Waking Is Rising and Dreaming Is Sinking:
The Struggle for Identity in Coma Literature

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis explores the representation of coma within contemporary fiction and non-fiction, including Irvine Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, Alex Garland's *The Coma*, Stephen King's *The Dead Zone*, Iain Banks's *The Bridge*, Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* and Jeff Malmberg's documentary-film *Marwencol*. Initially examining these representations of coma through the lens of 'trauma theory', I examine how it is frequently depicted as a purely psychological trauma, often ignoring the physical consequences of brain injury and the impact this can have upon the patient's identity.

During the course of my investigation, I draw links between diverse theoretical fields rooted in literary criticism, philosophy, classics and medicine, creating my own critical framework against which representations of coma can be critiqued and which allows me to explore both authors' and audiences' fascination with the condition. Ultimately, I examine how misrepresentations have led to the proliferation of confusion and misinformation surrounding coma within the public arena and I look at the potential damage that this has for the real 'survivors'.

My approach is focused on close-reading, drawing out comparisons between archetypal tropes, common in depictions of coma, that have led to the condition being conflated with others states or disorders of consciousness (from the sleep and dream-states, to the chronic disorder of consciousness, the persistent vegetative state), which further contributes to the overall distortion of public perceptions of the condition.

As part of my research, I have run a writing group, the members of which are all survivors of coma and brain injury. I have published collections of their work and I draw on this resource of first-person testimony to critique fictional misrepresentations. In doing so, I have produced an addition to the field of trauma-narrative analysis, examining a medical condition that, whilst depicted frequently in literature and the media, has remained largely unexplored within the sphere of literary analysis.

Acknowledgements

A Relatively Normal Life. An Introduction

In 1968, the Harvard Brain Death Committee made a ground-breaking decision that has shaped how we think of death today and which has consequently helped to influence medico-legal policy: they developed a list of criteria that focused upon the diagnosis of death based upon the permanent failure of the brain to function.

Prior to this, diagnosis of death was purely cardio-centric, with the declaration of death based upon the irreversibility of cardio-respiratory functions. However, due to the increasingly inadequate and outmoded technologies (the basic empirical data gained, for example, from listening to the patient's heart through a stethoscope), and the rise in more advanced, life-supportive technologies (with life support machines that electro-mechanically provide and sustain cardio-respiratory functions), there was suddenly the very real need to move away from the older cardio-centric diagnoses of death and towards a more satisfactory and ethically responsible one. There was also the development of MRI and CT scans, resulting in physicians being able to monitor the state of the brain, again allowing for more complex life-support mechanisms to be put in place.

The decision of the Harvard Brain Death Committee was soon recognized worldwide, with many countries developing further modifications to the diagnostic criteria. For example, it was acknowledged that 'brain death' does not necessarily refer to the total failure of brain functions, as during scans, there may still be residual activity. Thus, as Stephen Holland points out in his discussion of this landmark development in medicine and its impact upon bioethics, 'A patient is diagnosed as dead when their brain stem is dead',[1] a diagnostic measure known as the Minnesota criterion. As a consequence, there began to be a sudden rise of patients who were kept alive in near-death states, not least the chronic disorder of consciousness, coma.

Then in 1972, a further complication arose. The two neurologists Fred Plum and Byron Jennett identified what they called the 'persistent vegetative state', a disorder of consciousness in which patients who were previously in coma have 'progressed to a state of wakefulness without detectable awareness'.[2] However, it was eleven years later in 1983 when the President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in

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[1] Stephen Holland, *Bioethics: A Philosophical Introduction*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p. 71
[2] The Multi-Society Task Force on PVS, 'Medical Aspects of the Persistent Vegetative State', *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 330 (21) (1994), 1499-1508 (p. 1499).

Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioural Research accepted the definition of PVS, defining unconsciousness as the inability to 'experience the environment'.[3]

This broadening out of the divisions of chronic disorders of consciousness not only called into question the boundaries of consciousness itself, but also of the thresholds between life and death. Where exactly on the spectrum between consciousness and unconsciousness, life and death, does the coma patient lie? Where is the patient in the PVS? The brain is minimally active, brain stem functions have not failed, and yet the body and the subjective self are in stasis, inert. This was to be complicated to an even greater degree when, in 2002, the 'minimally conscious state' was diagnosed, defined as a 'condition of severely altered unconsciousness in which minimal but definite behavioural evidence or environmental awareness is demonstrated'.[4] Unlike the PVS state this meant that the patient who reaches a minimally conscious state has a good prognosis for significant recovery, although permanent disability is highly likely.

The recognition of these alternative disorders of consciousness has been significant both in aiding the developments of medical care for the coma, PV and MC patient and in simultaneously creating confusion and bafflement within the public arena, these conditions being often conflated or mythologized through popular representations. This is a repercussion that has also become common in media reportage that will often contain 'scientific inaccuracies, inconsistent diagnostic and descriptive terminology' alongside 'mismatches between the descriptions of [the patient's] state and the medical terms used to characterize it' and 'inaccurate prognoses'.[5]

One current case study, much in the public eye, concerning such confusions surrounding diagnostic reporting of coma and the disorders of consciousness and one that has unfolded during the latter stages of writing this thesis is that of the Formula One driver Michael Schumacher. Since being brought out of his medically-induced coma in January 2014 after suffering a severe head injury during a skiing accident, media speculation over Schumacher's condition and the inconsistencies in language employed to voice these theories has been rife. An article from a January edition of *The Times* entitled 'Schumacher "is being brought out of coma"',[6] included a photograph of the driver with the caption, 'Michael Schumacher: "can open his eyes and squeeze a

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[3] The Multi-Society Task Force on PVS, 'Medical Aspects of the Persistent Vegetative State', p. 1499.
[4] Joseph J. Fins, Nicholas D. Schiff and Kathleen M. Foley, 'Late Recovery from the Minimally Conscious State', *Neurology*, 68 (2007), 304-307 (p. 305).
[5] James L. Bernat, 'Theresa Schiavo's Tragedy and Ours, Too' in *Neurology*, 71 (2008), 964-965 (p. 964).
[6] Simon de Bruxelles, 'Schumacher "is being brought out of coma"', *The Times* (30 Jan 2014).

hand"'. However, on reading the article, it transpires that this revelation was merely a speculation formulated by the French newspaper *L'Equipe* that was refuted by Schumacher's manager. The way this conjecture had been used by *The Times* as a 'pull-quote', however, imbued it with a sense of positivity and veracity which was further questioned by a report from *The Express* almost six months later. This article queried the 'level of progress' that Schumacher has actually made since coming out of coma, even writing of the 'fears that he could remain in a permanent vegetative state'.[7] *The Times*, around the same time as the report in *The Express*, ran the article, 'Michael Schumacher "an invalid for life" says coma specialist'[8] and yet most recently, *The Metro* ran a report in which the former Ferrari boss Jean Todt is quoted as saying that Schumacher can expect to lead a 'relatively normal life'[9] in the near future. The term 'relatively normal' seems to heighten the confusion and ambiguity concerning Schumacher's condition whilst simultaneously injecting an element of 'hope' into the media coverage, akin to that created by the *L'Equipe* article.

The professor of intensive care at Edinburgh University, Peter Andrews, reveals his deliberate decision to select carefully medico-linguistic terminology when talking about coma that is significant in this discussion. Quoted in an article concerning the Schumacher case in *The Guardian*, Andrews says how he avoids 'the term "awaken" because it could trigger too high expectations among relatives'.[10] He therefore clearly recognises the dangers of misrepresenting and conflating coma with other states of consciousness, most notably that of sleep.

This advocacy for the careful representation of disorders of consciousness is likewise voiced by several doctors in an article that is openly concerned with the reportage of Schumacher's accident published in *The Telegraph* in June 2014. In this report, the former Formula One physician Dr. Gary Hartstein describes the overly optimistic recovery claims and the opacity and confusion of media reportage as 'a highly cynical

[7] Allan Hall, 'Michael Schumacher moved out of intensive care, report claims', *The Express* (13 June 2014) <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/482136/Michael-Schumacher-moved-out-of-intensive-care-but-still-in-coma-claim-reports> [accessed: 14/10/14].

[8] David Charter, 'Michael Schumacher "an invalid for life" says coma specialist', *The Times* (20 June 2014) <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/europe/article4125140.ece> [accessed: 14/10/14].

[9] Don Mackay and Allan Hall, 'F1 Hero Michael Schumacher Can Lead "Relatively Normal Life" Soon, Says Former Ferrari Boss', *The Metro* (7 October 2014) <http://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/formula-1/f1-hero-michael-schumacher-can-4395046> [accessed: 14/10/14].

[10] Philip Oltermann, 'Michael Schumacher Being Brought Out of Induced Coma, Says Manager', *The Guardian* (30 January 2014) <http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2014/jan/30/michael-schumacher-brought-out-induced-coma> [accessed: 14/10/14].

use of language, using the truth to convey an impression that is almost certainly false'.[11]

Throughout the course of this investigation, I will seek to explore such examples of cynical language, alongside the many representations, misrepresentations and conflations of coma and other chronic disorders of consciousness and explicate what impact these have upon the struggle for identity of the coma survivor. The Schumacher case, I propose, illustrates many of the central issues that this investigation will seek to explicate. Examining a range of fiction and non-fiction, I will explore how coma is represented (and misrepresented) whilst exploring how the medical condition is often conflated with other chronic disorders of consciousness, thereby contributing to an overall opacity and confusion surrounding the nature of these conditions, a confusion that is evident in the recent media coverage of Michael Schumacher's accident and recovery. Lastly, drawing upon such real-life cases, alongside the stories of those survivors of coma and brain injury I have worked with during the course of my research, I will explore the potential impact that misrepresentations of these medical conditions can have upon the identity of the coma survivor.

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[11] Tony Paterson, 'Michael Schumacher: Doctors Voice Concerns Over Coma "Recovery" Claims', *The Telegraph* (17 June 2014) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/motorsport/formulaone/michael-schumacher/10905287/Michael-Schumacher-Doctors-voice-concerns-over-coma-recovery-claims.html> [accessed: 14/10/14].

1: *You Wake, You Die.* **Trauma, Aesthetics and the Writing of Coma**

There are four stages to my current existence and they repeat ad infinitum: sleep, dream, confusion and fear. At present I am at stage three.
-Steve Hollyman, *Keeping Britain Tidy*.

1.1: Introduction

In his discussion of literary and critical attempts to come to terms with trauma, Dominick LaCapra warns against 'fetishized and totalizing narratives', stories of trauma that are overly focused upon 'harmonizing events, and then recuperating the past in terms of uplifting messages or optimistic, self-serving scenarios'.[1] LaCapra's statement, here, immediately describes many of the problems with the representations of coma that I will explore during the course of this investigation. The image of the coma, a traumatic state of unconsciousness in which there is 'the total absence of awareness of self and environment even when the subject is externally stimulated',[2] has been prevalent in literary and filmic texts over the last fifty years. Within a genre that I will refer to throughout this thesis as 'coma literature', there are many texts that perpetually teeter upon the edge of fetishization, and several that plunge headlong over it.

Within this inquiry, I seek to consider the ways in which coma is represented, although, whilst I am concerned primarily with the (mis)representation of coma, I am also inevitably drawn to the representation, or, rather (in most cases) the non-representation of brain injury. This is primarily due to the fact that in most cases, deep coma will cause profound, irreparable brain injury, a consequence with which many texts often do not concern themselves. I will place my literary analysis within the context of the constantly-evolving field of 'trauma theory' which, in itself, draws upon wide-ranging theoretical approaches across the fields of psychoanalysis, medicine, history, philosophy and, of course, literary studies. I argue that whilst literary representations seek to approximate the traumatic experience of coma by drawing on historical and contemporary theories of trauma, such representations fail ultimately in their agenda by diluting the traumatic experience through a lack of engagement with the realities of the impact coma has upon identity and personhood.

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[1] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 78.
[2] Fred Plum and Jerome B. Posner, *The Diagnosis of Stupor and Coma* (Philadelphia: F.A.Davis Company, 1980), p. 1.

I will investigate the importance and relevance of trauma theory in my analysis and critique of representations of coma, examining how various concepts of trauma and the traumatic event have influenced fictional depictions. On the surface the plight of the coma survivor seems to be paradigmatic of that of the trauma survivor: someone who is subjected to a deeply unsettling and often violent event that, at the time it occurs, may not be fully comprehended or assimilated into conscious understanding. In the case of the coma survivor, the initiating traumatic event that leads to coma is physical: road traffic accident, a violent assault, brain tumour or stroke, to name but a few causes. Moreover, brain injury sustained by the coma survivor due to an external influence enacting upon the body (accident, assault) is referred to as a *Traumatic* Brain Injury (TBI). For the coma survivor, this trauma cannot be understood as it occurs precisely because of the coma itself, a state of depressed consciousness characterized by 'a suspension of wakefulness, emotion, attention, purposeful behaviour'.[3] However, as will be discussed in more detail within this chapter, the trauma of coma is more complex than the standard models of psychological traumatic neurosis proposed, for example, by Freud. For the survivor of coma, there is not only the trauma of the cause of the coma and of the coma itself (whether or not this disorder of consciousness is remembered), but also the tertiary level of trauma constituted by the emergence from coma and the almost inevitable consequence of this: traumatic or acquired brain injury. In using the designation 'coma-trauma', therefore, I refer to this multi-faceted and multi-dimensional manifestation of trauma of the coma survivor who is both physically wounded, but also psychologically traumatized by both the coma itself and the consequences of living with brain injury.

As I will illustrate, authors of coma fiction frequently overlook the third level of trauma and instead attempt to fit the medical condition into more traditional Freudian models of psychological traumatic neurosis, thus failing to create fully nuanced depictions of coma. Such depictions, I suggest, have led to what I call the 'soap-opera' model of coma representation, with patients emerging from coma with full cognition intact, often with little or no need for physical rehabilitation.[4] Or there are the cases in

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[3] Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 237.

[4] At the time of writing this, two literal, differing examples of my "soap-opera" model have come to light, one reflecting and one conflicting with my definition. An episode of *EastEnders*, during the 2013 Autumn season, saw the character Phil Mitchell fall into coma after a spectacular (ratings-attracting) car crash, only to emerge days later with full cognition, and with little need for physical rehabilitation, other than superficial physical damage caused by the crash itself. In August 2013, one *Coronation Street* storyline similarly saw character Nick Tilsley emerge from a car crash-induced coma (a crash that was aired on the same day as the *EastEnders* crash – 5 August 2013). Interestingly,

which, as most readers of this thesis will have encountered, a character receives a blow to the head, loses his memory, and then recovers his memory after receiving a second head injury. Often, these violent, catalysing incidents cause coma, or unconscious states, within which memory is arbitrarily switched on or off. In all of these cases, the medical gravity of coma is overlooked and furthermore, the almost-inevitable result of brain injury is either trivialized or ignored altogether, once more undermining the tertiary level of coma-trauma.

Using this critique of 'trauma-theory' as a starting point for my analysis, I will draw links between other diverse theoretical fields rooted within literary criticism, philosophy, psychoanalysis, classics and medicine in order to create my own critical framework against which representations of coma and the coma survivor can be exemplified and explored. It is therefore my intention to produce an addition to the field of trauma-narrative analysis, examining a medical condition that, whilst rife in its literary depictions, has remained largely unexplored within the sphere of literary study. As part of my research, I have run writing workshops with coma and brain injury survivors, generating first-person testimony and accounts of the writers' experiences of coma and brain injury. I published their first collection of work, *Head-Lines*, in 2011 and their second collection in 2014. What has been most noticeable is the distinct lack of first-person testimonies of the coma experience in mainstream literature, and so throughout my work, here, I refer to writings produced by this group to provide comparative counter-points for analysis, when looking at fictional representations in the light of real-life experiences.

Whilst this inquiry is primarily concerned with literary representations of coma, I will use my analysis to work towards an understanding of why authors have become

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the writing for this plot-strand has focused upon representing the irreparable brain damage he has sustained, the actor playing the role, Ben Price, openly discussing the first-hand research both he and the writers have conducted, working with the head injury charity, *Headway*, an organization I have also worked with throughout my research. Subsequent episodes of *Coronation Street* have depicted this character's (and other characters') struggle with his shattered identity, his violent mood-swings and cognitive confusion, physical rehabilitation and strained familial/marital relationships, all typical and common consequences of both coma and traumatic or acquired brain injury. For further discussion of the impact of coma and/or brain injury on selfhood and family relationships, see for instance: Catherine Malabou, *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*, trans. Steven Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012); Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (London: Picador, 1986); www.headway.org.uk; Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens* (London: Vintage, 2000), *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2003), and *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Penguin, 2005); 'Coronation Street Storyline Sadly Rings True for Brain Injured People', *Brain Injury Group* (2013) <http://www.braininjurygroup.co.uk/coronation-street-sadly-rings-true.html> [accessed: 27/11/2013]; <http://www.ukabif.org.uk/brain-injury-information>; *Narrative Approaches to Brain Injury*, eds. Stephen Weatherhead and David Todd (London: Karnac Books, 2013).

fascinated with the idea of coma as a literary trope, but also how literary and filmic misrepresentations have socio-political implications for the real victims of coma and brain injury, returning, full-circle, to LaCapra's warning against fetishized trauma narratives.

1.2: *The Unpleasant Experience*: Coma, Trauma, Narrative

Coma literature can be broadly split into two categories: interior and exterior coma narratives. The interior coma narrative focuses upon the subjective experience of the coma victim, often creating complex, dream-like worlds of the unconscious. In the exterior coma narrative, the focus is placed either upon the victim still within coma and the strains his condition has upon the personal relationships that he has outside of coma, or upon the coma survivor, and his reintegration into the world of consciousness post-coma. In both categories, LaCapra's notion of trauma 'fetish' is present, no more so than in several televisual and filmic representations of the last ten years. BBC One's series *Life On Mars*,[5] for example, whilst depicting an interior state of coma, is preoccupied with representing (and parodying) the 1970s, to the point of fetishizing icons of that era, from the BBC test card with the little girl and the clown, to coma-protagonist, Sam Tyler, receiving televisual direct-address advice from Open University professors with customary leather elbow-patches and helmet-strap beards. Even the representation of the police force, metonymically embodied by the politically incorrect Gene Hunt, fetishistically totalizes the era in its parodic homage to such 'realist' police dramas as *The Sweeney*, alluding, almost affectionately, to inherent racism and sexism within the workplace. The viewer is engaged by these fetishized signifiers of Tyler's coma, eventually gaining pleasure from them and, in the end, from the coma itself and the possibilities it offers for conjuring up further pleasurable images.

The coma as narrative device can similarly be seen in David Chase's hit TV- series *The Sopranos*. In the final season, the central protagonist, Tony, spends several episodes within a coma, this particular production exploiting the soft-focus 'white-tunnel' trope of the near-death experience, alongside, as in *Life On Mars*, representations of the interiorization of external stimuli. At one point, Tony bangs on the wall of his hotel within the world of coma in order to silence the incessant chattering of his 'neighbour',

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[5] *Life On Mars*, dir. Various, BBC One, 2006-7.

a chattering that, in reality, is entering his unconscious from the external world and becoming interiorized and assimilated into his subjective experience of coma.[6] In an example of exterior coma narrative, Almodóvar's *Talk To Her,*[7] the victim of coma, Alicia, becomes fetishized by the morally-dubious anti-hero, Benigno, to the point whereby he repeatedly rapes her, causing her to become pregnant. It is the birth of the stillborn child that becomes the catalyst for her 'awakening' from coma and subsequent rehabilitation, a closure that echoes LaCapra's allusion to the 'optimistic…scenario'.

As outlined earlier, because coma seems to fit the traditional model of trauma, it is useful to examine such representations of coma through the lens of trauma theory. Superficially, the coma condition, like the traumatizing event, 'is not fully perceived as it occurs'.[8] Developing Freud's work on traumatic neuroses, Cathy Caruth discusses the 'haunting' nature of trauma, postulating that, 'To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event'.[9] Within Freud's language on the subject of trauma there are frequent references to this notion of 'haunting', with the mind's 'compulsion to repeat'[10] embodying a form of psychic possession. His core example of Tancred from Tasso's romantic epic *Gerusalemme liberata*, cited in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, echoes this notion of the spectral nature of trauma, and it is significant that Caruth uses this as a foundation for her own theory of the 'possessive influence'.[11] After unwittingly killing his lover, Clorinda, Tancred enters a charmed and frightful forest, where he attacks one particular tree with his sword, at which point 'blood gushes from the wound, and the voice of Clorinda, whose spirit magically entered into that very tree, accuses him of yet again doing harm to his beloved'.[12] This emphasises the notion of the repetitive, inwards-turning nature of trauma and the compulsion to repeat the traumatic event of the past, an event that 'perpetually escapes or eludes our understanding'.[13] Through this repetition, the victim of trauma hopes to reassimilate this rupture of temporality and of identity, thereby mastering or coming to terms with the traumatizing event. But this example also emphasises the ghostly form of trauma, its haunting quality. The voice of Clorinda manifests itself as a ghost, and cries out to Tancred

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[6] 'Mayham', *The Sopranos*, dir. Jack Bender (HBO, USA, 2006)

[7] *Talk To Her*, dir. Pedro Almodóvar (Sony Pictures Classics, Spain, 2002)

[8] Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 8.

