (125). Again fortuitously choosing his examples, Winnicott asks,

What about such things as the wireless that is left on interminably?
 What about living in a town like London with its noise that never ceases, and lights that are never extinguished? Each illustrates the reassurance through reality against death inside, and a use of manic

defence that can be normal.

(Winnicott 1935, 131)

The bustle, the noise, the lights of the city are highlighted by both Carter and Waters, suggesting that London offers a denial of deadness, a manic defence against anxiety and therefore, a sensation of “life.” Fevvers exclaims, “Oh, my lovely London [...] The shining city! The new Jerusalem!” (Carter 1984, 89). Ambrose Tree, in McGrath’s *Martha Peake*, ambivalently introduces us to “London! Or rather – London” (2000, 24). In these texts, London is the potential space, resounding in paradox, play and ambiguities; Hollywood is more akin to the phantastic void of Siberia. As the centres of reason and of unreason London is a third space that is both and neither. It is a mythical, magical place inspiring awe and wonder, but it can, and should, also arouse anxiety – it is a place “vaster and smokier and more alarming than I could have thought possible” (Waters 1998, 64).

Fevvers’ negotiation in London and creative fight against patriarchal, rationalist society is illustrated through the story of Fevvers’ early history at Ma Nelson’s whorehouse (where both Lizzie and Fevvers worked, albeit not as prostitutes but as a house-cleaner and a sort of “lucky mascot”). Fevvers relates:

It was one of those old, square, red-brick houses with a plain, sober façade and a graceful, scallop-shaped fanlight over the front door that you may still find in those parts of London so far from the tide of fashion that they were never swept away. You could not look at Mother Nelson’s house without the thought, how the Age of Reason built it; and then you almost cried, to think the Age of Reason was over before it properly begun, and this harmonious relic tucked away behind the howling of the Ratcliffe Highway, like the germ of sense left in a drunkard’s mind.

(Carter 1984, 25-6)

To me, Fevvers here laments how that the Age of Reason was, in its genesis, perhaps a noble undertaking that was not allowed to achieve its own goals before being corrupted. This Age of Reason was responsible for the lofty designs of building itself, with its “plain, sober façade,” but it also gave rise to the game that enshrined itself

within the walls, “in which those who visited might extend the boundaries of their experience” and where “rational desires might be rationally gratified” (26).

“Rational” desires here are those desires experienced by any whole, psychosomatically integrated object. It is both the façade of the house and the institution within that survive the end of the Age of Reason, surviving as the “germ of sense” that infects the mind of the drunkard, surviving the dizzying and incoherent rationalism and industrialisation that is also the product of bourgeois reason.

The representation of Venice in *The Passion* also gives us a vision of a landscape that is urban and yet does not maintain the Enlightenment dichotomy of reason and unreason, instead serving as a potential space for the play of paradox and the realisation of subjective being. Villanelle’s Venice is the “city of uncertainty” (58). It is neither part of the mainland, that is, undifferentiated and inseparable from the world that surrounds it, nor an island, like the isolated prisons of San Servolo or Corsica to which Henri and Napoleon are banished. Venice is a city of mazes, where the usual (rationalist, patriarchal) temporal divisions and conceptions are challenged. “In Venice, a long time ago, when we had our own calendar and stayed aloof from the world, we began days at night” (1987, 56). It is the “city of disguises”, but do not imagine that everyone wades about pathologically hiding from the world behind their false-selves. Rather, as Villanelle explains, “What you are one day will not constrain you on the next. You may explore yourself freely” (Winterson 1987, 150). Venice is the “enchanted city” where “all things seem possible. Time stops. Hearts beat. The laws of the real world are suspended” (1987, 76). It is capable of generating illusion, the apparent movement of the buildings a trick of the early morning light reflecting off the domes.

Venice functions for Villanelle and Winterson as a potential space of specifically *sexual* play. Villanelle, like Winterson’s unnamed and unsexed narrator in *Written on the Body*, Nan in Waters’ *Tipping the Velvet* and Carter’s pantomime characters in “In Pantoland”, are all free to explore their gender and sexual orientation in a space in which they are free to chose to be men or women or neither or to negotiate their own way through these paradoxes. Again, there is a love in Winterson, Carter and Waters of the burlesque, where “transvestism and female

impersonation are staple disguises” (Warner 1994, 247). Villanelle androgynously shifts throughout between identities as a woman and a boy and seems comfortable in an ambiguous bi-sexuality. Many of the voices in *The PowerBook* are poly-sexual, living in disguise as whatever gender suits their desires. Nan, to examine an extreme example, starts as a woman who dresses on stage as a man and falls in love with a woman who also dresses as a man, then walks the street dressed as a “rent-boy” offering blow-jobs to men before strapping on a dildo and dressing full-time as the man-servant of a rich Sapphist and, finally, dresses as a woman who falls in love with a woman. Nan observes that

It might seem a curious kind of leap to make, from music-hall masher to renter. In fact, the world of actors and artistes, and the gay world in which I now found myself working, are not so very different. Both have London as their proper country, the West End as their capital. Both are a curious mix of magic and necessity, glamour and sweat.

(Waters 1998, 203)

Sexuality and gender thus also exist in a space *in between*. When she sees a sign seeking a “*Fe-Male Lodger*” she finds that “there was something very appealing about that *Fe-Male*. I saw myself in it – in the hyphen” (Waters 1998, 211).

Venice, Henri feels, is one place that could resist the compulsive and extremely tyrannical rationalisations of Napoleon.

Where Bonaparte goes, straight roads follow, buildings are rationalised, street signs may change to celebrate a battle but they are always clearly marked. Here, if they bother with street signs at all, they are happy to use the same ones over again. Not even Bonaparte could rationalise Venice.

(Winterson 1987, 112)

Henri is, at least at first, unable to deal with the uncertainty and chaos that for him Venice represents. Henri is more accustomed to the creations of French town-planners that designed Lansquenet and Paris, but Villanelle’s mother spits on Paris, here as in the real world the quintessential rationalist city. Henri wants a map to help find his way through Venice, an objective representation and guide to the space.

Villanelle responds, “It won’t help. This is a living city. Things change,” explaining that “The cities of the interior do not lie on any map” (Winterson 1987, 113-4). But the potential space is not something that can be objectively represented and cognitively understood – it must be experienced.

“You are an absolutist then.”

“What’s one of those?”

“All of nothing.”

“What else is there?”

“The middle ground. Even been there?”

“I’ve seen it on the map.”

“You should take a trip.”

(Winterson 2000, 40)

For Winterson, stories themselves are maps. Some of these maps are like the conventional narratives produced by automatic writing, where “Some of the territory has become as familiar as a seaside resort. When we go there we know we will build sandcastles and get sunburnt and that the café menu never changes” (2000, 54). However, “Some of the territory is wilder and reports do not tally. The guides are only good for so much. In these wild places I become part of the map, part of the story, adding my version to the versions there” (54). These are the spaces of uncertainty and dialogism, where the reader is not led by an authoritative voice but actively recreates the territories through which he or she passes and rewrites the maps that chart that space, putting something of themselves both in the environment and its representation.

In *Nights at the Circus*, we leave quasi-rationalist London, governed by the patriarchal tyranny of Big Ben, moving East to the quasi-mystic “Petersburg” where Walser begins to partake in the play made available through the circus. It is the combination of the city and the circus that fosters the suspension of disbelief and the acceptance of paradox that permit Walser’s creative play. The liminal location of St. Petersburg magnifies the effects of the circus. Walser himself recognises this quality of St. Petersburg as a city of in-betweens, of hybridity and paradox.

St. Petersburg, a beautiful city that doesn’t exist any more.

Today, another beautiful city of a different name bestrides the mighty Neva; on its site, St. Petersburg once stood.

Russia is a sphinx. You grand immobility, antique, hieratic, one haunch squatting on Asia, the other on Europe, what exemplary destiny are you knitting out of the blood and sinew of history in your sleeping womb?

She does not answer. Riddles bounce off her sides, as gaily painted as those of a peasant troika.

(Carter 1984, 96; emphasis original)

St. Petersburg stands between West and East and, standing on the precipice of the twentieth-century and the changes that await it, is between tradition and revolution, between names, soon to be at once present and absent, a “city that is on the point of becoming legend but not yet” (97). It is a “Sleeping Beauty of a city,” and like the Sleeping Beauty imprisoned by Madame Schreck, it is between life and death, “longing yet fearing the rough and bloody kiss that will awaken her.” In St. Petersburg, Walser’s journalistic prose is transformed into a grandiose, adjective-rich tour of magical excess verbiage, as exemplified above. “Walser reread his copy. This city precipitated him towards hyperbole; never before has he bandied about so many adjectives. Walser-the-clown, it seemed, could juggle with the dictionary with a zest that would have abashed Walser-the-foreign-correspondent” (98). As a clown, we can infer from Bakhtin, Walser has the “right to speak in otherwise unacceptable languages and the right to maliciously distort languages that *are* acceptable” (Bakhtin 1981, 405), “acceptable” in this context I take to mean officially sanctioned, rationalist discourses worthy of the sceptical journalist.

In Carter’s *Infernal Desire Machines*, for example, finding this space is much more problematic than in *Nights at the Circus*, where the *physical* re-location of the characters provides an *almost* straight forward representation of the *psychic* location of the characters. In *Infernal Desire Machines*, as in *Nights*, while the city is most certainly the home of rationalist thought, the space outside the city does not neatly divide itself into a potential space or an object-less sphere wholly dominated by internal phantasies. It is to Carter’s and others’ credit that they so explicitly make the

point that for subjects accustomed to the protection offered by a rationalistic defence, the movement from depersonalising rationality to a potential space is by no means assured and is a cause for anxiety. The “lesson” to be taken from the manipulation of these environments is to show how desperately one needs these defences once they come to dominate our experience, and how easily complete disintegration threatens to ensue after the loss of the first line of defence. (The seed whose kernel is damaged may not be able to germinate when exposed to a harsh environment.) Also, the inability to draw clear, defining lines around such spaces again presents the welcomed inability to impose simple categories and over-simplistic one-to-one correspondences, showing that it is not necessarily the space itself but the quality of experience that is transitional and the source of productive paradox.

Tokyo, as represented by Carter in “Flesh and the Mirror” (1974) and in David Mitchell’s *Ghostwritten* (1999), is another example of an ambivalent conception of the city. It is still a living place that offers potential liminality, but also at times threatens to overwhelm the subject. The use of Tokyo also highlights for me that the cities that offer the potentiality for experience can be situated in relation to Western rationalism: They are either shown as existing *outside* the tyranny of rationalism (as Venice is immune to Napoleon’s tyranny), at the supposed height of the irrational challenge to bourgeois hegemony (nineteenth-century London, for example), or, finally, it seems, in cities that can be imagined to lie beyond the grasp and design of Western rationality (the orientalism of Tokyo, although ironically, Tokyo was recently held up in the “West” as a shining example of capitalist organisation). In each case, it is shown that the city intrinsically defies its assumed place as the sanctuary of Cartesian logic. Like Winterson’s Venice, Tokyo, as potential space, cannot be rationalised, scientifically mapped-out. “It’s so big that nobody really knows where it stops [...] The city never stops rewriting itself. In the time one street guide is produced, it’s already become out of date” (Mitchell 1999, 37). Carter’s narrator in “Flesh and the Mirror” realises the folly of trying to contain the city and make it a part of her own phantasy:

I think I know, now, what I was trying to do. I was trying to subdue the city by turning it into a projection of my own growing pains. What

solipsistic arrogance! The city, the largest city in the world, the city designed to suit not one of my European expectations, this city presents the foreigner with a mode of life that seems to him to have the enigmatic transparency, the indecipherable clarity, of dream. And it is a dream he could, himself, never have dreamed. The stranger, the foreigner, thinks he is control; but he has been precipitated into somebody else's dream.