[9] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

[10] Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 2003), 43-102 (p. 61).

[11] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 5.

[12] Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle,' p. 61.

[13] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 13.

against his will. Just as he unwittingly killed her the first time, he unwittingly kills her the second time and this traumatic repetition takes the form of a ghostly voice, a spectral re-run of the traumatic event, akin to, as Freud postulates, the dreams of those 'possessed' by traumatic neuroses, the survivors of the First World War, for example, who were at the forefront of his mind at the time of writing *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Thus, as Anne Whitehead concludes in her appraisal of the development of trauma theory, for Freud, 'Trauma is inextricable…from the ghostly or spectral, and it testifies to the profoundly unresolved nature of the past'.[14] The subsequent repetition compulsion of trauma, the tantalizingly intangible haunting of the traumatic event, constitutes the psyche's attempt to seize and master the trauma through repetition and practice in order to exorcise it from the mind.

In coma literature, the traumatizing event, often caused by a violent assault enacted upon or within the physical self (road traffic accident/brain tumour) is likewise often not perceived as it occurs. In such texts, the plight of the coma victim is centred upon the attempt to face up to the event that has caused such a catastrophic 'break in the mind's experience of time'[15] but that has also caused such a rupture within the victim's sense of selfhood. What is most interesting is that in interior coma narratives this attempt to 'reunify' the self through a rediscovering of the haunting, past event occurs within the world of the unconscious – that once the victim of coma has confronted the traumatic event, then the process of their survival has only just begun. In many of these narratives, it is the confrontation with the traumatizing event that catalyses the victim's emergence from coma, the texts concluding at the point of 'awakening'. However, in the reality of coma, the victim may be confronted with a further, re- traumatizing struggle for identity post-coma through any brain injury that may have been sustained, an eventuality, as will be revealed, that many works of coma fiction fail to address.

In Alex Garland's *The Coma*, for example, whilst within his coma, the central protagonist, Carl, only briefly entertains the possibility that he may have sustained a brain injury, proclaiming:

> I was not suffering from psychological trauma, as I had at first suspected. Instead, as Mary pointed out, it was more likely that I had some sort of brain damage. Which, to look on the bright side, might be reversible. Even, in some ways, easier to address than psychological trauma – or at least more straightforward.[16]

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[14] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 13
[15] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), p. 61.
[16] Alex Garland, *The Coma* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), Section 1, ch.10 [p.39]. When

Whilst Philip Tew sees this passage as an example of Garland's 'parodying [of] both the postmodern condition and society's rendition of the individual through the narrative's evocation of a traumatized consciousness revisiting a concrete traumatic experience',[17] I argue that this exposes a deeper problem with the representation of coma within the novel and within coma fiction as a whole. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter two, by his own admission, Garland's literary objective in writing this novel was to create a text in which 'dreams' were presented in a less 'naff' way,[18] a goal implied within the closing section of the novel as Carl 'awakes' from coma and concludes that, 'Everybody dreams, but nobody has ever managed to tell me what their dream was like'. Coma, then, is clearly equated with sleep and it is as this point when Carl formulates his first principle of, 'You wake, you die […] when you wake, you lose a narrative',[19] Garland representing coma, again, as a sleep-state. However, within a rather throw-away, expository conclusion to the novel, Garland does touch upon a central debate within trauma and narrative theory: the possibility that the process of trauma can be seen to be embodied by the structures of narrative and the reader's relationship with the text. In his essay, 'Freud's Master Plot', Peter Brooks makes the insightful connection between Freud's psychoanalytical perspective on traumatic repetition and his own narratological perspective. Crucially, Brooks focuses on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which, as discussed earlier, Freud attempts to hone his theory of traumatic repetition compulsion and 'haunting'. Brooks sees *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as 'an essay about the dynamic interrelationship of ends and beginnings',[20] going on to suggest that all of the literary devices present within a text and those that keep drawing the reader back into the middle section, are indicative of the compulsion to repeat, the traumatic compulsion that Freud outlines in his works. Through the repetition of the 'unpleasant experience'[21] the individual attempts to convert a passive subject position within a traumatic experience into an active subject position, an endeavour that can, Freud argues, 'Be attributed to an instinctive urge to assert control

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providing a page reference for *The Coma*, I have included the number in square brackets to indicate that these are my own numberings, reflecting the fact that Garland, himself, does not include any page numbers within the text. I discuss the use of this stylistic feature in more detail later in the chapter and in chapter two.

[17] Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel* (London: Continuum, 2007),p. 192.

[18] Tim Adams, 'Coma Chameleon', The *Guardian* (27 June2004) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/jun/27/fiction.features2>, [accessed 23/01/2011], (Para. 9).

[19] Garland, *The Coma*, [p.155].

[20] Peter Brooks, 'Freud's Master Plot', *Yale French Studies*, Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading, No.55/56 (1977), 280-300 (p.285).

[21] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p.54.

that operates quite independently of whether or not the memory as such was pleasurable'.[22] This attempt to achieve mastery over the trauma through repetition, Brooks argues, manifests itself in the process of reading a text, with literary repetition acting as a form of 'binding of textual energies that allows them to be mastered by putting them into a serviceable form within the energetic economy of the narrative'.[23] In this statement, Brooks aligns the literary agenda with that of the victim of trauma, repeating the traumatic event in order to 'bind' it and achieve a sense of psychic and, therefore, emotional control. But Brooks goes further, suggesting that 'what operates in the text through repetition is the death instinct, the drive toward the end'.[24] Here, Brooks alludes to Freud's bold conclusion to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: that 'the goal of all life is death'.[25] In making this declaration, Freud asserted that the aim of all life was to return to the state that existed prior to the evolution of the species: the lifeless, inanimate state. The repetitive confrontation with the traumatic event (an event that Robert Jay Lifton refers to as the 'death encounter',[26]) reveals, Freud suggests, the drive towards death, but a death that must be achieved only on the victim's own terms. Thus the compulsion to repeat reveals a paradoxical agenda: both to come to terms with and master the death encounter (a threatened death that the victim neither chose nor was prepared for) but also the desire to return to a state of inertia, embodied by death itself. Similarly, Brooks argues, 'The desire of the text is ultimately the desire for the end, for that recognition which is the moment of the death of the reader in the text'.[27] The reader, therefore, wants to master both the text but also wants his involvement in the unfolding of the narrative to end – for his interaction with and role in the text to, in effect, achieve their demise.

This intersection of trauma and narrative theory becomes particularly pertinent at the ending of Garland's novel, itself a literary, plot-driven text that concerns itself with a traumatized subject. By discussing, albeit cursorily, the 'loss' of self-narrative as being a form of 'death' ('you wake, you die'), Garland aligns the coma experience with this notion of the traumatic loss of story during which the element of selfhood which has been invested in that story is likewise lost. In short, both story and a piece of selfhood

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[22] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p.54.
[23] Brooks, 'Freud's Master Plot', p.289.
[24] Ibid., p.291.
[25] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p.78.
[26] Robert Jay Lifton, 'An Interview with Robert Jay Lifton' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Chicago: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 128-147 (p.128).
[27] Brooks, *Freud's Master Plot*, p.296.

dies during the narrative process, yet the subject survives and retains this knowledge of the loss. Throughout the novel, Garland's protagonist constantly repeats the events that led up to his coma, even falsely experiencing an 'awakening' from coma. Alongside this, the reader is repeatedly confronted with the same repeated scenarios, characters and landscapes. The reader and the protagonist alike are trapped within the repetitive, traumatic core of the novel and both strive towards the end through a compulsion to repeat that echoes Freud's death drive, alongside Brooks's drive towards the end of the text. For Carl, the moment of clarity that he reaches is, paradoxically, a perplexing one as he realises that he both desires and fears the death of his coma narrative and his role in it. In the final moments of coma, he observes, 'Now, moments from waking, the death is suddenly frightening. I want to hold it off as long as possible'.[28] Once more, this desire to 'hold off' his emergence from coma reveals the compulsion of traumatic repetition, in the hope to master truly the death encounter. But it also reveals the conflicting desires of the reader: to hold off the ending of the novel for as long as possible, but also to desire truly the end to come in order to gain pleasure in the discovery of the fate of the protagonist whose journey they have been following avidly. This pleasure, therefore, constitutes *jouissance*, as proposed by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (in his development of Freudian concepts) and linked with the death-drive. It is the pleasure gained from the fulfilment of a need (the death-drive being one of these 'needs') and so in this sense, *jouissance* is gained by the fulfilment of the need for the novel to end, and for the reader's role in the text to 'die'.

However, despite alluding to some of these key debates in both narrative and trauma theory, by limiting the part of consciousness that is 'lost' within coma to simply the 'dream' narratives that are experienced therein, Garland ignores the possibility of post-coma brain injury. Even as Carl begins to arise from coma, despite the fact that he will lose his coma narrative, he appears to be 'awaking' with his cognition intact, as if stirring from a bad dream. In short, he only seems to be losing a dream-narrative, not his entire pre-coma self, as is often the case with victims of coma and brain injury. As argued earlier, there is a doubling of coma-trauma *prima facie*: the initiating event that causes the coma, and the experience within the coma itself, even though this most often constitutes a blank in consciousness for the coma survivor. However, this may be no less traumatic than a full recollection of the state of coma, the void in memory being equally as alienating and traumatic as fragmented, uncanny images of the unconscious.

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[28] Garland, *The Coma*, [p.155].

What is prevalent in much of the literature of coma (primarily in coma fiction) is the failure to address or discuss the *tripling* of trauma: the coma-survivor's brain injury and subsequent rehabilitation. Similarly to *The Coma*, in Iain Banks's *The Bridge* and Irvine Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, the protagonists emerge from their prolonged comas, seemingly with cognition intact. In two of the broadcast works discussed earlier, both Tony and Alicia emerge from their respective comas with few lasting effects, and with very little need for a comprehensive rehabilitation programme. In short, all of these texts equate the coma-state with the sleep state, exploring the traumatic impact of coma, but failing to explore fully the multi-layered nature of this trauma, thus, I argue, romanticizing the condition through a misleading, literary aesthetic. In his own development of aesthetic theory, Theodor Adorno analyses authors' use of language to communicate suffering, referring to, 'Fantastic art in romanticism', with their 'presentation of the nonempirical as if it were empirical'.[29] Whilst he goes on to assert that, 'This effect is facilitated because the fictions originate in the empirical',[30] I argue that in these examples of coma fiction, they have no real origin in the empirical as in most cases, survivors of coma emerge with little or no memory of what occurs within the unconscious state as I will now begin to illustrate with reference to examples of non-fiction narratives of coma survival.

In Paul Pritchard's account of his traumatic brain injury incurred through a rock-climbing accident, his repetitions and hallucinatory traumatic experiences only occur after emergence from his induced coma. Writing about the occurrences in the world around him, he writes, 'Obviously I wasn't aware of any of these goings on, I was unconscious or hallucinating wildly for the best part of four days'.[31] The 'unconscious' stage, a blankness in experience, Pritchard attributes to the coma itself; his dream-like hallucinations to his traumatic, cognitive confusion post-coma, experiences that are, for the most part, attributed to the interior coma-state within coma fiction as seen in Garland's novel.

In describing her son Erik's coma and subsequent traumatic brain injury, Ruthann Knechel Johansen paints a similar picture to the first-hand experience of Pritchard. She outlines the various stages of coma, marked by subtle shifts in the Glasgow Coma Scale that measures depth and 'levels of responsiveness in three areas: motor response, eye-

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[29] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), p.19.
[30] Ibid., p. 19.
[31] Paul Pritchard, *The Totem Pole* (London: Constable and Company, 1999), p.52.

opening, and vocal response'.[32] Writing as witness to her son's trauma, her account avoids using the designation 'waking' to describe her son's emergence from coma, a literary decision that is in opposition, for example, to Garland's novel. She talks about the coma 'lightening',[33] only using the words 'sleep' and 'napping' to describe the post-coma condition, a confusing and frightening experience that is akin to that described by Pritchard. Importantly, Johansen, herself, uses inverted commas for these designations, almost to emphasise the metaphorical, even ironic nature of her terminology. Writing figuratively, she describes the coma itself as 'a lost "realm" we could not enter',[34] but it is a lost realm that can neither be recalled by her son, through the irreparable brain damage he has sustained. Indeed, Erik's recovery seems to hinge upon his loved ones' attempts to fill in the void of consciousness and selfhood through the telling of stories: '[…] We tried to present stories that linked his former, healthy self with his present, recovering self and that projected a future of restored well-being'. [35] In a rehabilitative process that seems to echo Brooks's reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (and his comparison of trauma with the narrative process), this revisiting of stories of the past to rebuild a self of the future seems to be a strategy of recovery that is traumatic in itself. In short, Erik confronts the loss of his pre-injury, pre-traumatized identity by listening to stories about this identity in order to work through and master his loss and therefore attempt to move forward with the re-building of a future, post-traumatic identity.

Significantly, Johansen repeatedly uses the language of (re)birth in writing of her son's rehabilitation, describing his emergence from coma as his 'second "birth"',[36] an image of trauma that reflects Jacques Lacan's theoretical position with regard to the trauma and loss of childbirth. Drawing a link between this notion of the second (traumatic) birth of coma and Lacanian theories of 'the Thing' ('the unsymbolisable and unimaginable reality of loss'[37]), the emergence from coma and the process of birth can be seen to be both inherently traumatic. Lionel Bailly, in his appraisal of Lacan's conceptualization of 'the Thing', argues that 'if a primary characteristic of the Thing is to be unsymbolised and unsymbolisable, then perhaps the Thing is what is lost at the point of birth'.[38] However, this Thing can only be 'conceptualised after the event of its

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[32] Ruthann Knechel Johansen, *Listening in the Silence, Seeing in the Dark* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 2002), p.16.
[33] Ibid., p.62.
[34] Ibid, p. 63.
[35] Ibid., p. 131.
[36] Ibid., p. 80.
[37] Lionel Bailly, *Lacan* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), p.136.
[38] Ibid., p.138.

loss, and the lost object was never and could never be symbolised'.[39] Through this Lacanian perspective, the comparison of the post-coma condition to a form of birth is magnified. Due to the fact that often, in cases of serious coma, memories and even whole identities may be lost in the void created by traumatic or acquired brain injury, there nevertheless remains an awareness, a knowledge, that something has been lost, yet it cannot be symbolized because of the ruling condition of the brain injury. Thus a link can be drawn between the void in consciousness prior to birth and the void in consciousness prior to the (re)birth from coma. In both cases, there is an awareness that there was a consciousness prior to birth, constituted by the stories that are told and circulated by loved ones, but this consciousness, due to the fact that it now constitutes a lost void, is now unsymbolizable, though loved ones may still attempt to symbolise it through their narratives of the past.

Such a manifestation of the post-coma condition generates yet another parallel with a traditional strand of trauma theory and Freud's foundational theory of traumatic neurosis: the phenomenon of latency. In another key work, *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud writes of a hypothetical situation in which a man walks away from a train wreck 'apparently unharmed'.[40] It is only after a delayed period of time that he begins to develop 'a series of grave psychical and motor symptoms, which one can ascribe only to his shock or whatever else happened at the time of the accident.'[41] In a similar example to that of Tancred cited in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the traumatic condition only takes hold after a certain delay in time. As Caruth explicates in her development of Freudian thought, 'So trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on'.[42] In the cases of both the trauma survivor and coma survivor, the traumatic event is not confronted or understood as it occurs and only makes its impact belatedly, often in the form of traumatic repetitions and psychic 'hauntings'. Of course, to reiterate what I revealed earlier, for the victim of trauma, the initiating event may be recovered, confronted and 'mastered' through the repetition and working through process; for the survivors of coma, this event may never be recovered, as all memory of it may have been obliterated completely through physical injury. As Catherine Malabou discusses in

[39] Bailly, *Lacan*, p.138.
[40] Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (Letchworth, Herts: Hogarth Press, 1939), p.109.
[41] Ibid., p.109.
[42] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p.4.

her analysis of the 'new wounded' (those affected by physical brain trauma, alongside neurosis), here, in analytical and theoretical terms, 'the break between contemporary psychopathology and classic psychoanalytic practice occurs'.[43] For the coma survivor, the traumatic event may forever remain as a void and beyond the borders of consciousness, an eventuality that is no less traumatic than if the memory and cognition of the trauma had remained intact. This transformation that has occurred, as Malabou posits, 'through destruction',[44] will 'not allow patients to return to a previous state, to seek refuge in a past of any kind'.[45] And whilst Malabou concedes that for both the victim of 'sociopolitical trauma' and of 'organic trauma' there exists the 'same relation between the psyche and catastrophe',[46] the victims of organic trauma undergo 'an *unprecedented metamorphosis… of identity'* [original italics], as if they become 'separated from themselves'.[47] However, for the coma survivor (one victim of 'organic' trauma), despite this unprecedented metamorphosis alongside the gap in consciousness that the coma, itself, has created, he may still repeatedly return to snap-shots of memory from the pre-coma mind of his 'separated' self, memories that, whilst not traumatic per se, become traumatic through their incoherence, temporal rupture and detachment from all frames of reference that may allow him to make sense of them, thus reminding him of the fractures in selfhood and the irretrievable pre-coma identity: the 'shredded' psyche[48] that Malabou makes reference to.

Despite these differences, however, both the trauma survivor and the coma survivor are linked by these doomed repetitions of fractured memories (Freud's traumatic 'hauntings') that are, themselves, symptomatic of a process of survival that has taken place. As Caruth concludes when discussing Freud's constantly shifting approaches to trauma, 'What Freud encounters in the traumatic neurosis is not the reaction to any horrible event but, rather, the peculiar and perplexing experience of survival'.[49] Whether or not the coma victim ever recovers memory of the traumatic, initiating event, or whether this forever remains a void in consciousness, he is still confronted with the problematic condition of all survivors of trauma: survival itself, and the confrontation with Lifton's 'death encounter'. And whilst Malabou calls for 'new forms of treatment that would no longer be based on the investigation of the past, the exploration of

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[43] Catherine Malabou, *The New Wounded* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), p.48.
[44] Ibid., p. 48.
[45] Ibid., p.48.
[46] Ibid., p. 11.
[47] Ibid., p. 15.
[48] Ibid., p. 48.
[49] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p.60.

memory, or the reactivation of traces',[50] the coma survivor will inevitably be drawn back into this traumatic repetition in the desperate hope and need to recover and reunite with their old 'self', but also to appease the desperation of their loved ones who hope for such a recovery to take place.

As I will now illustrate, there are numerous other texts which similarly present coma as a void that again refute the representations of complex coma dreamscapes present in Garland's novel. In James Cracknell's autobiography *Touching Distance* (written with his wife Beverley Turner, to provide an alternative account of her husband's recovery from coma and brain injury), it becomes immediately clear that he has no awareness of the coma. After falling into a deep coma following a serious biking accident, he writes: 'My next memory is of lying down in a strange room. But I can see Bev, and there's Mark. That's all. One weird disassociated image and then it fades. They call these 'islands', sudden breakthroughs of conscious memory, in what is otherwise a total blank'.[51]

In Sandra Lyman's self-published memoir, *Waking Up: Memoirs Of A Coma Recoverer*, she writes, in the foreword, 'I dedicate this book primarily to my God. He gave me […] the memories of coma',[52] yet peculiarly, she relates very few memories of the deep coma she was in. What soon becomes clear is that those 'memories' of coma that she attests to are rather 'locked-in' thought processes that come into consciousness, not within deep-coma, but within the semi-conscious state that she reaches through her gradual emergence and recovery from coma. In narrating her story, she fluctuates between relating factual detail of the occurrences in the hospital room ('The nurses just changed the tube to a smaller one and left me in bed'[53]) and internalized, frustrated utterances, marked by her use of italics ('*There is nothing to do. Maybe I can pick up that box with my foot. I can!*') Because these interiorized thoughts and narration of physical actions are detached from the physical action of the hospital room, there becomes a blurring between what is real and what is not: is this depiction of her picking up the box real, or imagined? This sense of cognitive confusion is heightened through Lyman's description of her locked-in (yet physically active) state as her 'nightmare'[54] from which she wakes up, yet it soon becomes clear that what she claims to remember

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[50] Malabou, *The New Wounded*, p.48.
[51] James Cracknell and Beverley Turner, *Touching Distance* (London: Arrow Books, 2013), p.227.
[52] Sandra Lyman, *Waking Up: Memoirs of a Coma Recoverer* (Baltimore: Publish America, 2007), p.3.
[53] Ibid., p. 60.
[54] Ibid., p. 55.

about her coma are actually the confused memories of what Johansen refers to as the 'lightening' coma. Baldly, rather than writing about her coma, Lyman could inadvertently be writing about her recovery from coma and the transitions she makes through other chronic disorders of consciousness during which brain function becomes increasingly active and purposeful: the Minimally Conscious State (MCS), for example. Lyman therefore focuses not on unconsciousness, but the growing consciousness and awareness of the outside world as she begins to emerge from deep coma, even, at one point, hurling a ball at one of her physical therapists whilst still trapped in a 'locked-in' state. Her use of italics to delineate the world outside of her consciousness from her locked-in self takes on particular significance when analysed in the light of theories of the writing of trauma. Roger Luckhurst, in his critical overview of the traumatic memoir 'boom', notes that often, in such texts, 'Disjunct strands of self, typographically separated on the page, eventually converge in a classic account of the 'breakthrough' of traumatic memories'.[55] In *Waking Up*, the use of 'disjunct', italicized utterances are increased as Lyman comes closer to full consciousness, again highlighting the lack of consciousness in deep coma, and converging in swathes of traumatic breakthroughs that allow her to strive towards full post-coma consciousness.

In a similar vein, the tagline of the book *Journeys In Dream and Imagination,* by the Swedish poet Artur Lundkvist, reads: 'The hallucinatory memoir of a poet in a coma'.[56] However, in the blurb of the frontispiece of the text, the reader is immediately presented with a contradictory disclaimer: 'After two months in a coma in the intensive care unit of the hospital, Lundkvist, at the age of 75, awakened… There followed weeks of semi-consciousness during which the moments of wakefulness and clarity increased'. What follows is not so much a memoir detailing the condition of deep-coma, but, again, poetic depictions of the post-coma condition and of the flood of dreams, 'islands' (to refer again to Cracknell's memoir) and the general cognitive confusion that this brings.

These examples of post-coma recovery that illustrate, either intentionally or unintentionally, the void of the coma unconscious, are not just limited to non-fiction. The opening of Steve Hollyman's *Keeping Britain Tidy* details one character's emergence from coma:

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[55] Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p.123.
[56] Artur Lundkvist, *Journeys in Dream and Imagination*, trans. Ann B. Weismann and Annika Planck (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1991).

> There was the blackness, and it blanketed me, and then there was nothing. Nothing for days, and then the wall clock tick-tocking.
>
> And here it comes, The Surfacing.
>
> This is how it feels to be born. Unwombed and taking the first breath.[57]

In this depiction, Hollyman employs the imagery of the void and (re)birth also present in Johansen's autobiographical account of her son's coma. Hollyman's distinction between the 'blackness' and the 'nothing' is an interesting one, the first suggesting the slippage into coma, the second the coma itself. Both are linked by their incommunicability (but only rendered in language retrospectively after Shaun emerges from coma) and both exacerbate the void in consciousness that Shaun is left with. Significantly, Hollyman was chiefly interested in accurately presenting the post-coma condition, and the traumatic process of rehabilitation, conducting interviews with coma survivors and victims of traumatic brain injury. Speaking in an interview with me in 2013, Hollyman discussed these literary aims, saying, 'I wanted the novel to be realistic, and no one I spoke to had any memory of being 'inside' the coma'.[58] Hollyman's findings in researching his novel clearly reflect the autobiographical experiences of coma survivors cited herein, alongside Antonio Damasio's own observations of coma survivors who 'can recall the descent into the nothingness of coma' but 'nothing at all' of the coma itself.[59] And yet despite the reality of coma survival, depictions of lucid interiorities of coma still seem to be common within fiction.

In the cases of all of the writers I have worked with to-date through the coma and brain injury survivor writing group, such complex and detailed memories of the coma are absent, and only one of the writers, Caroline Waugh, possesses snap-shots of dream-like memory, openly admitting that she is unable to attribute this to deep-coma or to her semi-conscious state experienced on her emergence from coma. Indeed, in her story of post-coma recovery, 'Lager and Black', she describes her physiotherapists feeding her 'frozen cubes of blackcurrant ice [to] stimulate the muscles' of her mouth. She then describes the frequent visits she received from her local vicar because 'staff believed she was going to die'. These two events of the ice cubes and receiving the Last Rites intersect to form her coma 'island', 'receiving Holy Communion, in the form of frozen cubes of wine!'. However, again Waugh's description of this 'memory' is filled with

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[57] Steve Hollyman, *Keeping Britain Tidy* (Conwy: Transmission Print, 2010), p.4.
[58] Steve Hollyman, Interview with Matthew Colbeck (12 November 2013).
[59] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, p. 95.

doubt, using question marks to emphasise her cognitive confusion. In trying to pin-point exactly when this 'island' occurred, she writes, '?Probably about the same time as this?', using question marks as parentheses to illustrate her uncertainty. When writing of the 'island' itself, she describes it as 'a very vivid dream(?)', again emphasizing her vacillating opinion on whether this was a genuine memory from coma, or a dream arising from the 'lightening' stages of her return to consciousness. [60] However, for the rest of the writers, they are left with a void in consciousness, the 'nothing' that Hollyman makes reference to. In the case of another of the writers, Steph Grant, this 'nothing' continues to 'haunt' consciousness throughout his post-coma recovery. In 'Blue Polystyrene Shoes', Grant paints a picture of post-coma 'islands' between which he must confusedly navigate, a void in consciousness sitting between each island and signalled by Grant's repetition of a two-word phrase appearing throughout the story: 'Then nothing'.[61] What Grant experiences constitutes the 'break in the mind's experience of time'[62] that Caruth sees as symptomatic of the trauma survivor who, failing to experience the trauma at the precise time it occurs, continues to relive it through traumatic repetitions. The present, then, is constantly disrupted by the incomprehensible past which, in turn, disrupts the possibility of the traumatized victim to move forward with their life in the future. This traumatic rupture in the perception of time is clearly evidenced in one particular section of Grant's narrative:

> *Who knows when later? A few hours? A few days? A week? Five weeks? It matters not*. The man who has a crying-smiling woman that loves him, and he her, is sat in an armchair, apparently reading an edition of J.S.Mill's *Utilitarianism*. Nothing goes into his head out of the book for the man is unable to understand written language. But he looks the part. [63]

Again, this conveys the intrusion of one of the disjunct, italicized voices that Luckhurst points out as being a common trope of the trauma memoir, this meta-narration reflecting the temporal rupture (typical of trauma, to return to Caruth) that the coma has created. What is also noticeable is the use of third person narration, signifying the detachment between the narrator, Steph, and the Steph that emerged from coma, inextricably altered from his selfhood and identity pre-coma. The comment, 'But he looks the part' chimes

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[60] Caroline Waugh, 'Lager and Black' in *Head-Lines*, ed. Matthew Colbeck, Issue 2 (Blythe Bridge: Waggledance Press, 2014), p. 29.
[61] Steph Grant, 'Blue Polystyrene Shoes' in *Head-Lines*, ed. Matthew Colbeck (Blythe Bridge: Waggledance Press, 2011).
[62] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p.61.
[63] Grant, 'Blue Polystyrene Shoes', pp. 6-7.

with this notion of the ruptured, post-traumatic identity, as though he is playing a role in his attempt to return to his pre-traumatized self, a goal that is rendered impossible due to the reality of his brain injury. Indeed, the role he attempts to play is that of his old 'self' as he tries to belong to this new world he has been 'reborn' into, to borrow Johansen's designation. Despite the futility of this post-coma role-play, Grant persists with it in a pattern of behaviour that reflects Freud's repetition compulsion of traumatic neurosis: attempting to re-read Mill, for example, despite not understanding a single word. In his preface to the story, Grant refers to his attempts to reunify the 'ripped apart remnants' of his identity and this is conveyed through his struggle to attempt to play the 'role' of his pre-coma self. I suggest that these ripped apart remnants exemplify Catherine Malabou's notion of the 'shredded psyche', both in the linguistic violence of the two phrases, but also in their conceptual construction, both referring to the idea of a shattered, fragmented post-brain injury identity.

Similarly to Grant, the former professor of surgery at Yale School of Medicine, Richard Selzer, adopts the third person voice to narrate his own experience of coma after succumbing to Legionnaire's Disease. Writing of his decision to use the third-person pronoun, Selzer explains that the use of '*he* gives a blessed bit of distance between myself and a too fresh ordeal in which the use of *I* would be rather like picking off a scab only to find that the wound had not completely healed'.[64] Interestingly, in discussing his narrative technique, Selzer uses a most apposite metaphor to describe his attempt to distance himself from the trauma of his coma experience. The image of the unhealing wound has enormous resonance with the word trauma itself, which translates as 'wound' from the original Greek and the etymology of which both Freud and Caruth draw attention to. Indeed, the premature picking of a scab is indicative of a traumatic repetition during which one is both repulsed by the action of picking and compelled to continue with the action until the scab is removed and the wound reopened. However, despite Selzer proposing that his use of the third person has allowed him to avoid such a traumatic process, I would argue that he still relives his coma-trauma by the very process of narrating his 'chronicle of an illness told afterwards'.[65] Furthermore, Selzer's candid reasoning for using this pronoun, and then his persistence in writing of his trauma reveals the paradigmatic dichotomy of trauma: the repulsion finely balanced against compulsion. Steph, in discussing publically the

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[64] Richard Selzer, *Raising the Dead* (Beckenham: Whittle Direct Books, 1993), p. 26.
[65] Ibid., p. 26.

process of writing about his coma-trauma and decision to use third person narration still speaks of the emotional difficulty of facing the coma-trauma of his past, an experience that, by his own admission, he had never been able to voice fully prior to the writing of 'Blue Polystyrene Shoes' due to its upsetting nature, yet an experience that he constantly voiced and relived in his mind. We can again return to Brooks's re-reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and his interpretation of the process of narrative being indicative of traumatic repetition. As Luckhurst posits, drawing an overt link between the processes of trauma and of narrative, 'Trauma does not halt narrative but might be regarded as the motor that drives its manifold forms'.[66] However, despite both adopting the third person pronoun to write of traumatic autobiographical experiences, Selzer, unlike Steph, purports to reveal the secrets of the coma itself:

> Even to death and beyond, he will be the teller of tales, collecting impressions, defying forgetfulness, and meeting gods all along the road, the way you do when reading Homer or Virgil. He can do all that? In coma? Oh, yes he can. Dream, imagination – these are the chariots that the comatose body rides.[67]

This declaratory preface to his coma 'memoir' contradicts many of the autobiographical coma-texts discussed herein and in terms of linguistic styling has more in common with some of the coma fiction I have cited to-date, not least Garland's *The Coma* through Selzer's comparison of coma to 'dream'. Unlike Garland's protagonist, though, Selzer's comatose self is not daunted by the loss of story and of selfhood as he confronts and apparently overcomes the 'forgetfulness' of post-coma. Furthermore, Selzer's final line in this passage seems to suggest, through the use of the indefinite article, that every 'comatose body' is able to narrate their own experience of coma in a rather presumptuous, sweeping and, as I have illustrated, untrue generalization. The veracity of this assumption, however, is further called into question when, embarking upon the narration of his coma-trauma, Selzer hardly evokes the dreamscapes and imaginative flights of fancy that he promises in his preface. Instead, exploiting the use of third person narration, he focuses on the external perspective of his degenerating body, narrating from an objective external position and looking down upon himself through the imagined eyes of the medical staff. It seems as though the reader will finally get a glimpse of the 'chariots' of coma Selzer refers to when he writes, 'He has been in coma

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[66] Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p.84.
[67] Selzer, *Raising the Dead*, p.28.

for almost three weeks. What is it like?'.[68] However, what follows, once the flurries of figurative language have been stripped away, are simply descriptions of straightforward medical processes and details that struggle to inhabit the two realms of 'dream, imagination'. He writes that, 'It is like being encased in a layer of wax that separates him from the rest of mankind',[69] a simile that merely reinforces the inert physical condition of all coma victims. He goes on to describe the 'immense weight' that 'holds down his thin bluish eyes',[70] again a figurative utterance that brings textual colour to an otherwise mundane fact of coma that is retrospectively narrativized – the fact that he cannot force his eyes open. Developing this image, he writes, 'He has no need for eyes. Here, there is nothing for him to do but wait and listen to the silences rubbing against each other'.[71] The use of the active verbs in this statement implies an awareness of the coma-state, yet the reference to 'nothingness' and 'silence' (an inter-connected, back-to-back friction of silence, with no sounds of the world outside of coma filtering in) seems to speak only of the void of coma and lack of brain function addressed by the authors examined earlier. Despite the slippery language, it appears that Selzer, too, struggles to narrate comprehensively the interiority of his coma-trauma. In this narration of 'an illness told afterwards', then, the adverb 'afterwards' is most pertinent. Between the traumatic event of coma and the 'afterwardsness' of narrating this event, Selzer is still unable to write, in detail, of the experience within the coma itself, and has simply been developing the language with which he can figuratively and retrospectively describe the bald details of the inertia and void of coma.

This dilemma of coma-narration is again indicative of the dilemma of narrating trauma: the inability to render fully, in language, an experience that was not fully comprehended as it occurred, and we can look to the philosopher Maurice Blanchot to explicate this dilemma further. In one of his key works, *The Writing of Disaster*, Blanchot repeatedly refutes the idea that the disaster or traumatic catastrophe can be fully and comprehensively narrated or represented. Writing of the inherently incomplete and flawed nature of historical testimony, he discusses how such testimony is not false as such, nor is it of no importance to us. However, it simply cannot fully embody the traumatic reality of the disaster. The 'afterwardsness' of Selzer's testimony, I argue, is indicative of Blanchot's theoretical position: the coma-trauma, the void in

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[68] Selzer, *Raising the Dead*, p.30.
[69] Ibid., p.30.
[70] Ibid., p.30.
[71] Ibid., p.30.

consciousness, perhaps perfectly embodying Blanchot's notion of 'the disaster, unexperienced'. This is, Blanchot goes onto explain, 'what escapes the very possibility of experience – it is the limit of writing'.[72] At this limit and at this point of afterwardsness, despite all assurances to the contrary, Selzer still cannot lucidly narrate the disaster of the coma itself, unconsciously aligning himself with all of the autobiographical narrators of coma explored earlier.

1.3: How Do You Solve a Problem Like Aesthetics?

This overview of coma memoir (and empirically-researched coma fiction) exposes the gap between the first-hand, traumatic experience of coma and the representations of coma within much of the fiction that I will be discussing throughout this thesis. Returning to Adorno's notion of romanticism presenting the 'nonempirical as if it were empirical', I argue that through this aesthetic transformation, coma fiction (and occasionally non-fiction) is instrumental in misinforming a collective audience of what the coma condition truly entails, thus failing to represent fully its traumatic weight. Through the conflation of coma and sleep/dream-states, audiences, in turn, equate these two differing states of consciousness with each other, a connection promoted through examples of inaccurate, overly-aestheticized fiction. On a rudimentary level, much coma fiction fails to address the grades or levels of coma, adopting a one-size-fits-all approach and therefore failing to recognise the subtle shifts in consciousness that take place. Plum and Posner's pioneering work *The Diagnosis of Stupor and Coma*, from the outset, makes it abundantly clear that, 'Between the extreme states of consciousness and coma stand a variety of altered states of consciousness',[73] openly admitting that 'the limits of consciousness are hard to define satisfactorily and quantitatively' and going on to assert that 'we can only infer the self-awareness of others by their appearance and by their acts'.[74] The slippages between states of consciousness discussed in *The Diagnosis* are also referred to by Johansen, commenting that, 'Coma was not simply a clearly demarcated state of unconsciousness. In many patients coma does not end suddenly, as

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[72] Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p.7.
[73] Fred Plum and Jerome B. Posner, *The Diagnosis of Stupor and Coma*, p.3.
[74] Ibid., p.2.

if turning on a light switch'.[75] This is further supported by Plum and Posner when they assert how 'sleep-like coma almost never lasts more than 2 to 4 weeks', after which the patient enters a 'chronically unresponsive state'.[76] This is a position reinforced by Dr. David Bates who notes, in outlining an aetiology of coma, that, 'The longer a patient remains in a coma the poorer his or her chance of recovery'.[77] He points out that, 'By the third day [of coma] the chance of making a moderate or good recovery is reduced to only 7%, and by the 14th day is as low as 2%', and even more interestingly, 'By the end of the first week almost half of those patients who have not recovered consciousness are in a vegetative state'.[78] Crucially, in their use of the description 'sleep-like', Plum and Posner refer to the physical similarity of the coma-patient and the sleeping subject, and are at pains to distinguish the state of consciousness of sleep from that of coma going on to explain how the coma-patient, unlike the sleeping subject, remains 'behaviourally unresponsive to all external stimuli'.[79] In short, as Antonio Damasio is quick to point out, coma 'may look like sleep, it may sound like sleep, but it is not sleep'.[80] However, these two states of consciousness, as discussed, are conflated frequently in both works of fiction and non-fiction.

The coma-as-sleep metaphor, then, alongside the dramatic, fantastical escapades that the coma-protagonist embarks upon whilst trapped within this chronic disorder of consciousness links back to LaCapra's discussion of 'fetishized and totalizing narratives'. LaCapra's further explication of trauma and the development of his warning against such a trauma fetish is particularly pertinent to this discussion of the writing of coma. He proposes, in a similar vein to Freud, Caruth and also Blanchot (in his discussion of the unexperienced disaster), that the traumatized subject may not be able to master fully the traumatic event, just as the coma-survivor cannot fully master the trauma (and post-trauma) of coma. LaCapra writes that, 'Trauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence',[81] further illustrating Caruth's idea of the temporal disruption in the mind of the trauma survivor. This is a disruption that, as discussed, is likewise indicative of the coma-survivor who, post-coma, experiences the disarticulation of selfhood that LaCapra alludes to and seen,

[75] Johansen, *Listening in the Silence*, p.61.
[76] Plum and Posner, *Diagnosis of Stupor and Coma*, p.3.
[77] David Bates, 'The Prognosis of Medical Coma', *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry*, 71 (Suppl 1: 'Neurology In Practice') (2001), 1-29 (p. 21).
[78] David Bates, 'The Prognosis of Medical Coma', p. 21.
[79] Plum and Posner, *The Diagnosis of Stupor and Coma*, p.3.
[80] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, p. 236.
[81] LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p.41.

for example, in Grant's 'Blue Polystyrene Shoes'. Because of these interconnected theoretical positions, it is also useful to examine LaCapra's insistence upon a certain delicacy and care that the writer of trauma must adopt if they are to produce ethical representations of trauma, proposing a form of writing that he refers to as 'empathic unsettlement'. This, LaCapra explains, would be a form of writing that would avoid an appropriation of 'the traumatic experience of […] victims' but instead use a series of 'stylistic effects' that should render the feeling and unsettling nature of trauma without revelling in the act of writing, or fetishizing the writing itself. Such an approach should also, LaCapra asserts, avoid 'formulas or rules of methods'[82] which have the effect of normalising or homogenizing trauma and traumatic writing. In this way, LaCapra offers an ethical approach to the writing of trauma which would avoid the attempt to paint realistic and 'total' landscapes of trauma, but would instead empathically unsettle the reader through stylistic devices, such as temporal and narrative ruptures, or experimentations with form and *mise-en-page*.