You never know what will happen in Tokyo. Anything can happen.

(Carter 1974, 69)

Carter's narrator finds that Tokyo's vibrancy offers a means of experience. Living elsewhere, "It was as if I never experienced experience *as* experience [...] It was as if there were glass between me and the world" (69).

But Mitchell's representation also draws attention to the deficiencies that such space offers. Unlike Venice in *The Passion*, this space cannot be exploited by the individual *physically* for an experience of potentiality. "You don't have the space [...] You're pressed against people body to body in the trains, several hundred hands gripping each strap on the metro trains. Apartment windows have no view but other apartment windows" (37). As from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth the irrational moved from an external threat to become internal, the spaces cities offer for creative experience seem to move from external, psychical spaces to those that are internal, psychical. "No, in Tokyo you have to make your place *inside* your head" (37; italics in original). These spaces are found by Tokyo's citizens through "Sweat, exercise and pain" in gyms and swimming pools, in television, Internet, Hollywood, doomsday cults (38) – which demonstrates, for me, ambivalence not only towards (post)modern technologies but also towards the quality of experience in the (potential) spaces of contemporary society.

Potential Cyber-Spaces

Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* also asks us to question the potential spaces to be found in cyber-space, the interweaving world of the Internet. Dissolving boundaries form the structural basis of his novel; many of the characters are trying to live beyond their somatic limits, therefore indulging in a schizoid omnipotent phantasy. Our first narrator has joined a religious sect which he believes has granted him extra-sensory power and released him from the "prison of materialism," from all human ties with his "skin family" – that "unclean, biological family" into which he was born (1999, 9). Mitchell often exploits cyber-space as an exemplary site for such disintegration.

So I do not want to over-aggrandise the brave new world of the Internet – for fear of my analysis crashing down like dot.com stock or one day seeming as dated as a 1950s sci-fi matinee. I do not want to endorse whole-heartedly cyber-space as the great new potential space lying-in-wait. Here too I think we need to inject a note a cautious ambivalence. First, cyber-space is a disembodied universe. We do not take our bodies into the Internet. This can, as I have suggested, have its advantages, but instead of a potential space, it can also be a place where we indulge omnipotent phantasies. Instead of productive play, we often use the anonymous space offered by the Internet to indulge in regressive primitive processes, free of the inhibitions that necessarily confuse our material relations with others, the materiality that prevents us from regarding the other only as objects of our phantasy. In cyber-space we can split ourselves, and others, pander to our own illusions of grandiosity, collapse or blow-up the frames and boundaries that define ourselves and our relations with others – which also of course means that we are subject to feelings of emptiness, anxiety and disintegration, and more often relate to others in terms of part-, rather than whole-objects (see Young 1996, 1996b). Computers and the Internet also offer, in theory, places where one can escape the sloppy, unpredictable world of subjective emotions and human relations in favour of supposedly cool, binary, logical dispassion. We are invited in cyber-sex not only to "Take off your clothes" but also to "Take off your body" (Winterson 2000, 4). We should also perhaps be wary of the increasing corporate control of the Internet, whereby cyber-space is becoming less the utopian

demos it was once hoped it would develop into and instead merely provides more room for advertisers' logos – though I suppose that this is true of so many spaces that it would be unfair to single out the Internet for specific ridicule in this sense (I hear that Pepsi wants to project its logo onto the moon...).

But there is also evidence to suggest that cyber-space may provide at least an adequate surrogate or substitute for embodied experience in the potential space. As I have already discussed, Winterson's characters utilise the anonymity, the disguises, that cyber-experience can offer. Like the living city that cannot be quantified or contained on a map, the Internet is beyond definitive representation, moving and shifting according to the play of those that enter the space. "This is a world. This is a world inventing itself. Daily, new landmasses form and then submerge" (Winterson 2000, 63).⁵⁷ The Internet is a potential place where subjects can meet, intermingle an impact upon one another. As Winterson's narrator says: "It used to be that the real and the invented were parallel lines that never met. Then we discovered that space is curved, and in curved space parallel lines always meet" (2000, 94). This cyber-space, though, must also be shared. Just as in a potential (meat)space no one element can dominate, there can be no authority, the Internet is governed only by a democratic principle that everyone can use this space. "What happened to the omniscient author?" one character in *The Power.Book* asks another. "Gone interactive" is the straight-forward reply (27). Winterson, perhaps naïvely equating experiences of material sex and cyber-space, insists upon these dialogic, non-authoritarian relations

In this space which is inside you and inside me I ask for no rights or territories. There are no frontiers or controls. The usual channels do not exist. This is the orderly anarchic space that no one can dictate, though everyone tries. This is a country without a ruler. I am free to come and go as I please.

(Winterson 2000, 175)

And so we must remember that the Internet, like bridges, can *separate* as well as unite. The Windows interface that I am using as I write these words allows me to divide my project and my worlds into discrete units. Winterson's narrator explains: "I was typing on my laptop, trying to move this story on, trying to avoid endings, trying

to collide the real and the imaginary worlds, trying to be sure which is which” (2000, 93). This highlights, for me, the appeal of cyber-spaces where, like magic realist fiction, there are *uncertainties* that must be negotiated. “When I sit at my computer, I accept that the virtual worlds I find there parallel my own. I talk to people whose identity I cannot prove. I disappear into a web of co-ordinates that we say will change the world. What world? Which world?” (2000, 94).

“Queen of Ambiguities”: Illusion and The Transitional Object

A *Weltanschauung* erected upon science has, apart from its emphasis on the real external world, mainly negative traits, such as submission to the truth and rejection of illusions.

(Freud 1933, 219)

For Winnicott, it is through illusion that we come into being as subjects. Illusion is necessary for creative experience and enables the use of transitional objects that aid the infant in its movement from a purely magical, omnipotent worldview, thus also establishing the basis of intersubjective experience. It seems to me that in contemporary magic realist fiction we see many such transitional objects embodied as central characters, objects helping to guide the narrators, characters and readers in negotiating the paradoxes between magic and reality. Again, Carter’s *Nights at the Circus* offers an exemplary case study, though many other texts have similar figures, sometimes more subtly to be found in small objects, talismans, or even memories and language, objects that are also available to subjects in the exploration of the potential space and the articulation of their idiom.

Fevvers is heralded as the “Queen of ambiguities, goddess of in-between states” (81), and this status as a paradox within the potential spaces of *Nights of the Circus* both troubles and excites readers and characters alike. Fevvers is an object wherein paradoxes are allowed to play and within which there is no insistence upon resolution. She is both a woman and a bird, a virgin and a whore, a socially

responsible socialist and greedy, money-obsessed capitalist *and* a fetishised commodity, and yet at no point do any of these different roles appear to be in conflict – they are allowed to co-exist. She is the personification of illusion; her very name *sounds* like real “feathers,” but is, because of a sleight-of-ear with the accent of the language, *only the illusion* of “feathers.” Sage suggests that Carter herself is such a paradoxical figure, “the wolf in Grandma’s clothing” (1994, 18), or the socialist who writes fairy tales. Certainly the winged-woman is a theme Carter often employs, inviting comparisons with Mother Goose, the story-teller who facilitates illusion. (Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* is a collection of re-appraisals of Ma Goose’s tales). Thus we see not only Fevvers but also the Chance sisters in *Wise Children*, who play and dress as feathered fairies, and la Mère Folle, the Crazy Mother of the pantomime and Feast of Fools in Burgundy in “In Pantoland” (Carter 1993, 384-6). Dick Whittington’s cat in “In Pantoland” also goes “on two legs more often than on four to stress his status as intermediary between the world of the animals and out world” possessing “some of the chronic ambiguity of all dark messengers between different modes of being” (Carter 1993, 386).⁵⁸

Fevvers offers herself as an illusion – she cannot be proved to be fake or genuine without losing her power to facilitate creativity and liminal experience. As a transitional object, Fevvers guides Walser through the potential space that is the circus, serving as the object with which we play and that reduces our anxiety of liminality. Like a facilitating mother she allows illusion, and like a transitional object she aides the acceptance of and negotiation through paradox, thus (re-)ontologising the subject by enabling creative play. Again to employ Winnicott’s metaphor of the seed, Fevvers helps us to move the centre of consciousness from the shell to the kernel. Fevvers appropriately adapts the seed metaphor to that of an egg, saying of Walser (and perhaps the reader): “Let him hand himself over into my safekeeping, and I will transform him. You said yourself he was unhatched, Lizzie; very well – I’ll sit on him, I’ll hatch him out, I’ll make a new man of him” (Carter 1984, 281). However, while presenting herself as a fantasy, Fevvers does not “go inside” (Winnicott 1971, 5) in that she never becomes solely an internal object of Walser’s or the reader’s fantasy, and sternly resists the attempts of Rosencreutz and the Grand

Duke to reduce her to such a non-existence.

The question with which we are challenged at the very outset of the book, “Is she fact or is she fiction?” (Carter 1984, 7) echoes, while seeming to contravene, Winnicott’s insistence that we do not challenge the ontological status of the transitional object. Fevvers persistently challenges Walser and the reader to doubt her, “Believe it or not” (7); to wonder “‘How does she do it’ and ‘Do you think she’s *real*?’” (9). However, it is Fevvers herself who asks these questions, and she obviously does not expect, nor does she at all desire, an answer. Simply, if the “truth” were ever discovered, it would mark the end of her career as a confidence artist and the end of the reader’s hesitation, reducing her story from the fantastic to one of rational or supernatural certainty. These questions, like her declaration at the novel’s conclusion “I fooled you!” is, Carter herself explains, “a description of her being” (Haffenden 1985, 90). Carter and Fevvers are playing with their audience, with Walser and the reader. Fevvers “remained unconvinced about the precise nature of her own illusion” (Carter 1984, 159). In Siberia, when the young Escapee wishes to engage her in a debate on the recent mysterious disappearance of his fellow convicts, Fevvers’ explicitly clarifies, “because I’m not in the mood for literary criticism [...] I’m not the right one to ask questions of when it comes to what is real and what is not, because, like the duck-billed platypus, half the people who clap eyes on me don’t believe what they see and the other half thinks they’re seeing things” (244). At the novel’s conclusion, she comforts Walser, “We told you no other lies nor in any way strayed from the honest truth. Believe it or not, all that I told you as real happenings were so, in fact; and as to the questions of whether I am fact or fiction, you must answer that for yourself!” (292). Because she does not put her own myth-making beyond doubt or suspicion, Fevvers shows herself to be a superior confidence trickster to the Colonel’s capitalist Ludic Game or Mignon’s Herr M.. Fevvers succeeds as a transitional object when other marketed commodities fail, because in the marketplace, as a commodity, “the eyes that watch you take no account of your existence” (Carter 1979, 168).⁵⁹

The status of Fevvers’ wings, or a rope trick performed in Calcutta, must not be proved to be a genuine miracle any more than it can be exposed as an illusion. Just

as a fakir lying on a bed of nails asks Walser, “what [...] would be the point of the illusion if it *looked* like an illusion?” (16), the fantastic loses its power if it is shown, beyond a doubt, to be real *or* fake; uncertainty is still the key. Walser finds that it is the *limitations* of Fevvers’ act that tempt him into belief.⁶⁰ Even Walser, who is a reluctant player in the third space, becomes “enchanted by the paradox: if she were indeed a *lusus naturae*, a prodigy, then – she was no longer a wonder” (161). In a language that echoes and plays with Todorov’s, Walser further concludes:

She would no longer be an extraordinary woman, no more the Greatest *Aerialiste* in the world but – a freak. Marvellous, indeed, but a marvellous monster, an exemplary being denied the human privilege of flesh and blood, always the object of the observer, never the subject of sympathy, an alien creature forever estranged.