I will argue that whilst much of the writing of coma fails to address the medical truth of coma, often descending into flights of dream-like fancy and glossing over the impact of brain injury, LaCapra's notion of empathic unsettlement is present throughout the majority of texts that constitute the canon of coma literature. In their pursuit of empathic unsettlement through stylistic choices, writers of coma fiction, in particular, attempt to communicate at least some of the traumatic experience. In her analysis of such stylistic devices, Anne Whitehead suggests that 'the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection'.[83] The representation of temporal collapse relates to one of the fundamental principles of the traumatic event not being experienced as it occurs, itself rupturing time and selfhood and creating the 'holes of existence' LaCapra discusses and the temporal disruption that Caruth refers to. It is a dilemma of temporal cognition that, as discussed, also relates to the trauma of coma, as evidenced by the autobiographical accounts of post-coma selfhood and the haunting islands of memory that pervade the mind of the coma-survivor. It is therefore no surprise that we see this trope of temporal disruption throughout many examples of coma fiction. As I will detail, in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, the protagonist, Roy, is constantly caught within collapsing narratives, both

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[82] LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 41.
[83] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p.3.

from his disturbed and distorted past marked by violence and childhood sexual abuse, and from his present experience within his coma. The typography and *mise-en-page* visually represent his temporal disjunction as he refuses to emerge from his coma and face the outside world, the typographically miniaturized repetition of 'up' placed above each other on the page both physically representing the transition from an unconscious to a conscious state, but also his reluctance to make this transition (a reluctance, perhaps, echoing Carl's own reticence in *The Coma*). Similarly, the capitalized commands 'DEEPER' are positioned vertically beneath each other on the page, again representing both dynamic and emotive content that conveys Roy's desperation to sustain his coma. Frequently, the past intrudes upon his present, the traumatic memories of childhood assimilated into a nightmarish quest through the South African landscape, the atrocities caused within this apartheid-era 'coma-scape' imbued with metaphorical implications of sexual abuse and the violent acts that Roy, himself, has performed in the world outside of coma. These are acts that he cannot face up to and so he repeats them constantly, in the form of his coma dreams, in a process that embodies the traumatic compulsion to repeat, and the temporal collapse inherent within this schema.

Similarly, in Iain Banks's *The Bridge*, time and space collapse. The central, unnamed coma-protagonist repeatedly creates multiple alter-egos who all attempt to emerge from the disorder of consciousness. The chief alter-ego, John Orr, is constantly trapped within the repetitive cycles of the oppressive world of the Bridge, itself conceived as a circular structure, from which there is no escape. It is a place where there is no beginning and no end, in the middle of a seemingly endless expanse of water and where the only train-line seems to loop in on itself, back into the centre of the Bridge. In this world, the vague, disjunct memories and conceptions of the narrator's pre-coma self and loved ones seem to be manifested in distorted apparitions and hauntings that represent the traumatic car-crash that caused the coma, but which lack the necessary connections to the world outside of coma that are required to trigger a 'rising'.

In Garland's novel, Carl constantly repeats his actions, trapped, again, in a circular experience, confronting memories of the past that lack all referential meaning and memorial detail. Form, crucial in LaCapra's appraisal of ethical trauma writing, plays a key role, as in Welsh's novel. Silhouetted woodcut prints pervade the text, representing the outline of Carl's memories, but lacking the detailed frames of reference and temporal connections essential in the rebuilding of selfhood, as I will explore in the next chapter. Carl, within his coma, continually returns to the same places, the same vague

people that inhabit the 'overworld' outside of coma, in order to make the necessary connections that will allow an 'awakening'. These vague journeys and the encounters that he has lack all referentiality, emphasized by Garland's lack of pagination, once more representing the rupture in temporality and Carl's disjunction of selfhood that generates a sense of dizzying confusion that extends into the consciousness of the reader.

These levels of empathic unsettlement, in the form of temporal disruption, interruption and disturbance 'might serve as an outline of a general trauma aesthetic',[84] as suggested by Luckhurst in his discussion of Robert Eaglestone's formulation of the features of the genre of Holocaust testimony. One of Eaglestone's key components of such an aesthetic, Luckhurst goes on to highlight, is 'a resistance to closure that is demonstrated in compulsive telling and retelling'.[85] This is noticeable within the three novels discussed here with the representation of multiple voices, alongside the compulsion to repeat past, fractured memories, embodying the disjunction of traumatic experience. However, I suggest that because the protagonists emerge from coma in all three novels, seemingly with cognition intact, the writers undermine their own employment of empathic unsettlement in a rush for closure that seems to be at odds with the agenda of an ethical trauma aesthetic. In short, the authors have created narratives that are more concerned with 'harmonizing events', to return to LaCapra's warning against 'totalizing narratives' and so in the end, empathic unsettlement is neutralized. Indeed, in Welsh's novel, it seems that Roy's cognitively-lucid 'light switch' moment of emergence from coma is deployed by Welsh in order for his heroine to enact her emasculating revenge upon her violent sexual abuser of the past. This is the sort of 'self-serving scenario' that LaCapra also cautions against with the coma-motif being employed simply as a means to explore other, hierarchically-privileged themes and narrative threads of the novel, most notably rape, sexual abuse and the well-trodden road of revenge.

Whilst there are certainly problematic issues with the representations of coma in much of the fiction I have discussed, these are by no means the most extreme cases. In a 2006 study of the portrayal of coma in thirty contemporary motion pictures, the two neuroscientists Eelco and Cohen Wijdicks concluded that 'the depiction of comatose states in motion pictures is misrepresented' [sic] and that 'miraculous awakening from

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[84] Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, pp.88-89.
[85] Ibid., p. 88.

prolonged coma with no long-lasting effects was a typical feature'.[86] One of their chief concerns was related to the '"sleeping beauty" phenomenon',[87] in which the coma patients depicted in prolonged coma 'remained well groomed with normal, muscular, tanned appearance… as if they were sleeping'.[88] This habit of 'trivialising the depiction of prolonged coma to a sleep-like state [with] sudden awakening from coma'[89] (the 'light-switch' moment that Johansen refers to) is highly problematic, they suggest, with such misrepresentations having a palpable impact upon how audiences understand coma, their survey discovering that 'viewers were unable to identify important inaccuracies in one-third of the selected scenes'.[90] Significantly, the audience cohort that they used for their study was made up of medical professionals, and still the medical inaccuracies were often misunderstood as medical fact. This study exemplifies the problem of the fetishization of both coma and trauma, not least embodied by the 'Sleeping Beauty' phenomenon. The very image of Sleeping Beauty romanticises coma, an intent that is overtly present in the 1995 romantic comedy *While You Were Sleeping*[91] in which, in a gender-reversal of the Sleeping Beauty tale, a young woman falls in love with a comatose stranger whom she has rescued from an oncoming train. This also reflects Almodóvar's *Talk To Her* in the fetishization of coma, and the elevation of the coma patient to a romanticized, even sexualized, heroine, the lack of the portrayal of 'muscle atrophy, decubital ulcers, bladder and bowel incontinence'[92] preserving Alicia's status as a glamorized, eroticized subject.

   This Sleeping Beauty phenomenon is rife within coma literature, even explicitly referred to in Banks's *The Bridge*, the coma victim described as a 'Sleeping Byooty' by one of his own alter-egos. In Liz Jensen's *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax*, the young, eponymous coma-hero, Louis, is frequently fetishized and romanticized: 'I looked at his soft cheeks, the waxy skin, the parted mouth, the long dark lashes. I stroked his hair. It was sleek and thick, and already seemed longer than when he first arrived'.[93] Here Louis is described in almost sublime terms, his corporeal self, whilst in coma, elevated to a form of artistic and even erotic perfection. Elsewhere Jensen describes his

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[86] Eelco and Cohen Wijdicks, 'The Portrayal of Coma in Contemporary Motion Pictures', *Neurology*, Vol.66 (2006), 1300-1303 (p.1301).
[87] Ibid., p. 1301.
[88] Ibid., p. 1301.
[89] Ibid., p. 1302.
[90] Ibid., p. 1303
[91] *While You Were Sleeping*, dir. Jon Turtletaub (Buena Vista Pictures, USA, 1995).
[92] Eelco and Cohen Wijdicks, *The Portrayal of Coma in Contemporary Motion Pictures*, p.1303.
[93] Liz Jensen, *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), p.103.

'luminous skin', comparing him to church carvings 'with their tiny, perfect hands and feet, their dreamily closed eyes'.[94] This glorification and aesthetic amelioration of the coma body, I suggest, further undermines the gravity of the condition, thus attenuating the traumatic content and fetishizing the coma condition. This is problematized further as the novel also explores Louis's interior state of coma, a narrative thread that, whilst depicting traumatic repetitions within Louis's unconscious as he comes to terms with how he came to be in coma, ultimately undercuts the seriousness of the coma condition, further, by suggesting that all Louis has to do to emerge from coma is to decide that this is actually what he wants.

This coma fetish and the use of the Sleeping Beauty are similarly apparent in Marc Levy's *If Only It Were True*. This novel tells the story of Lauren, a young doctor who 'dies' in a car crash, only to be brought back to life moments later. Trapped in coma, an astral projection of her 'self' inhabits her apartment, now being sub-let by a new tenant, Arthur. He is the only one who sees her, and he soon falls in love with her, becoming increasingly desperate to save her before her life support machine is switched off. Sitting firmly within the mainstream genre of romantic fiction, Levy's novel recycles the stories of Snow White and Sleeping Beauty to create a modern fairy-tale, complete with 'sleeping' Princess and dashing Prince Charming. Rather than the cursed apple or spindle, though, it is a car crash that precipitates the heroine's descent into the deep 'sleep'.

In the description of the crash itself, Levy uses the figure of the coma patient that further exemplifies this glorification of the traumatized body:

> Lauren lay still, peaceful, at rest. Her features were calm, her breathing slow and even. There might even have been a small smile on her slightly parted lips. Her eyes were closed – she seemed to be sleeping. Her long hair framed her face, her right hand lay across her midriff.[95]

This passage exudes a sense of calm that is at odds with the violence of the traumatizing incident: the car crash that sees Lauren flung through a shop window. The lingering upon the physical, beautified aspects of Lauren's body is almost sexualized, romanticizing the coma in much the same way as the other novels discussed. Again, the coma is portrayed as a serene state of deep sleep with the sibilant reference to the 'small smile' even implying that this is a perfect state of being in the aftermath of the violence

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[94] Jensen, *Louis Drax*, p.27.
[95] Marc Levy, *If Only It Were True* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), p.11.

of the crash, the precision with which her body is described chiming with Jensen's depiction of the angelic, statuesque hero of her own novel. Levy's romanticization is further evidenced in his depiction of the astral projection of Lauren from the coma-state, creating a fantasy out of a severe medical condition.

However, this fetishized coma aesthetic becomes more complex as Levy gradually integrates factual medical detail seen, most prominently, at the point at which Arthur and the astrally-projected Lauren pay a visit to the corporeal Lauren who still lies in her hospital bed: 'The motionless woman was paler than her double, and thinner. Her hands had begun to turn inward in the seizing up that occurs in long-term coma patients, and she looked frail, but the resemblance was striking'.[96] Here, the romantic notion of the Sleeping Beauty intersects with the degradation of the body occurring within actual cases of long-term coma victims. Later, images of the 'IV drip to irrigate her' and the 'catheter to carry away her waste'[97] are once more at odds with this modern-day fairy-tale narrative and serve to deconstruct the earlier, sexualized depiction of Lauren post-accident. Levy portrays the Sleeping Beauty figure as a physically flawed heroine, who nevertheless seizes hold of (and maintains, despite these flaws) the romantic attention and commitment of the Prince Charming. Crucially, though, it is the 'perfect', unflawed Lauren that Arthur falls in love with, and even though he physically rescues the 'flawed', corporeal Lauren by kidnapping her from the hospital ward, what he strives towards is a recovery of the pre-accident Lauren that haunts his apartment. This being said, despite the overly-romanticized aesthetic of the novel, the narrative of Arthur's determination to save the 'unflawed' Lauren by protecting the 'flawed' Lauren becomes a hypostasized portrayal of the relationship between the coma victim and her loved ones. In other words, Levy attempts to portray the faith in the recovery of the coma victim and the hopes for a return to her pre-coma self that are held by those people in the world outside of her coma.

In Lauren, also, there is the manifestation of the haunting nature of trauma, the protagonist literally becoming the ghost of her trauma constituted by a violent accident of which she has no memory. We again see the connection between the 'haunting' of traumatic memory and the 'haunting' of the post-coma, post-traumatic memories of the coma survivor (the spectral nature of Steph Grant and James Cracknell's 'islands' of cognitive confusion, for example). Within the pages of Levy's novel, the latency period

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[96] Levy, *If Only It Were True*, p.44.
[97] Ibid., p.45.

of Freud's hypothetical train wreck survivor is re-imagined through the depiction of Lauren's car-wreck trauma that is not comprehended as it occurs (seen in the stasis of her post-accident self). Instead it is repeated and confronted as she continues to exist (through her astrally-projected self) after leaving the scene of the accident. Lauren is both haunted by this traumatic event, but also actively *haunts*, forcing Arthur to become the witness to her trauma in all of its forms: the trauma of the accident, the trauma of her coma and the potential future trauma of her death as the decision to switch off her life support machine draws ever closer. The figure of Lauren becomes an embodiment of the multi-faceted traumatic experience of coma, both in the trauma of her lost past, and in her struggle to work through this and to survive. To once more refer to Luckhurst's analysis of trauma, Lauren is 'the traumatic memory [that] persists in a half-life, rather like a ghost, a haunting absent presence of another time in our time'.[98] The coma is this half-life that sustains and preserves Lauren's existence but which prevents her from fully living. She is trapped in spiritual form within her old apartment and so is both absent and present, a ghost of the trauma that is etched upon and within her physical body. This paradox of trauma is heightened in the novel's denouement when Lauren, emerging from coma, has no memory of who Arthur is or what her relationship is to this strange man who holds vigil, each day, at her bedside: 'She opened her eyes and placed her hand on his. She looked at him with wondering eyes as she asked, "Who are you? Why are you here every day?"'.[99] The 'playing out' (or 'working through') of Lauren's astral projection seems to be an externalization of her struggle for survival within coma. However, at the end of the novel, Levy by no means paints a wholly romanticized depiction of coma survival. Ultimately, Lauren has only survived the first stage of her traumatic ordeal: the emergence from coma. The next stage of her traumatic experience and survival awaits, namely her rediscovery and rebuilding of selfhood, albeit a trauma that is somewhat romantically buffered by Arthur's faithful, optimistic role of Prince Charming. In the light of this critical interrogation, the tagline of the novel, 'Fall in love again' does not relate to the storyline contained within the pages of the novel but pertains to the future lives of Arthur and Lauren that exist in the world beyond the ending of the story. The romantic repetition implied in this tagline is indicative of the traumatic ordeal (we can only imagine that this process of falling in love 'again' for the protagonists will not be straightforward, as

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[98] Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p.81.
[99] Levy, *If Only It Were True*, p.216.

testified to by Lauren's lack of recognition of Arthur) and so the very act of falling in love also becomes traumatic set against this backdrop of coma and survival. This novel, sitting within a mainstream genre (testified to by its adaptation into the Hollywood blockbuster, Reese Witherspoon vehicle *Just Like Heaven*[100]) is by no means a straightforward example of romantic fiction, or one of fetishized coma narratives, despite its romantic propensities. Moreover, the unease that this supposed example of romantic coma fiction engenders can be seen within the film adaptation that departs from Levy's treatment of the most common medical consequences of coma – the void of the post-coma consciousness. Within the closing stages of the film, rather than leaving David (Arthur, in the novel) and Elizabeth (Lauren) at the stage of reacquaintance (or, more accurately, acquaintance, as Elizabeth has *no* memory of ever meeting David, astrally or otherwise), instead, through the briefest moment of physical contact, Elizabeth's memories of the coma come flooding back, and the couple embrace. It is the archetypal Hollywood and fairy-tale ending, metaphorically 'awakening' the sleeping beauty with a kiss.

1.4: From the Real to the Unreal and Back Again

In navigating towards a 'correct' or ethical approach to the writing of trauma, Michael Rothberg has coined the phrase 'traumatic realism', arguing that writers who adopt this approach 'challenge the narrative form of realism as well as its conventional indexical function'[101] in order to, as Whitehead proposes, 'make us believe the unbelievable'.[102] Traumatic realism 'does not produce an imaginary resolution'[103] but 'seeks to bring forth "traces of trauma," to preserve and even expose the abyss between everyday reality and real extremity'.[104] This exposure of 'the abyss' and the avoidance of neatly-packaged resolutions is indicative of LaCapra's warning against 'self-serving narratives', discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The works of fiction of which I have given a brief overview certainly attempt to expose this 'abyss' as, by their very nature, they depict the fracturing of the coma-self through the traumatic encounter. They

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[100] *Just Like Heaven*, dir. Mark Waters (DreamWorks, USA, 2005).
[101] Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.104.
[102] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p.84.
[103] Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism*, p.104.
[104] Ibid., p.139.

often do this by pushing 'the realist project to its limits',[105] seeking to 'present the real by representing the fictionality of the realist contract'[106] through the exploration of the aporia of traumatic experience, and through a range of narrative strategies that are highlighted by Laurie Vickroy in her discussion of trauma and survival in fiction. She writes of the 'textual gaps (both in the page layout and content), repetition, breaks in linear time, shifting viewpoints, and a focus on visual images and affective states',[107] all part of the repertoire of narrative techniques at the disposal of the writer of trauma fiction. It is these sorts of techniques that writers of trauma fiction employ to preserve the 'hole' in traumatic experience, to bring it into light, rather than, in Rothberg's words, to 'convert a hole in the real into a real whole'.[108] In other words, through using such techniques, authors attempt to avoid the creation of neatly-packaged, 'totalizing and 'self-serving' narratives that LaCapra warns against, and which Blanchot asserts are impossible to produce. However, this stylistic approach becomes somewhat problematic when looking at the writing of coma in which an ultimate abyss of traumatic experience, the coma itself, is represented through imaginative approximations of what might actually occur within that abyss. Moreover, the fact that much of coma writing does not confront the 'abyss' in consciousness post-coma (the tertiary trauma of brain injury and permanent loss of memory and, on a more acute level, of identity itself) means that nuanced representations of the trauma of coma are often absent.

Luckhurst also highlights a problem that is inherent within the use of literary tools through which the writer can attempt to communicate trauma: 'Paradoxically, the aesthetic means to convey the singularity of a traumatic aporia has now become highly conventionalized, the narratives and tropes of traumatic fiction easily identified'.[109] The same literary techniques and tics have become adopted across a whole range of trauma texts, no matter what the nature of the trauma is and so in the drive to avoid conventionalizing, fetishizing and, ultimately, desensitizing trauma through revealing 'the scars that mark the relationship of discourse to the real',[110] often authors may trip directly into the pitfalls that they have been trying so carefully to side-step. In calling for a mode of empathic unsettlement that would always evade a formulaic approach of narrative style and promote an ethical traumatic aesthetic, LaCapra failed to predict the

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[105] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p.84.
[106] Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism*, p.105.
[107] Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2002), p.21.
[108] Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism*, p.139.
[109] Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p.89.
[110] Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism*, p.106.

inevitable repercussion: the production and repetition of an infinitely recognisable 'repertoire of elements', to cite Roy Stafford's theory of the development of common generic tropes within broadcast media.[111] This consequence is frequently seen within coma literature, and a paradox that I will be exploring throughout this thesis. A solution to this paradox, Luckhurst proposes, is simple and twofold: to consider not just 'narrative rupture as the only proper mark of a trauma aesthetic'[112] and to regard trauma fiction not as 'a narrow canon of works',[113] but to recognise its 'explosion' across low, middle and highbrow fiction. This rather catholic approach to the analysis of trauma writing allows us to conduct an unprejudiced appraisal of all literature of trauma, recognizing and evaluating both progressive and regressive techniques of the trauma aesthetic across a wide range of texts.

Over the course of the next five chapters, I will take a similar stance, examining common representations and tropes across a wide selection of coma texts, both exploring how trauma and coma are represented, but also evaluating this against the 'wiggle-your-big-toe'[114] view of post-coma recovery present within contemporary, popular culture. Overall, I will explore how these coma narratives, whilst raising pertinent and complex issues around the representation of coma and trauma as a whole, most often use the coma itself as a narrative springboard for the exploration of wider socio-political or moral and philosophical issues. In short, I will look at how the lack of in-depth empirical knowledge of what occurs within deep coma gives authors *carte blanche* to use this void of consciousness to write about whatever they wish in the light of their wider creative agenda.

In chapter two, further exploring Freud's theory of traumatic departures (alongside Caruth's development of this theory), I will examine how Garland and Welsh, in their novels *The Coma* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares,* depict the interior landscape of coma as a form of exile. Developing my discussion, I will draw on Lacanian theory, positing a theoretical approach that sees the fictional representation of coma as an ultimate form of

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[111] See: Gill Branston and Roy Stafford, *The Media Student's Book,* Fifth Edition (Oxford: Routledge, 2010) for further discussion of this.

[112] Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p.89.

[113] Ibid., p.90.

[114] *Kill Bill Volume 1*, dir. Quentin Tarantino (Miramax, USA, 2003). In this popular film within the canon of coma fiction (and a text explored within the Wijdicks' study), Uma Thurman's The Bride emerges from a four-year coma, the sudden and immediate 'awakening' triggered by a mosquito-bite. She emerges with full-cognition, and immediately sets upon her path of revenge (in the Wijdicks study, it was found that in 7 out of the 30 films studied, the coma victim embarked upon, 'Revenge after awakening from head injury' – p.1301). The only sustained effect of her coma is the lack of use of her legs – though this is only temporary, as she wills her 'limbs out of entropy' by repeating the order, 'Wiggle your big toe'.

a traumatic, exilic state: an exile from the self and from society with the coma protagonist in each novel trapped within the alien landscape of their coma.

In chapters three and four, I will examine how writers of both coma fiction and non-fiction assimilate traditional and classical stories of katabasis (or hellish descent), resurrection and rebirth in order to depict the plight of the coma victim. Drawing parallels between such coma texts as Stephen King's *The Dead Zone*, Liz Jensen's *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* and Iain Banks's *The Bridge*, I will trace how these novels equate the coma-state to a descent into Hell/Hades, the underworld of the unconscious, whilst mapping these representations against tales of katabasis within Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman tradition. I draw links between the development of archetypal psychology by Carl Jung and, later, James Hillman, and narratological theories of the role of mythology in both literature and the development of personhood and the storied self, as posited by Northrop Frye and Paul Ricoeur. In doing this, I argue that whilst these intricate, modern-day versions of messianic transfiguration and classical quests through hellish landscapes detract from the genuine traumatic experience of the coma abyss, these narratives, in themselves, reveal a need to confront, explain and 'contain' the ultimate fear: the void in consciousness. This void may act as an indicator, for many people, of what occurs after death. I suggest that by containing and 'mastering' the coma abyss, authors are attempting to contain and master the fear of death.

In chapter five, I turn to Tom McCarthy's post-coma novel *Remainder*, exploring his representation of the theories of the simulacrum posited by Jean Baudrillard. However, I superimpose this theoretical framework over real-life experiences of post-coma recovery, looking at the coma survivor's identification with the new 'self' post-brain injury, and the alienation from the old self. I also examine this through Jacques Derrida's concept of 'the trace', an absent-presence of the survivor's former self that can never be reassimilated because of the permanence of brain trauma. As part of this analysis of the simulacrum within coma literature, I will look at the real-life case of Mark Hogancamp, as seen in the documentary-film *Marwencol* who, post-coma and brain injury, relived and attempted to work through his traumatic experience by creating simulations of his life-story using action figures and scale-models. I will also explore how McCarthy's commitment to researching the post-traumatic recovery of coma contributes to his accurate portrayal of coma and brain injury rehabilitation, but also how he raises important questions about the post-coma identity through the assimilation of post-modernist and post-structuralist theory.

In the final chapter, I will look at the use of coma as 'metaphor', evaluating how the image of the coma has been appropriated to explore wider socio-political issues, often undermining the traumatic nature of coma itself. Exploring Susan Sontag's seminal works *Illness As Metaphor* and *AIDS And Its Metaphors*, I argue that both coma and brain injury are the latest medical conditions to be appropriated by authors for metaphorical purposes, allowing them free rein to explore wider agendas. I look at how political and media commentators also use these medical terms metaphorically to describe socio-political and cultural issues of the day. Looking at such novels as Robin Cook's *Coma* and Douglas Coupland's *Girlfriend in a Coma*, I will look at how, throughout the last sixty years, the image of coma has been used to tap into contemporary fears or issues – in the case of the former, black-market organ donations and the rise of medical technology and in the case of the latter, the vacuity of an increasingly capitalist and postmodern society. I conclude by suggesting that misrepresentations of coma, chiefly the negation or dilution of the possibility of brain injury post-coma, serve to create a collective mythology that influences an audience's understanding of what the medical conditions of both coma and brain injury entail. I argue that such misinformed representations serve to stigmatize the brain injury survivor, in particular, through the failure to represent brain injury successfully and accurately as a legitimate and widespread consequence of coma survival.

But before I move deeper into the realm of coma literature, I would like to refer to one last example of coma representation, and one that illustrates both how widely the image of the coma has inveigled its way into contemporary and popular culture but which also highlights the ethical problems of overly romanticized and aestheticized representations of coma and trauma.

In 2011, the video game developer, Ubisoft, released its sixth instalment of the high-octane driving simulation series, *Driver*. *Driver: San Francisco* kept the first-person, sandbox format of its predecessors, but what marked its key departure was the narrative twist. Within the first segment of the game, its central protagonist, Tanner, a cop for the SFPD, is involved in a violent car-crash whilst in pursuit of his criminal nemesis. From this point on, the rest of the gameplay unfolds within the coma unconscious of Tanner, the narrative plotting allowing a new gameplay dynamic: the 'shift'. This 'shifting' allows the player to astral project across the city and 'possess' the driver of any car he chooses. In terms of narrative, much like Sam Tyler in the BBC series *Life On Mars* discussed earlier, Tanner must solve crimes within his coma, in order to come closer to

comprehending his true state of consciousness and emerge from coma.

The trope of the astral projection, as previously discussed, is similarly utilized in Levy's *If Only It Were True*, but is also present within the interior coma narratives of Garland's *The Coma* and Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, in which the respective protagonists seem to develop a remarkable ability to 'shift' between different levels of their coma unconscious as will be examined further in chapter two. In *Driver: San Francisco*, at one point Tanner utters, 'Maybe if I could hop a whole building… or a whole block…',[115] developing his ability to shift between locations. He no longer has to use the physical 'shift-stick' of his car but can 'shift' psychically, possessing the minds of other drivers scattered across the cityscape of his coma. The linguistic tone here is markedly similar to that used by Garland, at the point at which Carl realises his own growing ability to 'shift': 'The place I was seeing was a sense of place. While I could sense it, I could see it. And if, as I shifted from one location to another, I could sense two places…'.[116] This moment of realization, the tentative yet confident understanding that the ability to 'shift' can be illimitable, is present in both of these texts with the coma seen as an alternative reality that allows the protagonist boundless possibilities and over which he can develop control. This kind of introspective reflection continues throughout *Driver: San Francisco*; Tanner's observation that, 'I'm not dead… but I'm not me', could, in fact, serve as an epigraph for both Garland and Welsh's novels.

Embedded within the world of the game are, likewise, generic motifs inherent within works of coma fiction. Throughout, Tanner is confronted with road-signs that contain subliminal messages concerning his condition, sign-posts that try to guide him out of coma: 'Wake Up', one sign orders him. This notion of psychological and subliminal messages at work within the interior consciousness of coma appears throughout coma fiction: the OU lecturer in *Life On Mars*; the manifestations of vehicle wrecks and mishaps in Banks's *The Bridge*; the marabou stork in Welsh's novel. These become part of the unconscious process of repeating and working through trauma (the Freudian 'dream-work') that must be undergone if an 'awakening' from coma is to be achieved, once more aligning the consciousness of coma with the consciousness of sleep.

Throughout *Driver: San Francisco*, both narrative and gaming progress is hindered by intrusions from the world outside of coma. The jolting shock from defibrillator paddles or the jarring pitch of the life-support machine frequently impacts upon

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[115] *Driver: San Francisco*, dirs. Martin Edmondson and Craig Lawson (Ubisoft, UK, 2011).
[116] Garland, *The Coma*, [p.68].

Tanner's interior world, reminding him of the precarious life-or-death situation which he currently inhabits. Again, such motifs are constantly present within *Life On Mars*, *The Sopranos* but also within *The Bridge*: the protagonist at one point picks up his telephone only to hear the pips of a dead line that sound eerily like the staccato tone of a life-support machine.

Frequently, Tanner is confronted with flocks of black crows which, in some mythologies and cultures, are symbols of death. In this instance, the coma-state becomes equated with a death-state. This again utilises associations also present within such works of fiction as Stephen King's *The Dead Zone*, in which the central protagonist, Johnny Smith, is 'resurrected' from the death-state of coma, only to be 'transfigured' and granted the messianic power to save the world from nuclear destruction. Such a tendency towards equating the coma with a death-state is similarly noticeable in Banks's *The Bridge*, and also within the autobiographical poetry of Peter Redgrove, himself a survivor of multiple, induced comas.

This instalment of a popular game franchise, I suggest, highlights some of the ethical dilemmas that stem from overly fetishized representations of the trauma of coma. The game encourages the player to continue to speed and crash into scores of cars in increasingly spectacular ways, in order to attain objectives, constituting repetitions of the protagonist's traumatizing event. This leads to a sustained glorification both of the trauma that led to the coma (the crash) and of the coma itself as the player is always encouraged to look for new and inventive ways to drive a rival off the road, actions that are played-out in lingering slow-motion, fetishized cut-aways. I argue that such representations of the disaster of coma and its many levels of trauma are deeply problematic, not least because in the case of *Driver: San Francisco* Tanner 'wakes' from his coma with cognition fully intact and immediately becomes involved in a 'real-world' car pursuit that results in yet another crash, once more glossing over the tertiary level of coma-trauma: brain injury. In this case, the negation of the possibility of brain injury and creation of a coma-fetish is even more troubling when we consider the fact that motor vehicle accidents are the second leading cause of traumatic brain injury[117] and yet in this game that portrays multiple car crashes and which uses this as its core conceit, one consequence of this trauma (coma) is overly romanticized as a high-octane

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[117] Motor vehicle accidents are responsible for 17.3% of TBIs, and are the largest percentage of TBI-related deaths at 31.8%. See: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Injury Prevention & Control: Traumatic Brain Injury*, 'What are the Leading Causes of TBI?' < http://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/causes.html> [accessed: 26/11/2013].

dreamscape and the consequence of coma (brain injury) is ignored altogether.

Over the course of the following chapters, I will continue to explore this notion of the ethical responsibility of authors when representing the trauma of coma whilst examining the common metaphorical tropes that they use. Crucially, I will explicate how these tropes have the potential to misinform and mislead a collective audience as to the true nature of the medical conditions of coma and brain injury, whilst revealing simultaneously the deepest human concerns with the mysteries of chronic disorders of consciousness.

2: *A Compartmentalised Life*. Coma, Memory and the Exilic Self in Alex Garland's *The Coma* and Irvine Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares*.

The strange appears as a defense put up by a distraught self: it protects itself by substituting for the image of a benevolent double that used to be enough to shelter it the image of a malevolent double into which it expels the share of destruction it cannot contain.

- Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves.*

2.1: Introduction

Coma, as both a medical condition and literary conceit, constitutes, I suggest, a manifestation of exile, with the subject wrenched out of society and locked within the confines of 'the deepest form of unconsciousness'.[1] Whilst in coma, the subject is exiled from the outside world within which they used to play a part. This is an exile which is imposed upon the individual, often through violence enacted both upon and within the body as previously discussed.

Akin to exile from a country, the coma has a paradoxical, dual function. In one respect, both exile and coma constitute a traumatic transition, a painful upheaval in which everything that was once secure and solid is left behind, leaving little other option but an enforced journey into the unknown. Counteracting this, however, is the reality that the process of exile is also, despite its traumatic resonance, a process of self-preservation and ultimately of survival: if the exile were to remain in their country, in their *homeland*, there would often be the distinct possibility that they would be facing death. In medical language, the coma is frequently described as a safety mechanism, a 're-setting' of parts of the brain in order to preserve the functioning of the brain as a whole. Indeed, the medical practice of induced coma is often used to aid and even save the lives of patients: to prevent brain-swelling, for example, in head-trauma incidents, or to stem the growth of cancer cells. The exile of coma, therefore, both traumatizes and helps to sustain the life of the victim. But in medical practice, this exilic state can extend beyond the coma itself. For those who emerge from coma, the state of exile may continue through the inevitability of post-trauma brain injury that may be incurred, a consequence that can vary in extremity.

Baldly, I argue that the exilic condition is perpetuated often by the memory of the place from which one was exiled: the 'homeland'. The persistence of this memory and the yearning to return to the homeland is, I propose, much like the traumatic memory.

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[1] Arnold Mindell, *Coma: Key to Awakening* (Boston: Shambhala, 1989), p. 74.

Memory will not allow the exile to become fully contented and at peace in his present surroundings and will not allow him to move forward and beyond the feeling of exile. Just as the traumatic memory entraps the survivor of trauma within a ruptured temporality of existence in which the traumatic episode of the past is repeated and relived, so that the memory of the homeland for the exile entraps him in a constant yearning for the past and the traumatic associations of displacement and upheaval that it evokes. Edward Said, in his influential essay on exile, refers to this predicament as 'the loss of something left behind forever',[2] a loss which is embodied by the 'unhealable rift forced between […] the self and its true home'.[3] I suggest that Said's language, here, illustrates the traumatic condition and presents the possibility of translating the image of the 'unhealable rift' into the language of trauma: the 'rift' of exile relating to the 'wound' of the traumatized subject that is constantly reopened through reoccurring encounters with the traumatizing incident. This incident, as Anne Whitehead posits in her discussion of Caruth's development of the Freudian structure of trauma, is 'not available in the usual way to memory and interpretation'.[4] Interestingly, whilst Whitehead goes onto discuss how the traumatic event 'cannot be possessed in the forms of memory or narrative', nevertheless the 'haunting quality' of trauma continues to 'possess the subject with its insistent repetition and returns'.[5] The memory of trauma, then, cannot be possessed and yet the spectre of it possesses the memory of the victim.

Drawing a parallel between the language of such trauma theory and of the theory of exile, we can once more look to the notion of the 'loss of something left behind forever'. This reference to a permanent loss evokes a sense of death, or of a ghost, with the lost object (in this case the homeland) repeatedly haunting and possessing the memory of the traumatized exile. Indeed, as Catherine Reuben succinctly posits when writing about exile and identity, 'There is a strong link between exile and memory. Without memory, one would not know that one was in exile',[6] a sentiment supported by Said in his suggestion that, 'Almost by definition exile and memory go together'.[7] I suggest that here, the word 'exile' could be exchanged for 'trauma'. No matter how

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[2] Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile' in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2000), p. 173.
[3] Ibid., p. 173.
[4] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 12.
[5] Ibid., p. 12.
[6] Catherine Reuben, 'Exile, Identity and Memory: The Boundaries of Perception' in *Exile, Language and Identity,* eds. Magda Stroińska and Vittorina Cecchetto (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003), 197-212 (p. 202).
[7] Said, 'Introduction', *Reflections on Exile*, p. xxxv.

fractured and dysfunctional memory is for the traumatized subject, it is still memory (or the rupture in memory) that reminds that subject that it is traumatized. Significantly, later on during his explication of the condition of exile, Said proposes that in order to attempt to move beyond this traumatizing memory, the victim must refuse to 'sit on the sidelines nursing a wound'.[8] Once more, the language of trauma is evoked. According to Said, it seems as though the only way one can cope with the trauma of exile is to put a stop to the reopening of the wound of the traumatizing incident – the initiating moment of exile.

As I will explore, this complex nexus between trauma, memory and exile can also be extended to the medical state of coma and the plight of the coma victim. For the individual who survives coma but has sustained brain damage, they not only return from the exile of coma but return to a 'homeland' in which they now still feel exiled due to the indelible changes in personhood that they carry with them. Even if the survivor has no memory of who they used to be, these memories will still be held by proxy by their loved ones and shared with them, perpetuating not only a sense of exile within the homeland (the world outside of coma) but also a sense of metaphorical exile from their former self. As an exile himself, displaced from his Palestinian homeland, Edward Said's personal and literary analysis of the exilic state is once more germane to this discussion of the coma survivor. In writing about the group-mentality of nationalism and its 'essential association with exile',[9] Said proposes that, 'In a very acute sense exile is a solitude experienced outside the group: the deprivations felt at not being with others in the communal habitation'.[10] This is an interesting statement in that frequently, the exile may not be alone in his banishment. It may be the case that he has been exiled as part of a group and so will physically be in the presence of others, living side-by-side with them in the new place to which they have all been exiled. Said's concept of solitude, then, cannot be understood literally. Even if the exile is alone in his banishment, the new place to which he travels will be built around a 'communal habitation' in the form of society itself and although assimilation into this society will not happen immediately, the exile will still be amongst other people. Said's concept of exilic solitude can only work if it is seen as a metaphorical solitude, a mental isolation that is triggered by being forced to leave the familiar, as represented by the people and social groups that have helped to create memory and conceptions of homeland. In this

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[8] Said, 'Reflections', p. 184.
[9] Ibid., p. 176.
[10] Ibid., p. 177.

way, the persistence of the unpossessable memory of what has been lost is instrumental in refusing to allow exiles to reform and recreate their old home and habitat – that despite being within groups, each individual is alone. Everything that helped to shape memory within the homeland has been stripped away from the exile, thus creating a palpable sense of alienation, isolation and loss.

This, once more, can be extended to the coma-state, and perhaps in a far more literal way: whilst within the coma the victim is directly outside of the 'group', but on emerging from coma, the fragmentary, shattered memory of the victim and the radical shifts in their personhood only serves to extend the exilic existence. For the exile, the memory of the past homeland is 'reconstructed' by the present psychological trauma of their isolation and banishment, thus generating disillusionment and embitterment; for the coma survivor, memory of their homeland is reconstructed through either the physical and medical trauma of ensuing rehabilitation or through any brain damage incurred by the coma (or the initiating physical trauma) itself.

It follows that memory, whether disrupted or obliterated completely through the conditions of coma and brain injury, has the ability to sustain the exilic state: the exile may always be an exile, even if a return to the homeland takes place. In those cases whereby the coma survivor has 'islands' of memory retained from the 'lightening' stage of post-coma consciousness (the often surreal and ungraspable hauntings, that evoke Whitehead's elucidation of the spectre of trauma), the survivor's sense and memory of exile is perpetuated by these 'memories' constantly reminding the survivor that he has been exiled, despite residing once again in his homeland. This homeland, therefore, can never be the same again; the feeling of exile will always persist and be perpetuated by the memory of the loss of something left behind forever. Said also addresses this concept of the exile's 'unreachable' homeland to which the exile can never return, suggesting that, 'The pathos of exile is in the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth: homecoming is out of the question'.[11] I suggest that this statement can be considered as a powerful metaphor for the plight of the 'coma-exile' who loses contact with the solidity and familiarity of the homeland whilst within the 'outland' of coma and who then returns from exile only to find that the homeland can never be the same again. In short, even if the exile does eventually return to the homeland, a true 'homecoming' is impossible because the homeland is now loaded indelibly with the traumatic memory of exile and loss.

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[11] Said, 'Reflections', p. 179.

Having established where the concept of coma is positioned within this complex critical framework of the theories of trauma, exile and memory, I would now like to move away slightly from the discussion of the coma survivor's return from the outland of 'coma-exile' to the 'homeland' and instead focus on the representation of the exilic state of coma itself within two particular works of fiction: Alex Garland's *The Coma* and Irvine Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares*. I will explore how the interiority of coma is depicted as an exilic condition and how both authors draw upon both trauma theory and wider principles of psychoanalysis in order to represent the plight of the victim of coma and how traumatic memory perpetuates their state of exile.

2.2: *A New World to Rule*: Coma, Memory, Control

Whilst much of Said's discussion of exile focuses upon the physical and geographical dislocation of an individual *from* his homeland, David Bevan, in his introduction to a collection of essays analysing the relationship between literature and exile, proposes a model of exile that occurs *within* the homeland. He posits that, 'Exile within a place is often still more poignant than exile from a place or exile to a place. Exile, viscerally, is difference, otherness'.[12] I argue that the coma victim exemplifies this concept of exile within a place, still physically inhabiting the homeland and yet, through the distinct otherness of coma, exiled from it. *The Coma* by Alex Garland and *Marabou Stork Nightmares* by Irvine Welsh explore this 'internal' exile of coma and how memory impacts upon and often perpetuates the exilic self. However, rather than representing the realities of memory and the post-coma condition, they are more concerned with the representation of how memories of the outside world (of the homeland) may operate within the exilic state of coma itself. Both novelists focus upon representing the inner state of (un)consciousness of the coma-exile as he gradually moves out of coma and returns to the homeland. Furthermore, for both Carl (*The Coma*) and Roy (*Marabou Stork Nightmares*) the exile of coma is triggered by a violent act. For this reason, it is important to first consider the initiating incident of exile for these characters – their points of departure for the outland of coma.