She owes it to herself to remain a woman, he thought. It is her human duty. As a symbolic woman, she has meaning, as an anomaly, none.

(Carter 1984, 161)

Walser recognises that in order to be considered a subject with meaning, and not become merely an empty, commodified object, Fevvers must retain her humanity, her “flesh and blood” – she must not become simply the realisation of magical phantasy, and she must survive the paradox of her own being. It is this paradox that is at the core of creative subjectivity, and it is this uncertainty, the very doubt within our minds, that lies at the heart of magic realism. Like a child with the transitional object that exists between magic and reality, if we are to enjoy our subjectivity, if we are to enjoy our object, we must tolerate the uncertainty, the paradox. “If she isn’t suspect, where’s the controversy? What’s the news?” (11).

Fevvers serves as a transitional object not only for the reader and Walser but also for other characters we find at the circus. In particular, Mignon, the abused wife of Lamark and the sex-toy of the Strong-Man, is also helped by Fevvers’ benevolent guidance. Mignon, we are told, “used to pose for the dead” (128), playing the part of deceased girls for another confidence artist, Herr M.. This role mirrors Mignon’s own status as desubjectified, a character for whom sex and her body have no meaning

other than through her role as a wage-slave. Herr M., like other confidence artists in this book, produces illusions, but these are not all productive in a Winnicottian sense. The illusion Herr M. offers is of the return to earth of the ghosts of recently deceased girls. Carter's portrait is somewhat ambivalent. On one level, we can regard his illusions as transitional phenomena that help the families of these deceased girls to overcome their mourning. However, Herr M. objectifies Mignon, increasing her depersonalisation, and we see Herr M. benefiting from the commodification of these illusions like the most opportunistic capitalist. Mignon, due to the traumas she had suffered throughout her young life and the constant objectification to which she is subjugated, is "a being without a past, without a present, yet she existed thus, without memory or history, only because her past was too bleak to think of and her future too terrible to contemplate; she was the broken blossom of the present tense" (139-40). Mignon's body, when we find her in St. Petersburg, is insubstantial. She has no internal objects or subjective life and she is incapable of creating any. No matter what she eats, "she did not put on any weight, it was as though something inside her ate it all up before she could get to it but she didn't have worms" (133). Her empty insides are a defence against the trauma and abuse she is continually forced to undergo. "She had an exceedingly short memory, which alone saved her from desolation" (141), but because she has no internal objects, no psyche-somatic integration, she is incapable of experience, incapable of subjectivity.

The only time Mignon speaks is through songs in a language she does not understand. The words themselves have no meaning, so she cannot find solace in self-articulation, but only in the aesthetic experience that the songs provide. It is not though language itself that we come to be subjects, but language can provide the objects we use in the articulation of our idiom and the realisation of our subjective ontology. "To sing is not to speak," Fevvers tells the Princess, "if they [the apes] hate speech because it divides us from them, to sing is to rob speech of its function and render it divine. Singing is to speech what is dancing to walking" (153). Recall too Winnicott's suggestion that music may be a transitional object employed by the subject to help negotiate anxiety (1971, 2). Winnicott also sees that the words are not important so much as the tune, the melody, which is as likely to be an object for the

infant's play as language. Under Fevvers' care – she gives “bread and milk for the abused child, a maternal touch” (132) – Mignon gains the confidence to leave her husband, put an end to the abuse and indifference she suffers both under him and the Strong-Man, and finds meaning and love through her relationship with the Princess of Abyssinia. Mignon and the Princess then also use music as a transitional object to bridge the gap and the anxiety between each other and between themselves and the tigers. Similarly, Fevvers facilitates the movement of the Strong-Man from a depersonalised sub-human gladly participating the patriarchal mythologies of power and masculinity. She acts as a mediator, slowly drawing the Strong-Man out of his affectless shell and helping him to communicate (literally, as she translates for him) his feelings to Mignon and the Princess (166-7).

Maurice Conchis in *The Magus* is another figure who functions to guide characters and readers through a liminal space, although he certainly does not fit the nurturing, maternal role most often found, offering instead play more fraught with anxiety and horror. Conchis is the game-master who performs his role as nurturing caretaker with a rather more sadistic glee than Winnicott might like, but he nevertheless provides illusions, in the form of the elaborate masques, that tempt Nicholas into an imaginative potential space. And like a caretaker, Conchis disillusions his child, though his “final disintoxication” is again perhaps more abrupt and shocking than what Winnicott would recommend. Conchis himself, like Fevvers, seems to exist paradoxically between worlds; very literally in his case between the worlds of radical reason and radical unreason. As Conchis slowly and purposefully reveals to Nicholas through the course of their “experience” – Nicholas calls it an “experiment” before Conchis corrects him (235) – Conchis was initially enamoured by reason.

We all regarded medicine as a religion, and we called ourselves the Society of Reason. We saw the doctors of the world uniting to form a scientific and ethical elite. We should be in every land and in every government, moral supermen who would eradicate all demagoguery, all self-seeking politicians, reaction, chauvinism. We published a manifesto.

(Fowles 1977, 171)

Conchis however later distances himself these beliefs (“*Merde*” is written over the manifesto) so that when Nicholas meets him in Bourani, Conchis is trying to use science creatively – fittingly, he finds a creative science in something that resembles a cross between the spectacular masque and psychoanalysis. Conchis explains this transformation:

There had always been a conflict in me between mystery and meaning. I had pursued the latter, worshipped the latter as a doctor. As a socialist and rationalist. But then I saw that the attempt to scientize reality, to name it and categorize it and vivisect it out of existence, was like trying to remove the air from the atmosphere. In the creating of the vacuum it was the experimenter who died, because he was inside the vacuum.

(Fowles 1977, 410)

This does not perfectly fit the model I am advancing here. I am not sure why Conchis juxtaposes *mystery* and *meaning*, as if meaning were somehow only achieved through rationalist methods, and it would strike me that the vacuum he describes is devoid of life and meaning. But learning to negotiate between the vicissitudes of reason and unreason, he realises that “All good science is art. All good art is science” and that knowledge is not of primary importance, but being: “I wish simply to be” (409).

Harris too provides us with such characters. Vianne is another figure who emerges from the carnival to nurture the creative play of people around her. Vianne transforms the whole town and battles the forces of rationalism while, for the most part, keeping her own status an ambiguous mystery. She is also a figure that mediates between magical and ordinary worlds. This is emphasised by the references to her mother, depicted as a real witch with real magical powers. “My mother was a witch. At least, that’s what she called herself, falling so many times into the game of believing herself that at the end there was no telling fake from fact” (44). But Vianne (as Ward Jouve says of Carter) can tell fiction from fact; her magic is of a less marvellous, more commonplace sort:

My mother brewed spells and philtres, I sublimated the whole into a

sweeter alchemy. We were never much alike, she and I. She dreamed of floating, of astral encounters and secret essences: I poured over recipes and menus filched from restaurants where we never could afford to dine.

(Harris 1999, 296)⁶¹

Vianne also mediates between the villagers and the gypsies; the inhabitants of the city built by Enlightened republican planners on the one hand and the nomadic representatives of the ancient European epistemologies on the other. “Perhaps this is what Reynaud senses in my little shop,” Vianne muses, “a throwback to the times when the world was a wider, wilder place. Before Christ – before Adonis was born in Bethlehem or Osiris sacrificed at Easter – the cocoa bean was revered” (1999, 64).

“Jackapple” Joe Cox in *Blackberry Wine* functions like Fevvers or Vianne, pulling the depersonalised, emotionally scarred Jay into a world of productive uncertainty away from his defence mechanisms. Like Fevvers, he challenges rational credibility from the outset: “He introduced himself as Joe Cox, with a slanted smile, as if to challenge disbelief” (2000, 23). In an interesting reversal, while Fevvers wields Ma Nelson’s sword as a talisman to ward off danger, Joe gives Jay a small red flannel bag filled with the scents of sandalwood and lavender. Like Vianne, he rejects the rigid demarcation of what is rational and irrational, believable and unbelievable. He rejects the Enlightenment distinction between what is an acceptable, “medical” remedy and herbal or “folk” remedies. He explains to a young Jay that “a few hundred years ago there were no difference between magic and medicine. People just knew things. Believed things. Like chewin cloves to cure toothache, or pennyroyal for a sore throat, or rowan twigs to keep away evil spirits” (2000, 54). Joe mediates between a variety of discourses: “With Joe, Chinese medicine rubbed shoulders companionably with English folklore, chemistry with mysticism” (55).

A Recipe for Becoming: Everyday Magic

Harris’ fiction best exemplifies the focus in much contemporary magic realist fiction

upon the magic that exists in everyday domestic experience. Harris refers to the “domestic magic” (1999, 56), “layman’s magic” (1999, 64) and “everyday magic” (2000) in defamiliarising the supposedly mundane tasks of the domestic sphere. This can be seen in the mystification of everyday experience, such as a spiritualist’s claim in *Affinity* that “our age is a marvellous one” (Waters 1999, 100), with the telegraph machine making everyone telepathic, or Mr. Weasley’s constant amazement at Muggle magical inventions such as the car and telephone. But perhaps cooking is particularly useful as a symbol of this sort of everyday magic. It closely resembles the very earnest efforts of men who set themselves the infinitely more important, and endlessly futile, aim of turning lead to gold. “There is a kind of alchemy in the transformation of base chocolate into this wise fool’s gold,” Vianne explains (1999, 64). This magic shares obvious characteristics with the more marvellous practices of witchcraft and wizardry, but is performed in settings and with ingredients more familiar to everyday readers:

There is a kind of sorcery in all cooking: in the choosing of ingredients, the process of mixing, grating, melting, infusing and flavouring, the recipes taken from ancient books, the traditional utensils – the pestle and mortar with which my mother made her incense turned to a more homely purpose, her spices and aromatics giving up their subtleties to a baser, more sensual magic.

(Harris 1999, 62)

Where Vianne’s mother was a witch, Vianne’s own magic is grounded in the world of everyday experience. The witches’ cave is moved to the kitchen; the eye of newt and tongue of bat is replaced with proportions of cocoa and chilli powder; the ancient mystical texts are family cookbooks, passed from one generation to another; rather than strict, ritualistic incantations, recited precisely, spells are interpreted to personal taste; the spells are not meant to conjure demons but are love potions of a more simple sort. “This is an art I can enjoy” (1999, 62) Vianne says, soon echoed by the reader. Perhaps as Fevvers realises, a genuine miracle in a secular age must invite doubt to be cast upon it if it is to have power. Fevvers cannot be proved to be a winged-woman, or else her power as a transitional object is lost as she would likely

find herself upon a sterilised dissecting table. Vianne and Joe seem similarly to realise that their power lies not in the alchemy and necromancy of old but in brewing and cultivating productive paradoxes.

Most often this conceptualisation of everyday magic is an attempt to reclaim power for women limited by patriarchal ideology to the domestic sphere. The association of magic, or unreason, with the maternal, feminine world in these novels attempts to serve variously feminist, anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist ends by rewriting the gender mythologies of patriarchy, the confinement of women. The mystification or simple defamiliarisation of recipes, child-rearing and women's own "irrational" world acts to redeem experience itself for women, denied the grand self-mythologising of men. For Carter, too, "Fantasy was an everyday, *domestic* business, she'd say" (Sage 1994, 2):

On the face of things she [Carter] is renouncing "magic"; in fact I think she is denying that magic is alien or strange, and so becoming a city of strangeness. It is the sexual tourist, or – to put it more politely – the orientalist, who finds the city and the "arbitrary carnival" of its street exotic [...]