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[12] David Bevan, 'Introduction', *Literature and Exile*, ed., David Bevan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), p. 3.

In his analysis of the work of another prominent literary exile, W.G. Sebald, Philip Schlesinger highlights a common connection between violence and exile: 'Typically, violence - actual or threatened - propels people into exile, although we cannot exclude the inner compulsion to depart'.[13] In the case of Carl in *The Coma*, it is certainly a violent initiating event that heralds his metaphorical departure from the homeland: a vicious attack on a tube train at the hands of a delinquent gang. For Welsh's protagonist, Roy, his departure is an altogether more complex manifestation of departure, triggered by an act of self-violence: a botched suicide attempt, the cause for which is gradually revealed through narrative exposition. The two novelists, however, present the characters' respective comas in two sharply contrasting ways. For Carl, it is an exile from which he is desperate to escape; for Roy, the self-imposed and self-sustained exile becomes a safe haven in which he can attempt to hide from the realities of his homeland, realities that led him to the suicide in the first place. Despite this difference, both novelists explore how memory (and the distortion of memories) plays a key role in sustaining coma. Again, it is useful to consider Said's discussion of exile in analysing the representation of coma in these two novels. He writes, 'For an exile, habits of life, expression or identity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment'.[14] This description of the 'doubling' of exile (physical and psychological) supports the idea that it is the memory of the homeland that makes it impossible for the exile to live comfortably; that he can only compensate for the real sense of loss by 'creating a new world to rule'.[15] This creation of a new place and a new order occurs through an attempt to, in turn, create a new conception of selfhood in order to learn to accept and overcome the feeling of exile and assent to a future self that can live comfortably within a new land. However, as Said suggests, the memories of exile cannot be completely put out of mind and so this attempt to develop control over how one perceives and accepts a new life and a new land will be inevitably superimposed over those distant memories of the homeland. We can once more think back to Steph Grant's attempt to move forward and away from the exile of coma by adopting the fragmented memories and behaviours of a lost self, trying to re-read Mill, for example. As discussed in chapter one, for the real victims of coma, these 'memories' of the homeland (a place inhabited by the old self) are often

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[13] Philip Schlesinger, 'W.G.Sebald and the Condition of Exile' in *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol.21(2), (London: Sage, 2004), 43-67 (p. 46).
[14] Said, 'Reflections', p. 186.
[15] Ibid., p. 181.

completely obliterated. In this regard, however, Said's exegesis may still be applied, only more problematically. Indeed, I argue that in such real-life cases it is the memory of a memory of the homeland and the 'pre-exilic' self that continues to haunt the coma-survivor, eruptions that perpetuate the exilic state despite the fact that, to all intents and purposes, they have made the physical, medical return from coma to the homeland. However, both Garland and Welsh gloss over the real potential of shredded or even obliterated memories of the post-coma exile. Instead, as I will demonstrate, in both novels memory is depicted in a far more conventional way in that *lost* memories or distorted, fragmentary memories of the homeland (and pre-coma self) can ultimately be largely retrieved and confronted. In other words, permanent loss of memory through brain trauma is not entertained by the authors, thereby over-simplifying the multifaceted exilic nature of coma. This has clear implications for the application of Said's theories of exile in that both Garland and Welsh align the psychological exile of coma with geographical exile. Both Carl and Roy are trapped within psychical projections of geographical landscapes in which they are exiled and where they do indeed attempt to accept exile through the creation of 'a new place', although in markedly different ways.

At the start of *The Coma*, Carl narrates the details of his attack and his emergence from coma, describing the nightmarish homeland that he has returned to, inhabited by shadowy taxi drivers, unnamed nurses and vague friends and neighbours. However, it soon transpires that this entire 'memory' of survival and rehabilitation is a falsification, a 'new world to rule' that was formed whilst still within his coma. The more Carl tries to inhabit this world comfortably, the more uncomfortable he becomes, with the world itself threatening to collapse and reveal the truth of his sustained exile within coma. Applying Said's concepts of exile, Carl's existence within this fake re-imagining of his homeland occurs against the backdrop of memories of his real homeland. These memories, however, lack solid definition and are maddeningly intangible and so this new world, to once more refer to Said, becomes 'unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction'.[16] Here, Said acknowledges the inevitable consequence of the attempt of the exile to 'build' a new world upon memories of the homeland. Such an existential palimpsest can only have one result: the alienation from the new world as the eruption of memories of the homeland ensues, leading to an overall and persistent traumatic memory of exile. These haunting feelings of displacement, alongside the memories of exile and the homeland that leak through the cracks of consciousness, are represented in

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[16] Said, 'Reflections', p. 181.

Garland's novel, creating an unnerving sense of disorientation and dislocation within Carl's comatose mind. His attempts to reside within a 'fictionalized' version of his homeland continually remind him of the place from which he was exiled and so it is only a matter of time before the façade breaks down to reveal the truth: that despite experiencing a return to the homeland and liberation from the exile of coma, he is still actually trapped within the outland.

Throughout the novel, Garland represents a highly complex relationship between memory and 'coma-exile'. Even before Carl realises his initial memories of awakening are false, the reliability of his memory as a whole is brought into question as he describes the attack which initiated his departure into coma:

> *Now, through the side windows of the train, as if I were hovering between the external glass and the subway walls, I saw myself walking backwards through the carriage, holding up my arms around my face and upper body. The young men were attacking me [...] From my position outside the carriage, I watched as the young men kicked me into unconsciousness* (Original emphasis).[17]

In this early extract, the reliability of memory comes under scrutiny. Carl positively affirms that as the incident took place, he stood as an external witness to his own trauma. However, this suggests that he has a somewhat distorted memory or that perhaps his consciousness is creating Freudian 'screen memories', a psychic mechanism, Freud postulates, that assists the subject in concealing 'the memory of a more significant or painful event than that which is superficially remembered'.[18] In other words, the screen memory is designed to protect the traumatized subject from the true gravity and emotional weight of the trauma itself. In the above extract, Carl witnessing his attack from an objective subject position creates a sense of separation between him and the trauma of the violence which constituted his point of departure into the exilic state of coma. It is, therefore, as though the attack were happening to someone else and the flat, apathetic tone of the narrative voice represents the self-preservative function of the screen memory, distancing the subject from the trauma. This technique, I suggest, also resonates with Grant and Selzer's use of the third person pronoun in order to distance themselves from their own trauma. However, the fact that Carl's memory of his attack takes this objective form calls into question the very

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[17] Alex Garland, *The Coma* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), [p. 4].

[18] Nicola King, *Memory, Narrative, Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 109.

reliability of his memory itself, as Freud explicates in his discussion of the phenomenon of seeing oneself from an objective subject-position within certain memories: 'Wherever one appears in a memory in this way, as an object among other objects, this confrontation of the acting self with the recollecting self can be taken as proof that the original impression has been edited'.[19] Significantly, Freud also refers to this phenomenon in his discussions of how one perceives one's own death, proposing that 'our own death is indeed unimaginable, and however often we try to imagine it, we realize that we are actually still present as onlookers'.[20] In Carl's out-of-body testimony, this Freudian 'edit', he describes only what he imagines the attack (the encounter with death) would have looked like from the point of view of an external witness, just as Selzer only imagines what his comatose self (his 'dead' self) looked like after his own 'death encounter'. Garland's use of italics adds weight to this sense of unreality whilst also, as discussed earlier, exhibiting one technique utilized by the writer of trauma fiction as observed by Luckhurst: italics to mark the eruptions and 'breakthrough' moments of traumatic memory. But the question remains: what exactly does this action of memory signify and why is it being distorted in this way? In order to elucidate this complex relationship between memory and exile, we can once more turn to the field of trauma theory and revisit Freud and Caruth's hypotheses of 'traumatic departures', discussed briefly in chapter one.

Returning to Freud's hypothetical case study in *Moses and Monotheism* of someone walking away from a train wreck with no obvious signs of injury, the concept of 'latency' becomes most apposite when analysing the representations of exile. As Freud discusses, over the subsequent days and weeks, the train wreck survivor may develop a 'traumatic neurosis'[21] as the realization of the seriousness of the accident, and the delayed recognition of just how close the person came to death, begin to be absorbed and rationalized by the survivor. As discussed, exile, by its very nature, is concerned with traumatic departures that are both physical and psychological. During the process of departure from the homeland, the individual is absorbed in the action of departing and it is not until the departure is complete and the individual has left the homeland that the process of exile is also complete. It is at this point that the true weight of disruption

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[19] Sigmund Freud, 'Screen Memories' in *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), 3-22 (p. 20).
[20] Sigmund Freud, 'Timely Reflections on War and Death' in *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 183.
[21] Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (Letchworth, Herts: Hogarth Press, 1939), p.109.

and dislocation begins to manifest itself through the memories of what the exile has lost or left behind; it is at this point when the psychological trauma begins to take root in the form of fragmented memories of the lost homeland, thus sustaining the exilic condition. In Freud's case study, it is only when the traveller has moved beyond the action of surviving the wreck that he is then 'free' to confront the nature of the survival itself, just as the exile is only free to confront his condition when the transition between homeland and outland is complete. As Caruth summarises, building upon Freudian theories of trauma: 'For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs'.[22] In Carl's case, the historical incident of his attack is not fully perceived 'as it occurs', resulting in the Freudian memory edit in which he detaches part of his identity from the violent event in an attempt, perhaps, to disassociate himself from the attack and to initiate a fake narrative of survival and awakening from coma (a Freudian screen memory), thus repressing both the physical and psychological traumatic reality of his situation. In essence, this function of memory represents a splitting of the self - a 'cloning or twinning',[23] as Michael Seidel discusses in his work on narrative representations of exile - in which part of the self is left within the external world (his corporeal self) while the other part of him (his unconscious) is trapped within the interior world of his coma. This fragmentation of self is often symptomatic of the condition of trauma in which part of the self and the traumatic experience may be repressed, only to come resurfacing in the form of traumatic echoes or episodes. But it is also symptomatic of the exilic condition whereby the subject stands astride two worlds, trying to reside here but inevitably residing there and so generating, as Schlesinger postulates, a 'hybrid… sense of identity'.[24] Carl cannot remember how long he has been in his coma, a gap in memory that embodies the 'incubation period' that Freud discusses:[25] the limbo in which the memories of the traumatic incident begin to coalesce to form an overall traumatic neurosis. Between the end of the accident (the moment of departure) and the first memories Carl experiences within the coma, the exilic (and therefore traumatic) condition takes hold, leading to a 'hybrid identity' and moreover, a hybrid, fictionalized

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[22] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 18.
[23] Michael Seidel, *Exile and the Narrative Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 20.
[24] Schlesinger, 'Condition of Exile', p. 46.
[25] Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, p. 109.

world within which he temporarily resides, thus causing a fragmentation of selfhood which Carl must attempt to reunite if he ever wishes to escape from his coma.

The first stage of this reunification is to confront the fact that his 'memory' of leaving the coma and embarking upon rehabilitation is false, constituting a distorted reality: a coma 'dream'. In his discussion of the exile's use of coping strategies, Seidel suggests that, 'Another imaginative solution to the exile's anguish is to export just enough of the homeland to the outland to metonymically purify it'.[26] This approach to dealing with the traumatic nature of exile is adopted by Carl who transposes certain memories and relationships extant within the homeland to his false narrative in order to 'purify' the exilic landscape to which he has been banished: the otherwise alien outland of coma. However, in doing this, his consciousness creates a doubling of exile, a traumatic echo that he has to live through twice: facing up to the trauma of his coma within his fake narrative of 'awakening' before confronting the fact that he is still in the exilic state of coma which heralds the end of this false experience of return from exile and recovery.

The function of Carl's memory within his exilic state, therefore, becomes even more complex and paradoxical. His false memories of awakening from coma both protect him from confronting the psychological trauma of his exile, but at the same time prevent him from commencing his return to the homeland. Garland's depiction of dream-like narratives and memories to convey a form of coma consciousness consistently highlights Carl's fractured sense of self, both preventing his unconscious from revealing the reality of his situation whilst conversely encouraging him to accept the new rules and conditions of his exilic territory (a shadowy resemblance of his homeland). His early encounter with his 'friends' Anthony and Mary exposes this tension between memory and exile. Throughout this episode, Carl is confronted with, in the Freudian sense, 'uncanny' occurrences which reflect 'the helplessness we experience in certain dream-states'.[27] In the first instance, he has no memory of how he arrives at their house, a confusion he expresses when he says to Anthony: 'One moment I was lying in the bath, the next I was ringing your doorbell'.[28] He also mentions how there was 'nothing in between', like the dizzying jump-cuts that occur in dream

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[26] Seidel, *Exile and the Narrative Imagination*, p. 10.
[27] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' in *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003),123-162, (p. 144).
[28] Garland, *The Coma*, [p. 24].

narratives or the 'detached shreds of the scenes we have really experienced'[29] that the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs refers to in his extensive analysis of the appearance of deceptive memory-scenes within dream-states. It is also soon revealed that Anthony did not come to collect Carl from the hospital, with Anthony himself confessing that 'a real friend should have been there'.[30] When Anthony hands over a cup of coffee to Carl, Carl says: 'I felt mildly irritated that Anthony had given me the mug in the first place, because, considering our friendship, I thought my dislike of coffee was the sort of thing he ought to know'.[31] These indications of a dysfunctional friendship come to a head when Anthony seems more interested in catching the milkman than he does listening to his friend's fears over the potential psychological and traumatic impact of his coma.

Over time, Garland reveals how Carl's screen memories, whilst appearing to perpetuate his coma-exile, are creating a complex matrix of triggers to force Carl into confronting the truth of his condition. Significantly, whilst with Anthony and Mary, Carl feels 'a sudden and terrific feeling of despair',[32] which is akin to those feelings he experienced as a child when he had 'very powerful fever dreams'. In his current situation, he is living through the ultimate 'fever dream' of his coma which is creating an entire, alternative reality that evokes the alienating 'otherness' of exile that Bevan refers to. Thus, Anthony's comment that 'a real friend should have been there' becomes an unconscious signpost that points towards the fact that he isn't a 'real' friend. Instead, as is revealed, Anthony is a cypher, a character created within Carl's coma consciousness and based upon the patriarchal frontman of a 'bland family'[33] at the centre of an advertising campaign in Carl's homeland. In fact, one of Carl's last memories before he is attacked on the train is seeing 'Anthony' on a poster within the tube station. His constant meetings with this cypher within his fake coma 'dream' becomes a traumatic echo of his last, fractured memory before slipping into unconsciousness.

Said's exegesis of exile can again help to illuminate the processes of Carl's coma-state when he proposes that, in extreme cases, 'the exile can make a fetish of exile, a practice that distances himself from all connections and commitments'.[34] This resonates with Carl's false reality created by his coma-dream. It seems that the comfort provided

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[29] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. and ed. Lewis A. Cosler (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992) , p.42.
[30] Garland, *The Coma*, [p. 23].
[31] Ibid., [p. 27].
[32] Ibid., [p.29].
[33] Ibid., [p. 145].
[34] Said, 'Reflections', p. 146.

by this unreal friend, no matter how traumatic, initially outweighs the need to face up to the reality of his medical dilemma: that he is still in his coma and needs to awake if he wishes to return to the homeland. In this regard, Carl's traumatic neurosis is highly complex. In his coma-dream, he faces the physical trauma of his attack when in reality what he should be facing (and, indeed, what he does face when he subsequently awakens from this dream) are both the trauma of the attack and the psychological, traumatic exile of his coma. It is only this confrontation with the 'reality' of his situation (marked by his last pre-coma memory of seeing the poster of Anthony in the tube station prior to the attack) that will allow him to attempt to return to the homeland. Said's notion of exilic 'fetish' can be seen in the form of Carl's invented friends, Anthony and Mary, themselves creations spun from a paradigm of cultural fetishization: advertising. However, it becomes inevitable that, following the encounters with his false friends and sensation of dream-despair, a gradual realization of a 'powerlessness in [his] adopted land'[35] (to refer to Lucy Wilson's analysis of the exile's relationship to the outland) guides Carl to his own hospital room where he comes face-to-face with the corporeal self within which he is exiled. This proves to be the first step toward accepting the severity of his circumstances (at the point of confronting his body, he says 'not for the first time in this dream, I woke up')[36] and the catalyst for his quest to reunite his fragmented identity. In other words, applying Said's theories, Carl finally makes the 'connections and commitments' that are required to accept the truth of his exilic state.

The complex and paradoxical nature of Carl's initially fetishized exile and his screen memory of awakening can perhaps be more cogently elucidated through the adaptation of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory that is particularly centred on concepts of trauma, identity and alienation. Throughout the novel, Garland attempts to render a model of consciousness manifested within the coma-state, a model that I suggest echoes much of Lacan's work on the formation and processes of the unconscious. Carl's confrontation with a psychological projection of his physical self, still submerged in coma, reflects Lacan's theories of the mirror stage, the point at which, in a child's development, it recognises its 'self' in a mirror, thus forming the child's Subject[37] and allowing the child to move towards having a unified image of itself, rather than the

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[35] Lucy Wilson, 'European or Caribbean: Jean Rhys and the Language of Exile' in *Literature and Exile*, ed. David Bevan (Amsterdam: Rudopi, 1990), 77-89 (p. 78).
[36] Garland, *The Coma*, [p. 56].
[37] I have capitalized 'Subject' and 'Object' to signpost Lacan's terminology of the subsconscious/Subject and the ego/Object.

hitherto fragmented understanding of its own identity. Whilst Lacan's theories were formulated through the analysis of child development, I argue that in many cases of coma literature, the coma is viewed as a form of birth or rebirth. Indeed, referring back to some of the works discussed in the first chapter, this seems to be a recurring motif. Johansen refers to her son's 'second "birth"';[38] Hollyman writes, at the point of Shaun's emergence from coma, 'This is how it feels to be born'.[39] The victims of coma, therefore, may emerge as a completely different person – the new birth of a new self that, often, may have to learn (or re-learn) everything it once knew – starting with the Lacanian recognition of self, as embodied by the 'mirror-stage'. I have also already drawn a parallel between Lacan's notion of birth as being a traumatic episode and the traumatic emergence from coma, not least due to the fact that after each, the 'survivor' experiences a certain 'lack'. Whilst Garland's novel doesn't concern itself with a deeply nuanced or empirically-researched representation of this post-traumatic condition, at the point at which Carl sees himself lying in the hospital bed, a Lacanian recognition of the self occurs. This is a recognition that allows Carl's identity to be both unified and alienated. Just as the baby recognises itself for the first time 'as a unitary being',[40] Carl is finally able to resolve the elements of the disturbing, uncanny 'otherness' of his exile he has encountered up until this moment: 'One moment I was opening the door to the ward room and seeing myself lying on the bed […] The next moment, I was lying on the bed. *I* was lying on the bed'.[41] Metaphorically, Carl, through this secondary mirror stage that has been triggered by the trauma of his attack and subsequent coma, is able to unify all of his fragmentary actions and conceptions of himself into this one revelation of selfhood (that he is still within coma), just as the baby is able to reconcile all of its fragmented actions and functions into one unified body and self-image. However, as Lacan suggests, despite this moment of unification, this mirror stage is still a hugely alienating experience constituting a 'splitting' of the self. This is a necessary rift as it separates the Subject from itself, creating the Object-self which is acknowledged by the child to be its mirror image. It is this Object that constitutes the ego and which forms the building blocks upon which the child builds a sense of itself. It is also an important moment in the socialization of the child, seeing itself as an 'other' that will then socialise with other 'others', and often recognizing its own sense of self that is reflected

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[38] Johansen, *Listening in the Silence*, p. 80.
[39] Hollyman, *Keeping Britain Tidy*, p. 4.
[40] Lionel Bailly, *Lacan* (Oxford: One World, 2009), p. 29.
[41] Garland, *The Coma*, [p. 55.]

within the behaviours and reactions of these others with whom it chooses to interact. The mirror stage, Lacan summarises, is therefore 'the symbolic matrix into which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to it being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject'.[42] From the very instant of identification, the baby knows that this image of itself is contradictory – its identity in the mirror (its Object) is both what it thinks it is and what others see of it. This is an important splitting of identity for Lacan, primarily as it allows the Subject to enter the Symbolic realm; it heralds the acquisition of complex language signification which is vital for the creation of the Subject, of the 'I', and the elaboration of the Object: the ego or 'Ideal-I'. The mirror stage, therefore, is an intellectual action in which the child begins to recognise the function of metaphor. The building of the ego 'comes with the gradual acquisition of language',[43] as language attaches ideas to the objectified idea of self, first acknowledged in the mirror. Essentially, this pivotal moment in a child's development marks the moment where it begins to understand metaphor: *that what I see in the mirror is not really me, yet I will still regard it as though it is me*, an act of signification grounded within the Symbolic realm that is built upon language and metaphor and where, Lacan proposes, the unconscious resides.