(Sage 1994, 9)

By exposing the magic of everyday experience, these authors hope to deny that experience is something that only happened at infrequent moments in life but is, in fact, something that exists in the minutiae of subjectivity – for example, in the mere act of breathing or crying to enjoy a musical sound.

Harris returns to the concepts of everyday or layperson's magic in *Blackberry Wine* (2000). Here, however, rather than the domestic sphere and secrets of culinary sorcery being solely the domain of women, Harris offers an illustration of two men, Joe Cox and Jay Mackintosh, employing this "simple chemistry" (2000, 17).⁶² While this novel lacks the feminist punch of *Chocolat* or like-minded novels that redeem the *extra-ordinary* experience of women, the overall effect is much the same, emphasising the creative potential of everyday life. In this novel, "magic, like wine," like writing, "needs the right conditions in order to work" (2000, 13). The novel focusses upon Joe's search for the elusive, creative impulse that inspired him long

ago to write one successful, critically satisfying novel. Rather than the connection between magic, cooking and the possibility of creative experiencing for women, therefore, the connection between magic and cooking leads us to a more traditional, more obvious conceptualisation of creativity. “You don’t write because someone sets you assignments!” Jay protests, “You write because you need to write, or because you hope someone will listen, or because writing will mend something broken inside you, or bring something back to life” (2000, 51). Both strategies show how a degree of magic, grounded in realism, offers a means of becoming through the most casual, everyday experiences of creativity.

Learning to Experience Experience: The Journey of the Hero and Reader in the Potential Space

In the fictions I examined, I found that without exception there is a central character that reflects the reader’s own hesitation and attempt to negotiate paradoxical spaces. Todorov’s second criterion of the fantastic, that hesitation must be experienced by a character with whom, on some level, the reader identifies, I took initially to be a quirk of the formalist approach to texts that need not be rigorously applied. However, it seems as though the more I read the more this view is substantiated; almost without fail, contemporary magic realist texts offer a central character who makes a journey from an ordinary world to one in which the potential for magic exists and with whom the reader is invited to identify. Nancy Astley, Harry Potter, Nicholas Urfe, Henri, Marianne, Desiderio, Walser and countless others begin their respective novels in a rationalist, often depersonalised, world before being transformed by their creative experience.

In *Nights at the Circus*, Walser, the New World rationalist, is initially unable to tolerate uncertainty or paradox. As Carter herself points out, rationalists such as Walser are desperate to sustain the illusion of their own scepticism, which is why they must employ the rationalist defence that allows them the alternative illusion of certainty (Haffenden 1985, 89), unproductive though it is. Walser’s defence against

the anxiety presented by Fevvers' ambiguous status takes the form of a scientific reasoning, "by all the laws of evolution and human reason" (1984, 15). He comes to Fevvers set upon a project to expose the great myths of his age, to "puff" Fevvers, to "explode" her (Carter 1984, 11) which could be read in a Kleinian sense as incredibly aggressive phantasies about destroying the persecutory object – to resolve, once and for all, one way or the other, the uncertainties that Fevvers forces us to confront. Or we could see this through a Winnicottian perspective where infants seek to destroy the object in their phantasy so that it can live as an object in its own right in the external world:

The subject says to the object: "I destroyed you", and the object is there to receive the communication. From now on the subject says: "Hullo object!" "I destroyed you." "I love you." "You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you." "While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) *fantasy*." Here fantasy begins for the individual. They can now *use* the object that has survived. It is important to note that it is not only that the subject destroys the object because the object is placed outside the area of omnipotent control. It is equally significant to state this the other way round and to say that it is the destruction of the object that places the object outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control. In these ways the object develops its own autonomy and life, and (if it survives) contributes-in to the subject, according to its own properties.

(Winnicott 1971, 90)

But although this form of destruction ends in love for the object, it is still an act to locate with certainty the object as either internal or external, an identification that Fevvers constantly resists. Again echoing Klein's theories, our narrator informs us that Walser's "habitual disengagement was involuntary; it was not the result of judgement, since judgement involves the positives and negatives of belief" (1984,10). This form of "judgement" that Walser lacks is the sort of rationalism that is based on the balanced perception of positives and negatives, good and bad objects that is characteristic of whole-objects seen in the depressive position. Walser's beloved

“rationalism” is not that of depressive ambivalence. On the contrary, it stems from the vicissitudes of love and hate and the inability to tolerate the ambivalence demanded by whole objects. Walser is engaged in processes of intellectualisation. And for Klein, Winnicott and Fairbairn alike (and also for many orthodox psychoanalysts), anxiety is a necessary component in mental functioning, as it is for the capacity to symbolise. But our narrator notes that Walser “did not know *how* to be afraid” (1984, 10); he is unable to *feel*, not only fear, but also love and hate. With Walser

There were scarcely any of those little, what you might call *personal* touches to his personality, as if his habit of suspending belief extended even unto his own being. I say he had a propensity for “finding himself in the right place at the right time”; yet it was almost as if he himself were an *objet trouvé*, for, subjectively, *himself* he never found, since it was not his *self* which he sought.

(Carter 1984, 10)

Like the depersonalised subject who seeks danger or practices to confirm its own somatic boundaries and psyche-somatic existence, Walser can only experience subjective being when “He subjected his life to a series of cataclysmic shocks because he loved to hear his bones rattle. That was how he knew he was alive” (1984, 10). And, like the depersonalised subject, he lacks a capacity for self-reflection. Walser “had not felt so much as one single quiver of introspection” (10), a sense of self-experiencing that Bollas sees as only possible once one is creatively engaged in the potential space (see Bollas 1992, 12-32). Walser is disengaged from his environment and as a “kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness,” sounding very much the postmodern subject of bits-and-pieces, always changing and never set in relations to anything but its own shallow, ever changing design. Like the narrator of “Flesh and the Mirror,” “Walser had not experienced his experience *as* experience; sandpaper his outsides as experience might, his inwardness had been left untouched” (10).

Walser himself seems to recognise his own need for a playful experience – “I need to have my sense of wonder polished up again” – although his decision to join

the circus may be motivated initially as much by the desire to resolve Fevvers' ambiguity as it is an attempt to seek out creative experience. He justifies his decision to his editor by claiming, "I don't think you realise just how much I'd like a break from hard news, chief" (90); he further pleads, "Keep me away from the battlefield for a while!", the hostile environment in which one's defences must be so strenuously maintained. When Walser asks his editor, "What would you say to a series of inside stories of the exotic, the marvellous, of laughter and tears and thrills and all?" (90) it is an invitation directed to the reader to share the adventure.

When Walser joins the circus, he is transformed into a clown, and thus begins the transformation of his subjective experience from the rationalistic defence to the creativity offered by accepting paradox.

When Walser first put on his make-up, he looked in the mirror and did not recognise himself. As he contemplated the stranger peering interrogatively back at him out of the glass, he felt the beginnings of a vertiginous sense of freedom that, during all the time he spent with the Colonel, never quite evaporated; until that last moment when they parted company and Walser's very self, as he had known it, departed from him, he experienced the freedom that lies behind the mask, within dissimulation, the freedom to juggle with being, and, indeed, with the language which is vital to our being, that lies at the heart of the burlesque.

(Carter 1984, 103)

Typically, Walser first meets this impending freedom with a certain anxiety. Walser first senses this freedom when looking into the deceitful mirror mistrusted by rationalists for the potential spark it offers the imagination. He experiences a sense of freedom from behind the mask, a useful false-self, like Villanelle's disguises, that offer a means to anonymity that can enable play. As a false-self, the mask is a temporary defence when first entering the potential space. Winnicott does not see the use of a false-self itself as pathological – like all defence mechanisms, it is a question of degrees.⁶³ It is the psychic equivalent of dipping a toe into a pool before flinging oneself in, potentially immersing oneself completely in frighteningly cold water. This

persona allows Walser to play within the potential space without putting under direct risk his entire subjectivity. Walser's costume permits him to "juggle," not simply with his identity (like trying on a new role as one would try on a new suit), but to play "with being." And for Walser, language becomes the balls that we use in our play (phallic association intended). St. Petersburg, remember, propels Walser "towards hyperbole; never before has he bandied about so many adjectives. Walser-the-clown, it seemed, could juggle with the dictionary with a zest that would have abashed Walser-the-foreign-correspondent" (98). Language is an object, a toy with which we play in the experience of being, though not constitutive of being in itself.

When a clown, Walser seemingly parodies his own privileging of rationalism when being made the object of study for Lamarck's *Educated Apes*. Standing naked before the apes sitting at desks, Walser wears a dunce cap on his head as the Professor – also an ape – highlights aspects of Walser's physiology. The Professor prompts Walser to speak, as "his speech was of surpassing interest" to the apes sat before him, to which Walser begins, "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty!" (111). This image of a naked man wearing a dunce cap quoting Shakespeare while standing before studious apes, the orgasmic thrusts and gasps of the Strong-Man and the ape handler pulsing from the sidelines and the imminent escape of a tiger create a scene that, while entirely plausible, defies all reason.

However, for Walser to experience the circus as a potential space, he must not give himself over completely to hyperbole and phantasy as he does in *Siberia*. The Walser of London is not totally consumed in St. Petersburg by the challenging, playful place and events that surround him – and thus Carter plays upon Bakhtin's own ambivalence towards the clown. Walser, for example, still posts reports off to the London papers. Sometimes these moments appear only as breaks in an otherwise chaotic space, but they are significant in that Walser, and the reader identifying with him, do not submit completely to the marvellous, maintaining the paradox and uncertainty essential to both magic realism and the potential space. Like Carter's own sensational prose, Walser plays creatively with words and phrases, employing them in such a way as to heighten his own subjective experience, but also like Carter, with

her dedication to materialist themes, Walser does not here entirely lose touch with reality. As is evident from these pages that juxtapose Walser's myth-making and the reality of the lives of the peasants with whom he stays, Walser's writing finds itself a creative space here between phantastical construction and real, material conditions. "I am inventing an imaginary city as I go along. Towards such a city, the baboushka's pig now trots" (97).

Like Walser, Desiderio (meaning, by the way, "the desired one," as opposed to the one who desires) begins *Infernal Desire Machines* as a model of Enlightenment rationalism. He is immune, to a greater extent than most, to the assault upon reason perpetrated by Dr. Hoffman. Desiderio tells us at the onset of the narrative,

I became a hero only because I survived. I survived because I could not surrender to the flux of mirages. I could not merge myself and blend with them; I could not abnegate my reality and lose myself for ever as others did, blasted to non-being by the ferocious artillery of unreason. I was too sardonic. I was too disaffected.