I argue that his theory of the acquisition of language and comprehension of metaphor plays a significant role within Garland's representation of Carl's metaphorical mirror stage within his coma. In this case, Carl re-enters language, or rather, the language schema that he had developed up until his attack – the language that constitutes part of the Other that is embodied by his knowledge and experience of his homeland. It is the Other that pre-dated even Carl's birth, formed from the systems of language, society and the law, 'the whole set of hypotheses within which the Subject is constituted'.[44] Through facing, again, his Object-self and acknowledging his unconscious Subject which is still trapped within the coma, Carl once more acquires the necessary language and comprehension of metaphor to be able to interpret his false screen memory of awakening, confronting the truth of his exilic state, thereby allowing him to attempt a return to the homeland.

Looking once more at the interchange between Anthony and Mary, it seems that every action and utterance they perform constitute signifiers of his true exilic state

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[42] Bailly, *Lacan*, p. 30.
[43] Ibid., p. 34.
[44] Ibid., p. 66.

within coma, 'blurted' by his unconscious Subject, the true meaning of which Carl has repressed into his unconscious, in much the same way as a child will repress negative or hurtful signifiers into its unconscious in order to preserve the embellishment and perceived 'perfection' of its Object-ego – its Ideal-I – in a process of 'wishful thinking' that denies reality. The child, then, will create 'master signifiers', linguistic 'tics' that will sometimes emerge from the unconscious Subject in the form of blurts, denegations, language slips and dream images. These work to preserve the Ideal-I in re-orientating signifying chains to support the ego. The master signifiers 'usually mask their opposites',[45] changing the meaning of one signifying chain into an opposite meaning that supports the ego. Signifiers in a signifying chain that are perhaps painful or hurtful to hear or accept for the Subject are turned into more comfortable, supportive and self-validating signifiers. In the process of psychoanalytic treatment, for example, a master signifier that might be repeatedly uttered by the analysand within different conversational contexts is '*things could be worse'*. Despite the fact that the analysand is frequently plagued by trauma and negative situations, the positive affirmation of the master signifier conceals the fact that in reality, and on a personal, psychic level, things could not actually be much worse. It follows that Carl's guidance out of exile relies upon him interpreting the master signifiers in order to confront the signifying chains that Lacan proposed were suppressed into the Subject to preserve the Ideal-I. Anthony's failure to pick up Carl from hospital; his unawareness of Carl's dislike of coffee; Mary's insistence upon him going to hospital; Anthony's 'language-slip' that a 'real friend should have been there' all constitute a preservation of the ego – in this case an 'ideal' scenario in which Carl has emerged from coma and is engaged in a process of successful rehabilitation with the (questionable) support of his friends. The notion and repetition of 'friendship' is the master signifier which masks and re-orientates the reality that within his coma, Carl has no friends and that he is isolated by an ultimate embodiment of exile. Carl, therefore, has to follow his discourse of the unconscious (the repressed signifiers of his Subject) in order to recognise and confront the opposite and true meaning of the signifying chain: that he is still trapped within the exile of coma and has no contact with his friends.

However, even after this revelation (triggered by the secondary 'mirror stage'), this process of following the signifying chains is further complicated for Carl due to the fact that the chains themselves contain gaps or are shattered completely. Throughout the

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[45] Bailly, *Lacan*., p. 63.

novel, in an attempt to trigger an awakening, Carl must follow various signifying chains in an attempt to piece his life together and move out of exile. However, these chains frequently come to an abrupt end, or fail to go anywhere at all due to the disruptions in memory, thus exacerbating and sustaining the exilic state. This suggests that exile is also a state that is grounded in language: that it is the understanding of language, metaphor and signifying schemes that allows the state of exile to be perpetuated. The exile experiences this sense of permanent, personal loss because the homeland comes to represent a fundamental part of the individual's identity, with the place of habitation often becoming personified and the relationship with it being deeply personal: a relationship that one understands through the grasp of metaphor and language signification. Furthermore, the signifier 'exile' may well also be masking the real signifying chains that have been suppressed into the unconscious. It is these signifying chains of the unconscious Subject that might reveal the real traumatic weight of exile that the individual tries to avoid, signifiers such as 'outcast', 'endangerment', 'threat', and ultimately 'death': a death that might have befallen the exile had he stayed within the homeland.

The difference in how Freud and Lacan view the unconscious can also be seen within Garland's novel. Unlike Freud's notion of the unconscious being a personified presence hidden within a topographical conception of the psyche, Garland's model of the unconscious within coma seems to adhere to Lacan's notion of it being an abstract matrix consisting of repressed signifiers, the shifting meanings of which are dictated by the discourse of the Other: the rules and habits of language itself.

2.3: *His Dark Confusions*: Coma, Exile, Trauma

This operation of language and memory functioning within the exile of coma is also of paramount concern to Irvine Welsh in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*. The point of 'exilic departure' for its protagonist, Roy Strang, is withheld from the reader for much of the novel. Roy consistently comes close to revealing the cause of his coma exile, but then always shies away from revealing the truth. These constant narrative side-steps function both as an engaging plot device, enhancing the conventions of the mystery genre that Welsh employs, and as representations of Roy's reluctance to confront the cause of his coma: his guilt over his involvement in the violent rape of a young woman. It is this that

has led to his unsuccessful suicide attempt and subsequent condition, exemplifying Schlesinger's 'inner compulsion to depart'. In Roy's outland of coma, instead of obliterating all memories of the atrocity he has committed, he repeatedly and traumatically re-enacts them in the form of his 'Marabou Stork nightmares'. However, another idea of Schlesinger's is also important to consider: that 'suicide is one response to exile'.[46] As discussed above, the self-exile of suicide unintentionally leads to the coma exile, but Schlesinger is talking about the possibility of suicide as a *response* to exile, not as a point of departure *into* it. Indeed, as the reader follows Roy's quest to discover his true self through the tripartite narrative of his coma (his 'surface' narration that is triggered by the constant threats of 'awakening'; his autobiographical narration; and his twisted coma nightmares on the hunt for the Marabou Stork), he begins to reveal an unending cycle of exile that has led him to the point of suicide. Roy implies that, from birth, he was exiled from his family and homeland, referring to the former as a 'genetic disaster'[47] and the 'scheme' in which he was brought up as 'a concentration camp for the poor'.[48] In this metaphor, Welsh uses another example of an exilic people, the Jews, to create a connection with Roy's early feelings of exile. Genetics continues to play a key role in his childhood alienation as he is bullied because of his physical features inherited from his cruel and violent father, not least his large ears giving fuel to the nickname 'Dumbo Strang', again serving to exile him from the 'collective' group.

Roy only seems to find peace when his family decides to emigrate to South Africa. Welsh, here, uses the oppressive ideology of apartheid to create an unyielding landscape of exile whilst at the same time developing the idea of self-exile through Roy's father's hatred of Scotland and his desire to leave the homeland behind. Despite Roy's relative 'contentment' in this environment, the reader, because of Welsh's creation of an unreliable narrator, has to dig much deeper to find the final reason for Roy's exile of coma. In his 'autobiographical' narrative, despite projecting a sense of belonging in South Africa, he has to suffer sexual abuse at the hands of his Uncle Gordon. Within the coma, however, Roy persists in creating screen memories to conceal the horrors of what was actually done to him so that, to return to Freud's exegesis, 'instead of the memory image that was justified by the original experience, we are presented with another, which is to some extent associatively *displaced* from it'.[49]

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[46] Schlesinger, 'Condition of Exile', p. 52.
[47] Irvine Welsh, *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 19.
[48] Ibid., p. 22.
[49] Freud, 'Screen Memories', p. 7.

This process of 'displacement' (in which the unconscious substitutes dangerous or traumatic thoughts or memories for vastly more acceptable or 'controllable' goals) occurs within Roy's coma 'dreams' in which he is back in South Africa with his fictitious friend, Sandy, on the hunt for the vicious Marabou Stork. The stork, itself, is a displacement that is so loaded with traumatic associations that it gradually develops into an example of 'condensation', whereby a single image becomes symbolic of many other, traumatic associations or ideas. The stork, therefore, is a symbol that represents all of the horrors Roy has experienced and, ultimately, the 'monster' that Roy had become prior to his suicide attempt. During the quest for this stork, Roy's pre-coma memories are assimilated into screen memories, prolonging the cycle of repression. The character of Dawson, for example, with his corrupt sexual proclivities and white supremacist beliefs becomes a projection of Uncle Gordon, despite the fact that the latter was 'a thin, spindly man'[50] whereas Dawson is an obese 'desperate old queen'[51] who appears 'to be covered in a strange, translucent oil'.[52] This symbolises the disgust Roy felt for Gordon at the time of his abuse, a disgust he could never fully voice as a child victim. Despite the physical differences, they are both described as having breath that is 'sweet and rancid'.[53] This transference of negative memories brings to mind Paul Tabori's definition of the exile: 'someone who inhabits one place and remembers or projects the reality of another'.[54] In the case of the 'geographical' exile who is physically forced to leave his homeland, these 'projections' can have a double-bind. On the one hand the positive memories of the homeland become a reference point for the outland, creating a model of place that can never be matched or reconciled; on the other hand, the negative, traumatic memories of the action of exile itself may serve to sour the individual's existence within the new place of habitation. It follows that the banishment to this 'new place' can only be understood and interpreted through the lens of the traumatic memory of exile. This double-bind of exilic memory is similarly represented in Welsh's depiction of Roy's coma. Roy attempts to evoke and inhabit the positive memories of his past place of habitation, South Africa, yet also projects the negative memories of the sexual abuse that occurred there and which served to exile his child-self further in this outland that his father brought him to. Thus, this new place in

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[50] Welsh, *Marabou*, p. 19.
[51] Ibid., p. 41.
[52] Ibid., p. 42.
[53] Ibid., p.64.
[54] Gabriella Ibieta, 'Transcending the Culture of Exile' in *Literature and Exile*, ed. David Bevan (Amsterdam: Rudopi, 1990), 67-76 (p. 68).

which he tries to reside, in which he tries to sustain his self-imposed coma-exile, is constantly alienating and turning against him.

His processes of screen memory, displacement, condensation and projection are not just employed in his coma quest-fantasies: they are also utilised in his seemingly 'factual' autobiographical narration. Whenever Roy is in danger of nearing a painful truth in his life, he shifts into his fantasy narrative, creating a rupture in memory and narrative cohesion in order to repress both the severity of his sexual abuse and the degree of his involvement in the rape:

> The funny thing was that it didn't really feel like abuse at the time, it felt mildly funny and amusing watching Gordon making a drooling tit of himself over me. I felt a sense of power, a sense of attractiveness, and a sense of affirmation that I hadn't previously experienced, during those sessions in the garage.[55]

In these early autobiographical narrations, Roy describes the abuse as being grounded in masturbatory titillation allowing him 'a sense of power' and control by granting Gordon access to his body in exchange for gifts and favours. In the dream-like outland of coma, this perversion is transposed to Dawson who is frequently portrayed as masturbating and defecating in public, depicting him as a rather pathetic, derisory figure. Towards the end of the novel, however, as the divisions between fantasy and reality increasingly threaten to corrode completely, Roy enters into what Roger Luckhurst refers to as the 'emergency phase', a common feature of trauma fiction characterized by 'the intrusion of occluded memories into an identity built on an excised version of the past'.[56] In Welsh's novel, Roy's narrative voice explodes into a confessional, capitalized stream of consciousness, the most significant declaration being: 'GORDON WITHDRAWING HIS BLOOD-STAINED COCK FROM A FRIGHTENED YOUNG BOY BENT OVER A WORKBENCH'.[57] In a similar way to Carl, Roy sees the traumatic event from an external position, disassociating his current self from the impersonal 'boy' of the confession, but the most significant implication of this is that he was never in control, that the abuse he suffered was total, violent and unrelenting. Again, both the fantasy and the autobiography are screen memories and distortions, attempts not to face up to the full extent of the abuse. This is often a

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[55] Welsh, *Marabou*, p. 72.
[56] Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 105.
[57] Welsh, *Marabou*, p. 255.

consequence of traumatic experience as Kalí Tal proposes in her extensive work on the trauma of sexual abuse when she writes that, 'The dislocation of trauma, which removed meaning from the world, is gradually replaced by new stories about the past that can support a rewritten personal myth'.[58] For Tal, this 'myth-making' is an essential element of the process of trauma survival and allows the traumatized subject to speak of and testify to their past in order to retell their trauma and attempt to make it seem more 'real' so that future communities can bear witness to and learn from this past. However, for Roy, this 'myth-making' becomes a way of creating a screen between himself and the trauma so that he does not have to face the real gravity of his past, a form of deceptive self-protection and preservation. Even at the end of the novel when his repressed memories come flooding back in the stream-of-consciousness episode cited above, Roy still insists that his involvement in the gang-rape was as a bystander, dragged into the horrific act by his brutal friend Lexo. It is only when, in his collapsing Stork fantasy, Sandy turns a gun on him that Roy begins to see through the screen memories and face up to the fact that far from being a bystander, he was the actual instigator of the rape: the actions he fervently attributes to Lexo throughout the novel are finally revealed to be his own. His 'personal myths' and screen memories, therefore, break down and it is at this point when the reader finally begins to understand why Roy developed a penchant for sexual violence in the first place: he was trying to take control of every sexual encounter through abusive, brutal means, just as his uncle did with him. It thereby becomes clear that he was trying to gain the power about which he can now only fantasise in his coma narratives by undermining and parodying Gordon in the guise of the dream-figure of Dawson. However, in doing this, he also exiles himself from both society and morality. Welsh portrays this through Roy's inability to sustain a wholesome relationship after he has managed to escape a criminal conviction. His relationship with Dorie promises to flourish, until Roy is repeatedly confronted by an anti-rape campaign, the posters for which act as signifiers of Roy's moral failure. These, in turn, trigger a state of crippling depression and self-loathing as he is reminded of his psychological and moral exile from 'decent' society. This causes his relationship with Dorie, his family, and society as a whole to unravel. He is reminded of his exilic status and he descends further into this condition, cutting himself off from everybody, until this ultimately leads to his suicide attempt: his 'inner compulsion to depart'.

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[58] Kalí Tal, *Worlds of Hurt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 125.

This also demonstrates how Welsh represents the Freudian concept of 'remembering, repeating and working-through'. Through his sexual violence, Roy 'does not remember anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but acts it out… he repeats it not as a memory but as an action'.[59] It therefore follows that the repetitious nature of his coma dreams and his transference of traumatic memories, not least his creation of the symbolic Marabou Stork, become Roy's way of 'repeating and working through'. It must be remembered that Freud, as an ego-psychologist, was working clinically with patients, using, analysing and interpreting their stories of day-to-day behaviour and dream images as a means of locating and eradicating the source of the symptoms of neurosis. Applying this approach to Welsh's novel, I suggest that Roy follows his own 'dream' narrative towards the origin of his neurosis and as author, Welsh exploits the interiority of coma to reflect upon how consciousness might cope with both physical and psychological trauma. In discussing how Welsh depicts Roy's unconscious confrontation with his traumatic memory, it is also useful to draw a link between Freud's psycho-analytical approach to the functions of narrative, and the systems of narrative style as posited by the narrative theorist Dorrit Cohn. Whilst not concerned with the practices of psychoanalysis per se, Cohn is particularly interested in psycho-narration and other narrative modes for representing consciousness. For this reason, his discussion of the function of the self-narrated monologue (a technique at play in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*) is particularly germane to my analysis of the novel. Cohn lucidly suggests that, 'Unable to cast a retrospective light on past experience, [the narrator] can only relive his dark confusions, perhaps in the hope of ridding himself of them'.[60] Cohn's concept of the 'dark confusions' is embodied by Roy's quest for the Marabou Stork, a quest which is hampered by narrative non-sequiturs and interruptions due to the fact that the stork, itself, represents the evil of Roy's crime, an evil he is not yet ready to face up to and which, moreover, he goes out of his way to avoid. The revelation, at the end of the novel, that Roy's physical affliction was not large ears but a large nose ('*Beaky* Strang', not 'Dumbo') exacerbates this idea that the Stork represents Roy himself: the vile corruption that needs to be, as Roy repeatedly insists, 'eradicated'.

The ways both protagonists use memory in their exilic states are starkly contrasting. Carl is desperate to eliminate false memories and retrieve lost memories and to follow

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[59] Sigmund Freud, 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, 12 (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 147-156 (p. 150).

[60] Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 168.

the signifying chains of his unconscious so that he can reconfigure his identity in order to escape exile and return to the 'waking world' of his homeland. Roy is desperate to preserve his false memories and fantasies to perpetuate his coma and *evade* the homeland. Despite this divergence, the structural models of memory that both Garland and Welsh use are surprisingly similar, representing a model of memory in which levels of consciousness lie in vertical relation to each other: the deeper the level, the more repressed the memory. I have discussed earlier how Welsh splits *Marabou Stork Nightmares* into three narrative voices, voices which are positioned in vertical relation to each other, with the voice of the narrative present being at the surface, the autobiographical memory being at the intermediary level, and the fantasy-quest lying at the deepest point of consciousness. It is this deepest point (the unconscious) that provides refuge for Roy, the place to which he goes when the truth of his exile comes knocking at his door:

> She looked so fuckin cool and proud   up   – Up a little bit, eh Roy?
> the way she danced, her hair aw sort   up   FUCK OFF
> ay long and flowing, her mouth in   up   I've seen faces, places,
> that pout that seemed tae spit out   up   And smiled for a moment,
> contempt for all the world, her   up   But oh
> lithe body twisting to the music.   up   You haunted me so.
> She hud that clinging top and   up   Still my tongue-tied
> short skirt on, the fuckin cock   up   Young pride
> teaser – – – deserved it up her – –   up   Would not let my love for you show
>   in case you'd say no.

> NO

> DEEPER

> DEEPER – – – – – Can't get deep enough to get at the Stork – – – –
> only her – – – – because we were all pretty out of it . . .
>   Aye.
>   We were all pretty out of it when we got back to Dempsey's. Lexo
> stuck a trip on her, and she was out of her nut. It was a crazy time. [61]

At this point of the novel, though, Roy struggles to move between layers and to hide within his Stork nightmares as he comes ever closer to the truth. The repetition of 'up' emphasises the magnetic pull towards an 'awakening', brought about by the intrusion of his mother's coma tape that plays a Matt Monroe song, and the involuntary insistence

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[61] Welsh, *Marabou*, p. 181. To accurately represent Welsh's use of *mise-en-page*, here, I have used a facsimile of a page from the novel.

of his memory to bring to an end his self-imposed exile. Welsh utilises the *mise-en-page* to represent how close the vertical layers of memory are coming together, with the diagonal 'up' string physically encroaching upon Roy's coma narrative, carrying the music and dialogue of the external homeland with them so that they are constantly threatening a return to the homeland. The closer Roy comes to this external reality, the less control he has over the layers of his mind to which he can travel. Previously, when an uncomfortable memory threatens his exile, he uses the command 'DEEPER' to find shelter from it within his fantasies – now, the command is losing its potency as the layers are moving closer together and becoming, in essence, a coherent narrative that unifies the fractured elements of Roy's psyche, therefore revealing the truth of his self-imposed exile. Welsh emphasises this reunification of selfhood through his use of language and dialect. Initially, as Roy embarks upon his quest for the Marabou Stork, his story is narrated in the style of a *Boy's Own* adventure story, with frequent exclamations in the vein of 'Gosh Sandy, you're a Hungry Horace today'[62] and 'Let's do the blighter!'.[63] The closer the layers of memory and consciousness move together, the closer Roy gets to his Scottish identity:

> Simply Devine, Patricia.
> Sidney Devine.
> I'll be back, Sandy.
> -Your Girlfriend looked nice. I hadn't seen her before. Still, I suppose I'm quite new on this ward.
> What girlfriend? Surely that fat hoor wisnae back. Some mistake surely. She'll be getting fucked by somebody else long ago and good riddance. And I gave that fuckin boot a ring. Fuckin joke. Go back tae Fathell, Dorie my love.
> No don't talk about her that way don't talk like that about Dorie who isnae real nowt's fuckin real
> Stay cool.[64]

The conflicting voices, represented by the fluid movement between Standard English and Scottish dialect, reveals Roy's fragmented identity and his desperation to repress the memories of his violent misogynistic behaviour that his Scottish self represents. However, these memories will not be easily forgotten (after all, they constitute his old identity, the unconscious Subject that was repressed, further, within the coma) and so they constantly attempt to catapult Roy toward a much-feared enlightenment: an

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[62] Welsh, *Marabou*, p. 7.
[63] Ibid., p. 13.
[64] Ibid., p. 38.

awakening and return from exile. Through this gradual reunification of the psyche, I argue that Lacanian theory can once more be adapted in order to further understand the nature of Roy's coma exile and how memory and language function within it.