(Carter 1972, 11-12)

Like Walser, Desiderio suffers from desubjectification and depersonalisation, these defences acting to quash anxiety but preventing the creative experience: "I was always a little bored yet perfectly content" (15). Similarly, a sense of unreality characterises his experience – or lack thereof: "I felt as if I was watching a film [...] but it was an endless film and I found it boring for none of the characters engaged my sympathy" (25), although perhaps this inability to identify with either the Minister or Hoffman is due just as much to their lack of depth as characters in his world. He remains "indifferent" and claims that he "could summon up no *interest* in all this" (25). He enjoys opera, but because of its "the inhuman stylisation"; when a performance of his favourite opera, *The Magic Flute*, is contaminated by the appearance of peacocks from Dr. Hoffman's hallucinating machines, he "instantly became bored and irritated. Boredom was my first reaction to incipient delirium" (16). When the Minister sends him out of the city in order to find and assassinate Dr. Hoffman, Desiderio informs the reader that, "I took with me no souvenirs or objects

of sentimental value because I had none” (40) – no transitional objects, no internal objects and nothing through which he can articulate his idiom.⁶⁴

Albertina attempts to coax Desiderio from his depersonalised slumber by her night-time visits, encouraging him to abandon his intellectualisation defence and “BE AMOROUS! [...] DON’T THINK, LOOK [...] WHEN YOU BEGIN TO THINK, YOU LOSE THE POINT” (26). When Desiderio gets beyond the city boundaries in search of Hoffman, the reader begins to see the layers of rationalism evaporate as he begins to accept Albertina’s invitations. As he was indifferent within the city, he recognises that “There was nothing in the great heap of stucco, brick and stone behind me to which I felt the least attachment except the memory of a certain mysterious dream” (40), the dream in which he is awakened to the potentialities offered by love, desire and Albertina:

Under all my indifferences, I was an exceedingly romantic young man yet, until that time, circumstances had never presented me with a sufficiently grand opportunity to exercise my pent-up passion. I had opted for the chill restraints of formalism only out of sharp necessity. That, you see, was why I so bored.

(Carter 1972, 41)

The space that lies outside the city in *Infernal Desire Machines* is, briefly, a place for play before it is overwhelmed by the dangers of Nebulous Time. Upon leaving the city, Desiderio goes to the sea-side resort of S. Here, the mayor’s daughter, Mary Anne, is sure that her father has “disintegrated.” Though she means this literally, such disintegration is a consequence, Winnicott says, of being unable to maintain his boundaries and negotiate the anxieties of liminality. It is also here that Desiderio finds himself more easily swayed by Hoffman’s machines; he begins to feel passion awakened in him, he is sometimes unable to distinguish between dream and reality. However, like St. Petersburg, this space is not entirely free from the Minister’s demand for compliance and Desiderio is arrested by the Minister’s Determination Police.

Nicholas Urfe resembles Walser and Desiderio in many respects: all men begin their respective novels as dedicated rationalists before being transformed with

the help of a facilitating transitional object. Nicholas' first paragraph of the novel establishes his "realist" credentials:

I was born in 1927, the only child of middle-class parents, both English, and themselves born in the grotesquely elongated shadow, which they never rose sufficiently above history to leave, of that monstrous dwarf Queen Victoria. I was sent to public school, I wasted two years doing my national service, I went to Oxford; and there I began to discover I was not the person I wanted to be.

(Fowles 1977, 15)

When Nicholas speaks of Queen Victoria's shadow he means, I take it, the sexual puritanism that the nineteenth century is perceived to have inflicted on the twentieth. However, the utter banality of these facts and the dispassionate way they are related forces us to remember that the twentieth-century also inherited the nineteenth-century love of rationalism and objectivity. Again, perhaps we other Victorians are not so different after all.

Nicholas' narrative reflects his belief in reason as he constantly tries to pin down facts and certainties for the reader and for himself, totally unaware that the point of Conchis' game is to foster uncertainties. At the conclusion of the game, Nicholas explains that Conchis "had simply guessed that for me freedom meant the freedom to satisfy personal desire, private ambition. Against that he set a freedom that must be responsible for its actions; something much older than the existentialist freedom" (440). Against the fixation upon desire and the individual is an approach that focusses on objects and intersubjectivity.

Murray's George Singer also attempts to ascertain the rationalist explanation behind his magical experiences. When a fish speaks to him at a Cumbrian aquarium, George looks first for a hidden microphone, assuming someone is playing a trick, checking in every nearby crevice and conceivable hiding spot "just to make doubly sure" (Murray 2001, 105). Of course George, a man of his age, does not believe he has heard a fish talk to him. "I was cold to the marrow and for a very good reason," he explains. "I had heard a disembodied voice addressing me and me alone. And it was 1992, the cyber-age and the age of global communication, not the age of cryptic

portents and primitive superstitions” (106). “I was a middle-aged rationalist who had accommodated to his middle-aged failure” (135-6). And so as to convince his reader of his trustworthiness as a sane, rationalising human, Singer assures us,

I can see that I need to spell it out in black and white, for my benefit as much as anyone else’s. Let it be underlined twice that I spit all over the notion of fairies or trans-species reincarnation. Also that I thoroughly dislike every anthropomorphic Walt Disney cartoon that has ever been made.

(Murray 2001, 106-7)

This last point is as much a testament to his good taste as his rationalist credentials, but claims like these are meant to confuse the reader, to leave us at a loss to reckon how such impossible events could be believed by such a seemingly nice, normal fellow as this. The fact that George entertains these ideas even temporarily is a testament to his transformation in the text.

It is from this potentially magically event – and the specific instructions of the fish – that George is prepared to receive Ken Wright’s sermon that promises to transform his life. Wright explains – echoing Fairbairn and Bion – that “Minds are ten a penny [...] the majority of people are deluded by the importance of the intellect [...] We live in an age of mind worship, of mania for education and qualification, in a society where the ability to reason and dispose of things is regarded as the highest achievement” (144). And echoing Eagleton’s and my own critique of postmodernism, Preacher Ken finds “these jet-propelled intellectuals” play at being God, “Capable of affirming or rejecting absolutely anything even up to and including the incalculable, the inimitable and the immeasurable. Nothing daunts these types” (145). Like the worst abusers of postmodernism, “A sure sign of their spiritual pride is that it is usually quite matterless whether it is for or against they are arguing. Whichever side of the divine their reasoning leads them, it confirms them in their sure conviction that the brain is the be-all and end-all” (145). These are the lessons that a talking fish prepares George Singer for.⁶⁵

Towards Negotiations

Lorna Sage says that Carter “had always taken the line that fantasy was not the shadow-side of a binary opposition, but had a real life history. Being was marinated in magic, and (conversely) imaginary monsters had no separate sphere” (Sage 1994, 1). At the end of most of these novels, some degree of balance is usually achieved, after the characters and the reader are subjected to the vicissitudes of reality and phantasy, creativity and compliance. In *Infernal Desire Machines*, this can be seen in Desiderio’s narrative, told only after the “reality wars” are ended and he has found a balance between the Minister and Hoffman. In *Nights at the Circus*, when Fevvers confronts Walser in the Shaman’s hut, she can feel how she has been transformed by the void of Siberia: She sees herself becoming “like the image on a photographic paper [...] She felt her outlines waver” (290) as Walser’s glare tries to envelope Fevvers into becoming a being of his phantasy. “Fevvers suffered the worst crisis of her life: ‘Am I fact? Or am I fiction? Am I what I know I am? Or am I what he thinks I am?’” (290). To rescue herself, and her friends, Fevvers tries to show Walser and the Shaman her wings, and it is by again becoming the transitional object that she recovers herself and Walser from the threatening void of internal phantasy. There needs, Carter suggests, to be a balance, a delicate negotiation between living in two worlds. Whereas the rationalists in London are tempted into the transitional zone by Fevvers’ spectacular grandeur, in the Shaman’s hut it is her relative ordinariness that makes her a transitional object. Just as the Europeans in the cities needed something overtly fantastic to dislodge them from their complacently rationalist perceptions, the Shaman and Walser are accustomed to their grandiose hallucinations, and it is something of the reality in Fevvers’ appearance that convinces them she is not a object of their making.

No Venus, or Helen, or Angel of the Apocalypse [...] only a poor freak down on her luck, and an object of the most dubious kind of reality to her beholders, since both the men in the god-hut were accustomed to hallucinations and she who looks like a hallucination but is not had no place in their view of things.

(Carter 1972, 290)

Marina Warner suggests that this movement is part of Carter's overall strategy, that she "needs to profane her own fabricated marvels, to blow the raspberries of sin in the artificial paradises of her own skilled invention. This characteristic in itself discomfits the reader: like the gorgeous apparition Fevvers letting rip with a fart, Carter's own prose keeps dirtying its own hands" (1994, 247). This emphasises the role of the transitional object and how it is perceived differently according to the needs of the subject. It is the gaze of the Shaman and Walser and their recognition of her as an object (perhaps their first transitional object) that restores Fevvers' appearance and status to that of a fantastic illusion.

After Walser has been restored – hatched – by Fevvers, he is able to entertain uncertainty and paradox with the aid of the transitional object. Upon seeing Fevvers naked, "He saw, without surprise, she indeed appeared to possess no navel but he was no longer in the mood to draw any definite conclusions from this fact" (292). Walser is able to tolerate anxiety that his rationalist defence had previously worked so hard to repress.

He was as much himself again as he would ever be, and yet that "self" would never be the same again for now he knew the meaning of fear as it defines itself in its most violent form, that is, fear of the death of the beloved, of the loss of the beloved, of the loss of love. It was the beginning of an anxiety that would never end, except with the deaths of either or both; and anxiety is the beginning of conscience, which is the parent of the soul but is not compatible with innocence.

(Carter 1972, 292-3)

This ability to tolerate anxiety permits *feeling*, and hence *meaning*, through play. Walser recognises the change within himself and fortuitously expresses this new found sense of being to Fevvers in language that is entirely consistent with that I have used here:

All that seemed to happen to me in the third person as though, most of my life, I watched but did not live it. And now, hatched out of the shell of unknowing by a combination of a blow on the head and a

sharp spasm of erotic ecstasy, I shall have to start all over again.

(Carter 1984, 294)

And at the novel's conclusion, we the readers are even left with the status of our fantastic journey unresolved – an exceptional case, Todorov would say. Fevvers' laugh to Walser's challenge leaves us no way of *knowing*: Is she the "only fully-feathered intacta in the history of the world"? are Fevvers' wings real? is she "intact"? and Fevvers' laugh is a last denial of any attempted resolution.

So too in *Infernal Desire Machines*, Desiderio recognises that although he does not endorse the Minister's vision of the rule of rationalism, he is loathe totally to abandon reason, *in some form*, for Hoffman's hedonistic, unstructured rule of phantasy. Desiderio says, in words that could be those of a number of contemporary magic realist authors, that "there was still that duplicity in my heart's core. I had been marked out at the beginning as the Minister's man, for all my apathy, for all my disaffection, for I, too, would have worshipped reason if I could ever have found her shrine. Reason was stamped into me as if it were a chromosome, even if I loved the high priestess of passion" (Carter 1972, 195). When confronting Hoffman face-to-face in his castle, Desiderio realises that he cannot share Hoffman's dystopian vision. He recognises that Hoffman, like the Minister, is insisting upon compliance in a totalitarian way. "I knew he could never be my master. I might not want the Minister's world but I did not want the Doctor's world either. All at once I was pitched on the horns of a dilemma, for I was presented with two alternatives and it seemed to me that the Doctor must be wrong for neither alternative could possibly co-exist with the other" (207). Desiderio, from his retrospective position as narrator, realises not only that the satisfaction of individual desire cannot be privileged over "the common good," but also that the subject cannot exist narcissistically indulging every phantastic whim. The solution, therefore, must lie in a balance, not in the vicissitudes of love and hate but from the ambivalence that accompanies whole-object relationships.

Endnotes

1. Jack Zipes, whose readings of folk and fairy tales influenced Carter, similarly identifies a shift in narrative strategies in the Enlightenment: “The rise of the fairy tale in the Western world as the mass-mediated cultural form of the folk tale coincided with the decline of feudalism and the formation of the bourgeois public sphere” (Zipes 1979, 12).

Bakhtin perceptively appreciates how in Renaissance literature competing social and bourgeois visions of the body paradoxically co-existed. Of Cervantes, Bakhtin says

[...] bodies and objects begin to acquire a private, individual nature; they are rendered petty and homely and become immovable parts of private life, the goal of egoistic lust and possession. This is no longer the positive, regenerating and renewing lower stratum, but a blunt and deathly obstacle to ideal aspirations. In the private sphere of isolated individuals the images of the bodily lower stratum preserve the element of negation while losing almost entirely their positive regenerating force. Their link with life and with the cosmos is broken, they are narrowed down to naturalistic erotic images.

(Bakhtin 1984, 23)

“However divided, atomized, individualized were the ‘private’ bodies, Renaissance realism did not cut off the umbilical cord which tied them to the fruitful womb of the earth” (1984, 23).

Fredric Jameson also identifies magic realism historically, although from a more specific – and I think limited – Marxist perspective. Magic realism, for Jameson, “betrays the overlap or the coexistence of pre-capitalist and nascent capitalist or technological features” (Jameson 1992, 138).

2. Carter also seems at times mistakenly to declare the end of the Age of Reason, although this is largely contained in *The Sadeian Woman*, which I discuss below.

Zipes, for me, is more accurate in his reading of nineteenth-century fantastic tales. Whereas Monleón sees the nineteenth-century gothic, such as Poe, as launching a relentless (transgressive) assault upon bourgeois reason, Zipes sees Poe as seeking to frighten “rationalistic audiences with his fantastic tales that chilled a Victorian mentality” (Zipes 1979, 13).

3. In this sense, Freud too was a “realist” in that he sought to describe the supernatural in completely rationalist terms. There is, of course, the well-known explanation for telepathy at the conclusion of *Interpretation of Dreams*, though this too is read in completely rationalist terms (See Freud 1900, 783; for a discussion on Freud’s conceptualisation of telepathy, see Jacobus 1999, 202-34). This does not stop D. M. Thomas from playing with Freud’s conceptions of the past, present and future coming together uncannily and *super-naturally* in his Freudian novels *The White Hotel* and *Eating Pavlova*.

4. Henderson seems to be attempting to negotiate a paradox between using rationalist

thought that is productive to our understanding of the world and a rejection of a disembodied rationalism that seeks to know everything and eliminate all mystery. While calling here for a certain “suspension of disbelief” in the analytic process, he elsewhere instructs that we must not fret that our analysis will “spoil” the mysteries maintained by theology because “Whether to analyse is to ‘spoil’ cannot, by definition, be an issue accessible to rational inquiry” (1975, 113). The negotiation of this paradox is also attempted by several magic realist authors, which I examine below.

5. This does not, for reasons that should become clear below, imply a third term beyond the Real and the Imaginary or the Symbolic or anything Lacanian, as some (for example, Schmidt) would suggest. In a general dismissal of such readings of Carter, Sage reckons that “You can make it sound like *écriture féminine* only if you don’t quote much” (Sage 1994, 20).

6. Klein’s concept is derived from Freud. See Freud 1905, 112-2; 1916-7, 370-1; Hinshelwood 1991, 296-300.

7. Carter does address Klein in this work, headlining a chapter “Kleinian Appendix: Liberty, Misanthropy and the Breast” (133). Although her reading of Klein – on breast envy – is interesting, it employs a different strategy from the one I am using here. Also, Carter only cites Klein’s *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963*, thus I can only assume that she had not read the essay (published in 1921) to which I have most often been referring here. (Interestingly, my copies of Klein’s collected works, first published by the Hogarth Press in 1975, have been published by Virago press since 1988, during Carter’s lifetime and at the press to which she served as an advisor since its conception; see also Carter 1997, 75, where she also briefly discusses Klein, in a book review written in 1988.)

8. Echoing the object-relations feminist critic Nancy Chodorow, Carter notes that Justine, as an object, “does not act, she is” (49), “to be the *object* of desire is to be defined in the passive case” (76). This conception of *being* (merely as a passive object), as opposed to *doing* (as an active subject), is an argument with which I agree, but represents an entirely different strategy from the Winnicottian conceptualisations of being and doing that I most often refer to here. See Chodorow 1989, 23-44.

Here is also perhaps one aspect of Sade that Lacan gets right: both limit the experience of *jouissance* to men, as it must always be phallic in Lacan’s Oedipal-scene. This is certainly true of Sadeian transgressions, which as Carter also demonstrates, will never offer real emancipation to women.

9. In her assessment of Kristeva, Fraser finds that it “does not lead beyond structuralism,” branding Kristeva’s project a “quasi-Lacanian neostructuralism. In the process, she ends up reproducing some of Lacan’s most unfortunate errors. She, too, lapses into symbolism, treating the symbolic order as an all-powerful causal mechanism” (1992, 188).

10. Though I am not certain Foucault's essay is a response to Lacan's theory of transgression, Foucault's essay appears only three years after Lacan's seminar and seems to be a response to the same themes.

11. See also *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, where Winterson explains that stories are "a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained, it's a way of keeping it all alive, not boxing it into time" (1985, 91). She also here objects to the perceived certainties offered by "histories" and the relative denigration of stories:

People like to separate storytelling which is not fact from history which is fact. They do this so that they know what to believe and what not believe. This is very curious. How is it that no one will believe that the whale swallowed Jonah when every day Jonah is swallowing the whale? [...] Because it is history. Knowing what to believe had its advantages. It built an empire and kept people where they belonged, in the realm of the wallet...

[...] There is order and balance to be found in stories.

(Winterson 1985, 91-3)

12. Zamora and Farris (1995) thus posit that all magic realist texts exist between the "imaginary" and the "historical."

13. See for example Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth (1998).

14. Eagleton suggests in a very interesting, compelling (if somewhat wishful) reading that Marx did not posit the *end of history* but to put on *end to History*, "to get out from under all that so that we may make a new beginning" (1996, 65).

When I say that Marx is the "rational voice of socialism," I do not mean this as an insult, *per se*. Such a statement applies to his later works, rather than his earlier, more humanist writings.

15. Diana is also ironically associated with the working and peasant classes, and was especially worshipped by women (Harvey).

16. This last claim, that "time is cyclical, involving a continuous dynamic process of regressive recovering and renewal, driven by the recognition of inevitable loss, the depressive mourning, that underpins all creative psychological change," I think relates to the Kleinian theory of art as reparation.

17. See Klein 1928, 1945; Hinshelwood 1991, 57-67. Furthermore, the Kleinian re-reading of the Oedipal experience led her to postulate the depressive position, which removes us even further from this linear developmental model initially proposed by Freud.

18. Ironically, although Kristeva correctly identifies the problems that lie at the heart of the patriarchal concept of History and historical time, and she recognises the

emergence of this generation, I still largely – though not exclusively – identify her with what she calls the second generation, which regards women’s history as purely “cyclical or monumental,” based on her focus on the *chora*, Kristeva’s articulation of the doctrine of primary narcissism that imagines an ahistorical fusion between mother and baby.

19. Carter shows the futility of a genuine Oedipal transgression in *The Sadeian Woman*. Juliette easily seduces her father, “is impregnated by him, murders him and subsequently aborts his child; so she rids herself of the spectre of his paternal authority over her by a systematic series of ritual transgressions” (Carter 1979b, 92). I sense irony in the second half of this sentence, but regardless Carter makes it clear that while Juliette throws off the spectre of paternal authority, she adopts a new master in Sade.

20. When speaking of “Jeanette” I am referring only to the character in the novel and am not addressing any possible parallels with the life and times of the author.

21. I would also be interested to undertake another re-examination of the transformation of city space as “reason” flees to the suburbs for tax-breaks and clean, child-friendly living.

22. Green also describes, however, the phallic mother – a term Carter uses to describe Sade’s women – as the opposite of the dead mother (Green 1986, 157).

23. Carter, “not in the mood for literary criticism” (1984, 244), anticipates the Lacanian reading, providing through Fevvers an interpretation of this symbol. Rosencreutz explains that it is not anything sexual he wants from Fevvers, further explaining,

“For it is not: ‘Honi soit qui mal y pense’, but ‘*Yoni* soit qui mal y pense’, yoni, of course, in the Hindu, the female part, or absence, or atrocious hole, or dreadful chasm, the Abyss, Down Below, the vortex that sucks everything dreadfully down, down, down where Terror rules [...]”

“So *that* was the signification of his gold medallion! The penis, represented by itself, aspires upwards, represented by the wings, but us dragged downwards, represented by the twining stem, by the female part, represented by the rose.”

(Carter 1984, 77)

(It is worth noting, by the way, that Fevvers uses “Rosencreutz” as merely a pseudonym for a “Member” of Parliament.)

24. I mean “use” in the a general object-relations sense, that does not mean “exploitation.” (See Winnicott 1971, 86-94)

25. Although not likely to be accepted by many as “magic realist,” in Carter’s quasi-gothic-urban-uncanny novel, *Love* (1971) Annabel is also described in terms that show Carter’s early interest in such rationalist figures. Annabel has “no instinct for

self-preservation if she was confronted by ambiguities” (1), “There was nothing in her mythology to help her resolve this conflict” between the familiar and unfamiliar, the gothic uncanny that haunts the nearby park in a northern city (3). She regards sex “with the abstract precision of the geometrician” (4). Depersonalised, “an object composed of impervious surfaces” (27), her own

lovemaking was still permeated by unease for she understood the play of surfaces only superficially; she was like a blind man at a firework display who can only appreciate the fires in the air by interpreting their various degrees of magnificence through the relative enthusiasms of the noisy crowd.

(Carter 1971, 24)

The touch of her lover has no effect on her (32). She does not act sexually from desire but because she reads in magazines what she *ought* to want to do (33). “She did not even think of herself as a body but more as a pair of disembodied eyes” (30).

26. Interestingly, Hoffman further explains that “I should have had very little success in, for example, Peking – in spite of the Chinese influence on my researches” (211).

27. It might be correctly said that Freud also participated in this rationalism, though I tend to give Freud more credit for less defensively trying to insist upon such a rationalist approach and for breaking this ground in the first place, opening the possibility for a non-rationalist approach that Lacan chooses to ignore. Klein too, like all psychoanalysts, has a rationalist tendency. As I have mentioned, her treatment of little Dick, in particular, has been scrutinised and criticised for the particularly harsh imposition of some rationalist interpretations. It has also been suggested that she made similar errors of... “zeal” and “enthusiasm,” let us say... in her analysis of her own children – a potential factor in Melitta’s terrible revolt against her mother? (Grosskurth 1986). Torok describes Klein’s early methodology in analysing her own children as being “precisely in the manner of a former orthodox Talmudist turned atheist: very scrupulously and very scientifically” (Torok *et al.* 1998, 66).

28. Zipes also notes that

Folk and fairy tales have always spread word through their fantastic images about the feasibility of utopian alternatives, and this is exactly why the dominant social classes have been vexed by them. Beginning with the period of the Enlightenment, folk and fairy tales were regarded as useless for the bourgeois rationalisation process. So it is not by chance that the culture industry has sought to tame, regulate and instrumentalize the fantastic projections of these tales.

(Zipes 1979, 3)

There is a correspondence here with the critique of Bakhtinian carnival, that it functions as only a safety-valve to release tension. Zipes also points out, however, that in the nineteenth-century “serious artists [...] sought to use fantasy as a means for criticizing social conditions and expressing the need to develop alternative models to the established social orders” (1979, 15).

29. Zipes, quoting Negt and Kluge, also recognises that “what was later to be called fantasy was primary the result of separation and confinement” (Zipes 1979, 9).

30. See also Monleón 54-5 on the story of Pierre Rivière (Foucault 1978).

31. See also Day’s discussion of Hoffman as a postmodernist (1998, 89).

32. In the recent film of Harris’ novel, Father Reynard is replaced by *Count* Reynard, the mayor and local aristocrat of Lansquenet. I suspect this transformation was made for the benefit of American audiences, who generally mistrust government and believe that theirs is a classless society, and who would also not wish to cast organised religion in such a dark light.

33. This metaphor and the story of Chuang Tzu is also employed by Janette Turner Hospital in her novel *Borderline* (1985), the connection with ontological crises and what many psychoanalysts describe as “borderline” disorders being too tempting to pass without mention. Borges also uses this koan.

34. The traveller later chants, as if in a blessing:

I am my own antithesis.
My loins rave. I unleash negation.
The burning arrows of negation.
Come!
Incinerate yourself with me!

(Carter 1972, 135)

35. This is also true of the centaurs that Harry Potter finds outside Hogwarts, who “Being intelligent and capable of speech [...] should not strictly speaking be termed a beast, but by its own request it has been classified as such by the Ministry of Magic” (Rowling 2001b, 6; see also *ix-xiii*).

Carter may also be playing here with Freud’s anthropological speculations in *Totem and Taboo*. (See for example, discussions on the Sacred Stallion and the Dark Archer – 185.) In what may be a parody of Schreber (Freud 1911), the centaurs “believed their god revealed himself to them in the droppings excreted by the horse parts of themselves since this manifested the purest essence of their equine natures [...] The twice daily movement of their bowels was at once a form of prayer and a divine communion” (175-6).

36. Desiderio describes that he “experienced an almost instantaneous regret as soon as the act was over for I could hardly imagine there was any society in the world which would not think that gaining carnal knowledge of one’s hostess and foster grandmother was a gross abuse of hospitality [...]” (85) which corresponds to Lacan’s belief that the experience of *jouissance* is preceded by an immediate sense of guilt and pain – again, however, Carter’s representation is meant to be a critique, not meant as evidence for Lacan’s normalising narcissism.

37. Again playing with psychoanalytic theory, Carter has Desiderio quote Freud:

I remembered the words of another German savant and quoted to her: ““In the unconscious, nothing can be treated or destroyed.”* Yet we saw the Count destroyed and the Cannibal chief.”

“Destruction is only another aspect of being,” she [Albertina] said categorically and with that I had to be content.

(Carter 1972, 186)

At the bottom of the page, there is a footnote: “* Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Desiderio.”

Of course, Albertina’s words are true, and can be easily understood within a Kleinian (and also Winnicottian) framework of the vicissitudes of good and bad, creation and destruction. A similar point is made by Thomas in *The White Hotel*, and again using Freud as a direct point of reference. The novel is full of images of life and death, creation and destruction. Lisa writes to Thomas’ fictional Freud “Good and evil coupling, to make the world” (Thomas 1981, 171).

38. The frozen wastelands of Russia also appear as a depersonalising void in Winterson’s *The Passion*. Villanelle explains that “To survive the zero winter and that war we made a pyre of our hearts and put them aside for ever” (Winterson 1987, 82).

39. For the difference between symbolic representation and the concrete symbol, as with symbolic equation, see Segal 1957.

40. Although initially Winnicott identifies the transitional object as a fetish-object (see 1952, 223), he later amends this to say that the transitional object may eventually develop into a fetish-object (1951). Although Winnicott does not discuss the fetish at any length, my own reading is that the fetish emerges from an unhealthy relationship of the subject to its transitional object – when, for example, as I stated in Part I, the commodity is fetishised when relationships with objects (commodities, language) are substituted for personal relations (see Marx 1867, 170; Bronstein 1992).

41. This print can also be found on the cover of Day’s book on Carter (1998). In his lengthy discussion of this print, Monleón (*eventually*) makes the point I wish to emphasise here, parallel to Klein’s argument on transgression.

In a sense, the *Caprichos* represent the opposite side of the same problem addressed by Foucault in his study of madness: if reason and unreason could form an indistinguishable unity, if each contained elements of the other, if the seeds of unreason were sown by reason, then the principles of exclusion and confinement had been not only false but useless.

(Monleón 1990, 42)

42. Also in *The Bloody Chamber*, the Lady of the House of Love is described as having “the mysterious solitude of ambiguous states; she hovers in a no-man’s land between life and death, sleeping and waking” (Carter 1979, 205). (Like also the

Sleeping Beauty in Madame Schreck's brothel in *Nights at the Circus*.)

Peach also describes how Carter creates a "third space" in *Heroes and Villains* that rejects "conventional binarisms" (1998, 90). Although Peach does not cite Winnicott explicitly in this instance, given his use of Kleinian psychoanalysis throughout the book I assume that there is a Winnicottian influence in his usage.

43. Waters too seems to be trying to negotiate such a paradox, in *Tipping the Velvet* torn between her heroine's fantastic adventures and her final destination working with the socialist movement and the suffragettes in late nineteenth-century London.

44. I find Winterson's idealisation of Catholicism in this regard ironically misplaced. It is not that the Catholic Church willingly suffers the paradox of extremes, as she suggests is its "great strength," but that its art unavoidably addresses such extremes as a result of the Catholic Church's own tendency to promote, like the "regular reformers," schizoid thinking.

45. My evaluation of Habermas must wait for a future study. Day summarises that rather than rejecting, like Lyotard, the whole of Enlightenment ideology as an oppressive failure, Habermas prefers to see enlightened modernity as a project which is as yet uncompleted. Rather than rejecting, he prefers to *develop* the concept of reason, refusing the old centring of rationality on the individual consciousness or ego and arguing instead for a "change of paradigm from subject-centred to communicative reason" (Habermas 1987, 301); a paradigm shift which defines reason in intersubjective terms.

(Day 1998, 103-4)

I sympathise with Habermas' general wish to develop how we perceive and use reason from an exclusively bourgeois conceptualisation; however, I have long been suspicious of Habermas' approach that, to me and my admittedly limited readings of his work thus far, seems to maintain too much faith in objectivity and the possibility of a disinterested reason. This preference is revealed by Day above, in Habermas' desire to move from a "subject-centred" paradigm to one based on "communicative reason," which I have understood to be based on a rationalist, disembodied conception of language. Habermas' concept of the "public sphere" strikes me as a rather affectless place, and his hope for language as an objective means of measuring reason seems to me likely to fall into a trap similar to that Lacan has already stepped in. Day says that "Language is the primary medium of social interaction and it is language – the ordinary language of everyday social communication – that Habermas concentrates on in his definition of intersubjective reason" (103), but does not such an approach, like Saussure, Lacan and postmodern theory, privilege the signifier, ontologising it at the expense of the subject? These approaches seem to me not to be about the relations between real, embodied – and therefore *interested* – *subjects* but only between signs; it is, as I said in Part I, a fetish of the commodity, where relations between commodities/objects/signs are mistaken for relations between people (see also Eagleton 1990, 401-15; Habermas 1968).

46. Kristeva, drawing upon Bakhtin, seems to describe a similar process in her conceptualisation of the *chora* that threaten to erupt through the weaknesses in the Symbolic order. While not without some interest, this Lacanian reading offers us a transgression of the symbolic only – and, again, is therefore dependent on the symbolic itself.
47. For more on the gender of carnival, see Vice 1997, especially 176-180.
48. See also Day 1998, 203.
49. Clowns for Bakhtin not only serve the primarily epistemological concerns of truth but, through the grotesque, also attempt to heal psyche-somatic rupture.
 All these grotesque, parodied and clownish series of the human body on the one hand serve to expose the body's structure and its life and other hand drag into the body-matrix a heterogeneous world of things, phenomena and ideas that were, in the medieval [and contemporary?] picture of the world, infinitely far from the body.
 (Bakhtin 1981, 176)
50. Marina Warner observes:
 The revolutionary Russian philosopher Alexander Herzen commented: "In church, in the palace, on parade, facing the department head, the police officer, the German administrator, nobody laughs. The serfs are deprived of the right to smile in the presence of the landowners." (Wipe that smile off your face, says the bullying teacher.) Herzen concludes: "Only equals may laugh." So the laughter of the clown, the mockery of the fool, can be the expression of freedom, the gesture that abolishes hierarchy, cancels authority and faces down fear.
 (Warner 1994, 250)
51. Carter, through Lizzie, presents us another, more general interpretation of the circus characters to which I must concede a certain degree of accuracy, even if it is not particularly relevant to my own reading:
 A motley crew indeed – a gaggle of strangers drawn from many diverse countries. Why, you might have said we constituted a microcosm of humanity, that we were an emblematic company, each signifying a different proposition in the great syllogism of life. The hazards of the journey reduced us to a little band of pilgrims abandoned in the wilderness upon whom the wilderness acted like a moral magnifying glass, exaggerating the blemishes of some and bringing out the finer points in those whom we thought had none. Those of us who learned the lessons of experience have ended their journeys already.
 (Carter 1984, 279)
52. Rivers are often regarded as such liminal spaces. In representing the carnival as a

place where the normal categories of race are overturned – Sethe and her family delight at the carnival of watching the white people perform for them – and by associating that with the river, Morrison may also be playing upon a common (American) archetype, such as found in *Huckleberry Finn*, where the river is a space where cultural race relations are held in suspension.

53. Although I identified it earlier as a typical space of irrationality, Desiderio's experience on the river with a native tribe shares some characteristics with these examples of the potential space. On the river, Desiderio experiences a sort of re-birth where he finds himself cast in the role of the infant, learning a new language and developing within a new family. As with Walser's re-birth in *Nights*, Desiderio loses touch with his previous life and identity (as one could say about the slave identity Sethe leaves behind), and like Walser, who literally forgot who he was, "Desiderio himself had disappeared because the river people had given [him] a new name": "Kiku," meaning "founding bird" (Carter 1972, 77), also paralleling Walser's final rebirth, the "hatching" under Fevvers at the novel's conclusion.

54. A cliché that Henri re-iterates: "The end of every game is an anti-climax. What you thought you would feel you don't feel, what you thought was so important isn't anymore. It's the game that exciting" (Winterson 1987, 133).

55. See Carter's *Love* and Harris' *Blackberry Wine*.

56. Also, "A local carnival feature is its 'sense of a great city', such as St. Petersburg (Dostoevsky), Paris (Balzac) [...] or London (Dickens)" (Vice 1997, 153).

57. Winterson also remarks, however, that "There's no Netscape Navigator to help me find my way around life" (2000, 227).

58. These are not the only part-human, part-animal creature that serves such a transitional function. Lamarck's Educated Apes, appearing in the circus with Fevvers, are a sort of missing link between magical animal and rational Man.

59. At one point in this study, I thought that Carter and Fevvers' *self-reflexivity* contributed to the success of Fevvers as a transitional object when capitalist commodities, although sometimes useful as imperfect substitutes, ultimately fail. However, a simple glance at many contemporary advertisements that are cleverly self-reflexive served to remind me that only being self-reflexive, laying bare the devices, does not itself offer a serious challenge to the established order.

60. Walser's subsequent observation, that it is a paradox that "in a secular age, an authentic miracle must purport to be a hoax, in order to gain credit in the world" (17), is less of a paradox of the sort I wish to speak of here, and perhaps is instead indicative of either the cynicism that dominates our cultural experience or the lack of potentially creative experience. This does not indicate, I do not think, that our age is generally amenable to and fosters paradox, but rather is further evidence of the

inability of our “secular” (read: rationalist) culture to admit elements of the fantastic.

61. The relationship between Vianne and her mother could be read through Kristeva’s identification of three generations of feminist strategies. The first generation sought equality in a patriarchal world. Vianne’s mother is like the second generation, who set themselves completely “outside the linear time of identities” (Kristeva 1979, 195). The third generation, one which Kristeva sees as newly emerging, “does not exclude – quite to the contrary – the *parallel* existence of all three in the same historical time, or even that they be interwoven one with the other” (209).

62. With a self-reflexive wink, Harris tells us that Jay’s partner Kerry, a journalist, wrote a well-received book on entitled *Chocolate – A Feminist Outlook* (2000, 12). I wonder how we are supposed to read this, however, as Kerry is presented as a character we are not supposed to like: a rationalist who doesn’t understand Jay’s need for a magical encounter.

- 63.
- (1) At one extreme: the False Self sets up as real and it is this that observers tend to think is the real person [...]
 - (2) Less extreme: the False Self defends the True Self; the True Self is, however, acknowledged as a potential and is allowed a secret life [...]
 - (3) More towards health: The False Self has as its main concern a search for such conditions which will make it possible for the True Self to come into its own.
 - (4) Still further towards health: the False Self is built on identifications [...]
 - (5) In health: the False Self is represented by the whole organisation of the polite and mannered social attitude [...]
- (Winnicott 1960, 142-3)

64. Peach correctly suggests that Desiderio is never completely enamoured of Reason. “The way in which Desiderio expresses his criticisms of the Minister of Determination [...] suggests he is sceptical of the familiar post-Enlightenment myth that through reason human beings become more positively human [...] the appearance of the police reminds Desiderio that rationality played a key role in the design of the Holocaust, of the concentration camps and of the gas chambers” (1998, 105).

65. Although George does claim that “Even before listening to Preacher Ken on the subject I had never been all that impressed by cerebral intelligence per se. I have met too many emotionally retarded geniuses whose social skills would embarrass a gorilla. I have known too many very bright people pathologically ashamed of the fact they do not possess a degree” (Murray 2001, 181).

Postscript

In many ways, this seems like a strange place to end this thesis. The caveats that are usually to be found at the end of such a study equally apply here: There can be no “Conclusion” as such, since the very notion of “contemporary literature” precludes an end to this history – hence my use of a “Postscript” rather than “Conclusion.” I feel in many ways that I am still discovering contemporary British magic realist literature, and so I realise that there is much more to be done in this area. I would obviously like to learn more of magic realism as it is manifested in other parts of the world (including my home country, Canada), in order that I may better speak of the sources that influenced British authors but also so as to gain a better appreciation of the more specific political issues that British magic realist fiction – or perhaps Euro-American magic realism more generally – addresses. Perhaps other literary traditions will justify my object-relations approach to the fantastic, but perhaps in future analyses I will also find room for Lacanian transgressions, Freudian psychosexual stages, or even Jungian archetypes (however unlikely). It is surely no co-incidence that Peach, Williams and I find contemporary, British psychoanalytic theory a useful analytical strategy for reading contemporary British fiction, and I suspect that other magic realist traditions will require a more pluralistic, diverse theoretical approach.

With regard to psychoanalytic and literary theory, I hope that my future investigations will be able to move beyond the critiques that came to dominate parts of my first section. I want to begin a new series of constructive engagements, pausing perhaps to recognise the good in my own bad objects. With postmodern theory in particular, having re-read what I have written until now, I could make an effort to consider “postmodernism” more ambivalently – although I noticed a similar scathing negativity in Eagleton’s efforts to consider “ambivalently” postmodernism (see Eagleton 1996). I have certainly been influenced by postmodernism myself – how could I be otherwise, if “postmodernism” is the word we use to describe our mode of (cultural) production – and, like Carter’s wish to reclaim the ideals of Enlightenment rationality, perhaps I feel a degree of frustration

in a potentially productive project seemingly gone awry. I also must be aware that the discourses I advocate here also participate in our cultural mode of production, so it is really inconceivable that they completely evade all the rationalist pitfalls into which my predecessors have fallen. That is why, throughout my critical evaluations of postmodern and Lacanian theory, I have tried to make modest claims as to the revolutionary power and potential of object-relations. I seriously doubt that it is the miraculous remedy that will at once rescue the subject or our culture from the afflictions of the Enlightenment or of postmodern. (One only has to imagine how any theory will be regarded in one or two hundred years time to be humbled.)

However, to reiterate what I said earlier, I do believe that the shift I advocate here will mark a significant step towards redressing our present imbalances, misconceptions and misdiagnoses. I do believe, like Robert Young, that “object-relations theory can rescue us from the bleak fragmentation of postmodern deconstruction” (a term that Young uses in a non-Derridian-specific sense), without recourse to defence mechanisms manifested in misplaced concreteness or a desperate Idealism (Young 1996c).

What psychoanalytic object relations theory has to say to pessimistic cultural theory is that human nature does not have to be thrown out at the end of listing all the determinations that contribute to the causality of our humanity. Object relations theory can accommodate all the fragmentation and breaking up of a coherent idea of self or humanity and make it part of a theory of human nature which holds out some hope of bearing the disintegrative forces in our cultures and societies and finding a basis for reconstruction and reintegration.

(Young 1996c)

It is, however, bad form in today’s theoretical climate to be so essentialist (believing in “human nature”), teleological (believing that we should work to improve subjective experience) or – perhaps worst of all – so naïvely humanist (see Eagleton 1996, 93-130). Humanism in particular has become a nasty bogeyman in contemporary theory, and a word I have often heard ignorantly and unfairly levelled

at Winnicott's psychoanalytic ideology. But, as Eagleton and Young point out, humanism, while justly reviled in some of its previous, traditional manifestations, has become a straw-man upon whom postmodernists exercise less than precise target practice. While we certainly do not want to revert back to a position of regarding the human subject as the centre and origin of all meaning, we do not want to become "anti-humanist" to such an extent that we find no value in whatsoever in the human subject (Eagleton 1996, 129; see also Young 1996c). It will not do to maintain blind faith in the myth of human omnipotence, nor cynically to defend against the responsibility that human subjects do have in the creation of meaning and the social relations in which we find ourselves. Both positions are employing defence mechanisms rather than learning to survive the paradoxes and tolerate the uncertainty those paradoxes entail.

As I suggested earlier in this thesis, I am keen in future to work to examine further the ideological unconscious of psychoanalytic theory. I am particularly interested, for example, in how the doctrine of primary narcissism, the belief in an original, object-less state, is a manifestation of the individualist, bourgeois ideology underpinning orthodox psychoanalytic (Freudian and Lacanian) theory. When Freud or Lacan are taken up by cultural literary theory, this ideological baggage is inevitably brought along for the ride, though more often I suspect as an unconscious stowaway than a welcomed fellow-traveller. Like the infant that inevitably and unwittingly introjects the unwanted bad object with the good, many theorists I think, unwittingly or unconsciously, adopt certain unwanted ideological assumptions, positions that they often regard as an object foreign to themselves and their idealised object. This is not to say that I want to throw away the psychoanalytic baby with the bourgeois bathwater in which it is immersed – however, if we are to consider using psychoanalysis as a diagnostic tool or even cure for what ails the modern, the postmodern, the monadic, the isolated, the bourgeois, the capitalist, the late-capitalist subject, we need to be aware of how our strategies are themselves situated ideologically. And again like the Kleinian infant, rather than jettisoning our idealised object when we realise it is in the smallest way tainted, we need to be able to recognise and tolerate the paradoxes of love and hate, good and bad that comprise

any whole object.

Finally, I do see an encouraging shift in many aspects of our cultural life and theoretical environment. The very existence and – more encouraging – the popularity of fiction that addresses these paradoxes of love and hate, subject and object, phantasy and reality, is evidence to me that people are thinking in ways that recognise and seek to tolerate paradox. In literary criticism as well, despite my many harsh words, it seems that there is a significant movement away from the neo-formalist, quasi-scientific tendencies that I have taken issue with here – though perhaps not as great a shift as many literary critics would assume. Just as many Lacanians mis-recognise the revolutionary, anti-Enlightenment importance of Lacanian psychoanalysis, some literary critics have over-estimated the revolutionary power of the move from the traditional formalisms and structuralisms of, for example, Frye and Saussure, to post-Lacanianism, post-structuralism, post-modernism, post-feminism and even – it was inevitable, really – post-postmodern. But within psychoanalytic literary criticism there has been a subtle shift away from Lacan to Kleinian and object-relations theory. Some of those who brought Lacan to the fore in critical theory, such as Jacqueline Rose, Juliet Mitchell and Mary Jacobus are now pioneering this movement to object-relations. Although many psychoanalytic perspectives in literary criticism still engage solely with Lacanian theory, or in one way or another contain some of those unconscious trace elements and ideological suppositions of orthodox psychoanalysis, this shift to object-relations is not insignificant, nor is the increasing attention paid to specifically object-relations theorists such as Bollas, Flax, Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin and, to a lesser extent, American object-relations theorists such as Otto Kernberg and Heinz Kohut. And the recognition of paradoxes and the insistence upon their negotiation is not exclusive to object-relations psychoanalytic theorists: many theorists, it seems, such as Linda Gordon, are coming to this realisation independently of psychoanalysis.

I am less optimistic, however, when I examine our larger cultural environment. It would be negligent of me not to suggest some practical, immediate

political implications of the theories I advocate here, though time and space does not permit a detailed analysis. We repeatedly hear that our world, in light of recent global political events, is plagued by uncertainty, anxiety and fear. However, while I agree that there is a simmering anxiety of a sort not really seen since the Cold War, everywhere I see a proliferation of personal and politically institutionalised defences against uncertainty. As during the Cold War, there is an “us” and “them” mentality; both the Western alliance against terrorism and the terrorists themselves – both “theirs” and “ours” – are “fundamentalists” (see Young 2001) characterised by excessive pathological splitting and virulent projective identification. On the rise from almost all quarters is a conception of the world that is like that of the Kleinian paranoid-schizoid infant – complex political and social relations are thus reduced, in the words of the American President and his father before him, to a simple struggle between “good” and “evil,” “right” and “wrong.” Defence mechanisms, I have stressed throughout this thesis, must be available to subjects when they are faced with overbearing anxiety, and there is no doubt that citizens in America, Europe and the Middle East face real threats to their lives and security. But there is little hope of improving the political situation, or alleviating our personal and cultural paranoia, if we continue to be governed by schizoid decision making.

The realisation of depressive ambivalence is in this case not merely an achievement of subjective psychic maturity but a social and moral imperative. We must recognise the other as the whole object, capable of not only bad but also good, worthy of not only our hate but also our love. And both sides must see *themselves* in a similar light, acknowledging the injustices that have been perpetrated upon innocent civilians in their name. The Kleinian depressive position also insists, echoing Kant’s second categorical imperative, that in our desire to assuage our paranoia, our hate, we not use others as a means to an end. As uncomfortable as it is, we have to survive these paradoxes. And the certainty with which we maintain the distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil, must be replaced with the uncertainty that necessarily accompanies the acceptance of ambivalence. This illustrates the relationship between certainty, knowledge and reason: The ideas of which so many of us feel certain right now, the need to eliminate the evil Islamic

baddies at any cost, which is sold to us as a completely reasonable, common sense position, is completely ignorant of historical, economic, political, social reality. It is classic scapegoating: identify the bad object, project it and identify it as “out there,” a not-me external myself, and destroy it. This is a “reason” based on defences against uncertainty and a need to hide from reality. A truly “reasonable” approach, one that I would endorse based on my readings of the psychoanalytic theory and novelists explored here, based on depressive ambivalence and one that does not resort to the evasion or modification of knowledge of an uncomfortable or hostile reality, would force us to address the historical and economic conditions that themselves lead to others’ (schizoid) actions, for example, the continued imperialist, global economic and cultural hegemony of the West. Despite the painful feelings and anxiety that such ambivalence implies, we cannot afford these illusory certainties. These paradoxes must be negotiated.

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