The layers of consciousness that Welsh develops seem to represent Lacan's three 'realms': the Symbolic (the realm which contains language and the Other that holds 'all the rules and hypotheses that organise human society and thought');[65] the Imaginary (the realm that is created at the point at which the child recognises itself in the mirror and therefore begins to conceptualise itself as an other, using its body's image as a basis for the creation of the Ideal-I); and the Real (the most elusive realm to define where the unsymbolizable resides, constituted, perhaps, by the traumatic experience). Roy's quest narrative certainly embodies the Symbolic, the realm which also, Lacan proposes, harbours the unconscious due to the fact that it consists of repressed signifiers which form the 'true' self, the Subject. However, for much of the novel, he refuses to make the connections between these repressed signifying chains and interpret the metaphorical symbolization, thus sustaining his exile. It is at these points, when signification is about to occur (for example, when he comes close to confronting the elusive Marabou Stork), that he drifts back into the Imaginary realm. Here, he finds relative comfort in the autobiographical narration of the Object self which has created an 'Ideal' version of his life-story, therefore embellishing his Ego-identity, diluting the seriousness of his childhood abuse and involvement in the rape and projecting himself as a virile, violently macho and essentially 'imaginary' anti-hero. This implies that the surface level of narration, the level that Roy is so terrified of, represents the Real. Lacan said of this realm that it is 'something you find always at the same place. However you mess about, it is always in the same place, you bring it with you, stuck to the sole of your shoe without any means of exiling it'.[66] This is a significant use of the word 'exile' in light of the analysis of Roy's coma exile. The Real holds the source of 'absolute terror'[67] for Roy: the memory of the confrontation with death and, more specifically, death through suicide. The very act of 'self-murder' is an 'absolute terror' in that it perhaps signifies a much deeper, unsymbolizable truth: what drove the individual to suicide in the first place. It is worth noting that throughout all three narrative threads, Roy continually falls short of facing up to his suicide – it remains unsymbolizable so instead he avoids it altogether. Despite this, it continually lurks in the background, an

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[65] Lionel Bailly, *Lacan*, p. 222.
[66] Ibid., p. 99.
[67] Ibid., p. 100.

absolute terror that overshadows all of his attempts to hide within his coma from the outside world. Roy's coma, therefore, can be seen as an unravelling of Lacan's Borromean knot:
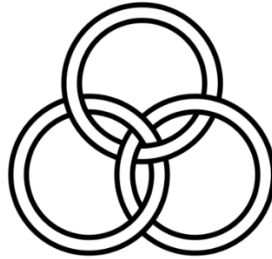
This is a structure representing the three realms and their mutual reliance upon each other for the knot to hold and for the three realms to maintain their perfect balance: if one knot comes undone, then so do the other two. However, with psychosis comes the unravelling of the knot with only the tiniest of threads holding together the three realms, yet the individual still clings to these threads, the tiny glimpses of meaning that can still be comprehended. In Roy's case, this unravelling is reflected in the frequent intrusions of multiple voices (as seen, above, with the Scottish voice impinging upon Roy's 'adopted' heroic identity within his stork fantasy) and the literality that Roy superimposes over his stork quest, refusing to interpret the metaphorical signifiers so that he can perpetuate his coma exile in an attempt to avoid the pressing shadow of the Real.

In Garland's novel, the vertical structure of memory is emphasized when Carl says: 'Waking is rising, and dreaming is sinking. You wake up, you fall asleep'.[68] This comment also emphasises Garland's approximation of the state of coma to the states of sleep and dream. Unlike his counterpart in Welsh's novel, Carl is desperate for a 'rising', as one would 'rise' from sleep – or even 'rise' from the dead (a metaphor in coma literature that I will discuss in greater detail in chapters three and four of this investigation). However, before this 'rising' can occur, Carl begins to develop, firstly, a certain amount of control over his coma – like Roy, he is able to move between the levels of consciousness by simply 'willing' it:

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[68] Garland, *The Coma*, [p. 109].

> And now that I *knew* I was dreaming, had become self-aware […] The place I was seeing was a sense of place. While I could sense it, I could see it. And if, as I shifted from one location to another, I could sense two places…
>
> If I could sense a bedroom and open curtains, but also sense a record shop, with strip lighting and shelves stacked with L.Ps, alphabetised…
>
> Then for a moment, curtains would blow open over the window of the record shop, and the vase of flowers would stand on the record shop counter.[69]

Carl creates this transition between memory scenes in a moment of empowerment, thereby negating the fear and panic he felt, earlier, when discussing his disjointed memory with Anthony. He begins to use this method of moving between the layers of his consciousness to try and locate memory triggers (the signifiers within particular chains, as discussed earlier) that will put an end to his exile. In the record shop he tries to find a piece of music that may draw him back to the homeland. This is both an interesting counterpoint to how Roy tries to resist surface music (a component of the Real, the traumatic world outside of coma) and a subversion of the image of the coma tape that Roy's mother plays and that, generally, is often used in coma treatment to try and present the victim with a sense of the familiar: a trigger for 'waking'. Here, Carl creates his own virtual 'coma tape' *within* the coma. However, this ability to control his memories is illusory, as the reader soon discovers when Carl begins to listen to a Little Richard record that should be familiar. Troublingly, far from being familiar, it becomes ever more alienating, the opening line of *Good Golly Miss Molly* constantly repeating throughout the song as this is the only line he has a memory of. It soon becomes apparent that Carl, instead of controlling memory, is, himself, being controlled by it. The scraps and islands of memory and the blank spaces in between only serve to bring him so far to the surface of his coma before, at their worst, sending him spiralling back into a black void of his unconscious (the deepest level in the vertical model) where the only trace of his identity is a disembodied voice that gibbers 'random words, strung together. Strings of words. Simple and unhinged. Without pattern, no looping, no meaningful repetitions'.[70]

This nadir of his exilic existence is initiated by following the trail of a certain signifying chain which he feels is sure to trigger a unification of his fragmented self: it is a trail that leads to a house he lived in as a child. Just as he appears close to breaking

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[69] Garland, *The Coma*, [p. 68].
[70] Ibid., [p. 116].

through 'the boundary of full consciousness',[71] he realises that the two figures he thought were his parents are again empty cyphers: blank, featureless silhouettes. This schism in such an important signifying chain (a chain that constitutes his status and identity within the family unit of the homeland) causes him to plummet into the darkest depths of the Subject, smashing any connections with the Ideal-I. Any Object-identification is made impossible by the fact that all he becomes is a 'consciousness' in a black void. In fact, he loses 'track of any understanding of physicality at all'.[72] At this deepest level of coma, not only does Carl lose sense of all physicality but this also leads to him losing language altogether, until eventually the 'strings of words' come back to him: 'BENT UNION TRACK OVER FINE CUBA ORE UNDER RED SORT ETHER INK TOKE INTRO SATURN NILE OR TRAP'.[73] Garland creates an idea of the Subject trying to reform signifying chains (almost like a 're-booting' of the brain) emphasizing the importance of language in order for Carl to unify his fragmented, exilic self. Even in these 'simple and unhinged' babblings, the signifying chains can be detected, reconfiguring themselves into an overall discourse of Carl's unconscious. For example, the words 'UNDER', 'ETHER' and 'TRAP' can signify the state of being exiled and alienated within a chronic disorder of consciousness. As Lacan proposes, language, even at phoneme level, is essential for the individual to listen to and comprehend the utterances that frequently emerge from his unconscious Subject. At this point of *The Coma*, this language chain, no matter how fragmented, helps Carl to reunify his identity and re-embark upon his journey out of exile. Once more, the reader sees how Garland represents memory and language as having the potential to free the coma exile but also the capability to perpetuate the exilic state forever.

2.4: *The Unassimilated Scraps*: Coma and the Unsymbolizable

The models of memory that both authors use adhere to the model of repression in Freudian psychology: 'What is repressed is pushed downwards, into the unconscious. The subject no longer has access to it'.[74] This lack of access to the unconscious is akin

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[71] Garland, *The Coma*, [p. 104].
[72] Ibid., [p. 112].
[73] Ibid., [p. 116].
[74] Bessel A. Van Der Kolk and Onno Van Der Hart, 'The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 158-182 (p. 168).

to Lacan's notion that direct access to the Subject is impossible. However, Lacan is not interested in a process of repression occurring within a vertical model of consciousness. Instead, he is much more concerned with horizontal models of repressed language signifiers that need to be traced in order to reach their signified meaning, a concept that is similarly explored in these novels. In psychoanalysis, of course, one way to access these repressed memories can be through dream-work, hypnosis or, more specifically, through hypnoanalysis in which hypnosis is employed in order to seek out the root cause of the problem, often stored deep within the unconscious. The coma, as described in these novels, is a model of the unconscious state within which the protagonists of both novels are forced to reside and where they can tap into the unconscious, accessing, rejecting and ultimately accepting the memories and fragments of experience that are at the root of their respective traumas: their exile within coma. In this sense, the coma is equated to a hypnotic trance in which the victims can attempt to recapture or reinterpret repressed memories through an abreactive process during which the repressed emotions are released by 'acting out' (through language, behaviour and the imagination) the memory-trace that is causing the conflict, in order to bring about an end to exile. Indeed, one could see the splitting of the self in both novels as the characters becoming their own psychoanalysts, their own guides to lead the way out of their exilic landscapes, regardless of whether this exodus is desired or not. In Roy's case, it is his journey through the hellish landscape of his quest narrative and the constant repetitions that he performs that once more serve to reunify the Borromean knot. He acts, however reluctantly, as his own psychoanalyst to help himself find signifiers for the unsymbolizable: his sexual violence and subsequent act of attempted suicide. At the point whereby Sandy turns the gun on him, he finally accepts his full involvement in the rape and his suicide attempt – he finally faces up to the unsymbolizable that conflicts so greatly with his heroic Ideal-I and re-written personal history that he has created in the Imaginary realm. It is at this point, therefore, where the rings of the Borromean knot are reunited, where Roy finally accepts the fact that he represents the stork, the vicious scourge of his coma fantasy, and that the action of Sandy shooting him represents his act of self-murder. In the same way as our own deaths are unsymbolizable (it is common in dreamscapes for the dreamer to awake immediately before the moment of death), Roy confronts his own death at the point when emergence from coma is reached. When he has finally located the source of his symptoms of psychosis he is able

to interpret the signifying chains of his unconscious and once more reunify the Borromean knot.

Similarly, there are several instances of abreactive interchanges in *The Coma*. Prior to the recognition and acknowledgement of the fact that he is in a coma, Carl interacts with characters within his coma dreams that play the role of 'spirit guides' to help lead him out of exile. Chief amongst these is the taxi driver who transports Carl between potential memory triggers and, moreover, who morphs into the Nurse who is instrumental in forcing Carl to confront his comatose self. All of the conversations that Carl has with the Cabbie are mediated through the taxi's rear-view mirror, or delivered to his profile as he drives the cab. In both situations, his face 'looks familiar', although Carl can never quite 'place it'. It follows that all of these characters are conjurations from Carl's unconscious. But they are also, inherently, manifestations of Carl himself and of various aspects of his fractured identity. Even the coma-version of Catherine, his girlfriend, is not really Catherine but rather a vessel that Carl can inhabit and speak through, appropriating a familiar face in order to create a trustworthy, inner psychoanalyst with whom he can cathartically discuss ideas and plans for a potential escape from exile. She also becomes a figure of the Lacanian Other, someone who represents the outside world with all of its mores and functions and habits. This Other/Catherine figure helps to generate a discourse of the unconscious which has the potential to guide Carl out of exile; significantly, it is Catherine who often suggests areas of memory which could possibly trigger an awakening for Carl. This is an Other, therefore, that Carl must re-assimilate if he ever wishes to return to the homeland and once more accept the rules of that homeland that govern his consciousness. The Cabbie, too, is a manifestation of part of Carl's unconscious self and so the two-way conversation in the rear-view mirror becomes ever more significant. Indeed, the notion of the mirror stage can be extended to this interchange with the Cabbie embodying the first mirror-gaze that occurs between a mother and child, an interchange in which the latter first becomes aware of itself. This connection between Carl and the Cabbie after all helps the former to confront his sense of self and gradually leads him to his secondary mirror stage as it is the Cabbie who guides Carl to the hospital. At this point, the Cabbie metamorphosizes into the Nurse who then leads him to the vision of himself in the hospital bed, in much the same way that the mother might lead the child to the mirror. In using the Cabbie as a guide towards various signifying chains, Garland aligns the pathways of the mind with the roadways of a city – Carl, with the guidance of the

Cabbie, follows the roads that connect his lost memories and signifying chains in order to escape the exile of coma.

In *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, Roy, too, has multiple guides out of coma. Unlike Carl, however, he doesn't always want to follow where they lead. Constantly, the voices of his guides are appropriated by the apparitions of his past in a desperate attempt to make him confront the truth at the heart of his coma. When meeting Dawson for the first time, for example, Roy's heroic sidekick and alter-ego, Sandy, begins 'rocking in his chair and letting out a low sound. –Mmmmm'.[75] Elsewhere, in the autobiographical narration, it is revealed that Elgin, Roy's autistic brother, exhibited similar behaviour when confronted with stressful situations. It seems that even the resilient Sandy is cowed by the oppressive dominance of Dawson to such an extent that he adopts the persona of Elgin in an unconscious attempt at condensation (as would occur in a dream) to force Roy into accepting the true nature of the abuse that his Uncle (in the guise of Dawson in these stork fantasies) subjected him to. But the Dawson figure is far more complex than being simply a screen memory for a traumatic childhood. He is also the character who charges Roy with the task to eradicate the Marabou Stork. In essence, Dawson is an unconscious creation designed to uncover both the seriousness of the child abuse and to guide Roy towards the quest that will, essentially, force him into hunting himself down. Roy, as discussed, ultimately metamorphosizes into the stork, the very quarry that he has been ordered, by Dawson, to eradicate, thus forcing him to confront the horrors that he has committed in the homeland and finally accept his identity as an abuser. It could be argued, in fact, that Garland and Welsh create paradigms of the Lacanian analyst as within his clinical practice, Lacan proposed that the analyst should speak as little as possible to the analysand, should not impose his own ego (through language) upon the patient. In this way, the patient will, in Lacan's words, 'reveal him to himself',[76] will confront and answer his own questions from the knowledge and memories that have always existed within the signifying chains of the unconscious.

The theories of the two psychotraumatologists, Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart, are perhaps important in bridging the gap between these abstract conceptions of coma and trauma, as present in these novels, and practical, clinical work. They posit that, 'In traumatized people, visual and motoric reliving of experiences, nightmares, flashbacks,

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[75] Welsh, *Marabou*, p. 53.
[76] Bailly, *Lacan*, p. 191.

and re-enactments seem to be preceded by physiological arousal'.[77] In Garland's novel, any reference to the influence of the outside world is omitted, yet in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, Roy's 'reliving of experiences' and, most appropriately, of 'nightmares' is frequently triggered by external influences. At one point, the perfume of his rape victim is enough to 'pull' him out of his quest narrative to the surface of his coma where he becomes aware of the victim, herself, looming over him, teasing him and kissing his cheek. Despite desperately trying to go 'DEEPER', he is unable to escape the repressed memories of his crime (the physical scent of the perfume within the Real becomes unsymbolizable), and so instead, he is forced once more to move closer towards a revelation of the truth. However, both Garland and Welsh depict pivotal moments whereby 'physiological arousal' actually succeeds (rather than 'precedes') a 'reliving of experience' as both characters physiologically leave the exile of coma following the moment whereby they reassimilate the flashbacks, memories and language signifiers that previously remained elusive. It is these stages when selfhood is 'reunified' that finally prove to be the catalysts for an escape from exile. In Roy's case, as discussed, it is the acceptance of his guilt and subsequent suicide that begins the return to the homeland; in Carl's case, it is the opening of his work briefcase and the reading of the enclosed documents that brings him out of coma – he confronts what he does as a career which identifies one of his 'roles' that he plays in the homeland. In both cases, the abreactive process reaches a conclusion with both Roy and Carl successfully 'psycho-analysing' themselves, through the adoption of alter-egos, memory-apparitions and confrontations with the Other which allow them to reintegrate the 'unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences'[78] that Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart refer to in their theories of traumatic memory.

But the exilic state of coma and the manipulative power of memory are not just communicated by the authors through narrative technique. As mentioned, Welsh plays with the concrete structure of the novel, the *mise-en-page*, to represent visually the exile of the coma and the fine line between reality and fantasy. It is important to note that Garland, too, uses unconventional presentation techniques to achieve the same outcome. The lack of pagination, for example, denotes a lack of specificity so that just as Carl is alienated by the collapsing, kaleidoscopic patterns of his exilic coma dreams, the reader is alienated to some extent by the fluidity of the unnumbered pages of the

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[77] Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart, 'The Intrusive Past, p. 174.
[78] Ibid., p. 176.

novel itself. Most interesting, though, is the use of monochrome, abstract illustrations, woodcuts created by the author's father, Nicholas Garland. These clearly make visual the nature of Carl's exile, whilst highlighting the rupture in memory that has occurred within the exilic state. The images depict silhouettes of specific episodes of the coma dreams, yet the images are conspicuous in their absolute lack of specificity: facial features blacked out in cameo-style woodcuts; landscapes and cityscapes depicted from skewed angles that are evocative of German-expressionist films, or points of view that obscure scenic and personal detail; and, in one extraordinary sequence, solid black pages that represent the nadir (previously discussed) of Carl's exile, as he sinks into the blankness of his unconscious, reduced to a voice without a body and without sensation. The reverse of each image is given a blank page, due to the saturation of ink devoted to each illustration, so that the image 'bleeds' through the page. However, this in itself leads to a strange and significant effect. The bleed itself might be seen to represent the vague memories that surface from Carl's unconscious – visible, yes, but just out of range of full recognition: signifying chains that persistently evade full comprehension. In this way, the illustrations reflect Said's theories of how memory exacerbates the exilic state: that once exiled, the distant memory of what once was will always be with the exile, no matter how distant, no matter how vague, and this will inexorably shape the attempts to forge a new existence within a new environment. In other words, the ghosts of memory (represented by the image bleeds) always haunt the subject, acting as constant reminders of exile. However, in *The Coma*, the images themselves, when viewed in their full glory, are equally vague and do not provide explanations of their ghost-images which again implies that the exilic state can never be overcome as posited by Said: that no matter how hard the individual works to conquer exile, and no matter how accustomed to it he feels, exile's 'unsettling force erupts anew',[79] thereby perpetuating the feeling of exile.

The experimentation with form, in both novels, can be explicated by Anne Whitehead when she writes that 'novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse'.[80] In the case of Garland and Welsh's novels, the authors have clearly adopted unconventional techniques to try to describe the traumatic and exilic state of coma. They are, in fact, trying to create a form through

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[79] Said, 'Reflections', p. 186.
[80] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 3.

which they can attempt to express the inexpressible: the unconsciousness of the coma-state. However, this is inevitably impossible to achieve as the meaning of the form can only be wholly deciphered through language itself. For example, Welsh's techniques of *mise-en-page* to represent physically his model of vertical layers of the coma state are not, in themselves, imbued with meaning through the form alone – they rely upon the reader's understanding of the words 'DEEPER' and 'UP' for the form to take on meaning.

   This impossibility of representing the unrepresentable, the largely unknown world of the interior coma experience, is perhaps why both Garland and Welsh adopt concepts of fantastical dreamscapes through which they attempt to communicate the coma experience. Indeed, in an interview with *The Guardian* from 2004, Garland commented that, 'I spent a lot of time wondering why dreams are so tricky in a narrative. There is something rather naff about talking about dreams. This in itself is something that pushed a button in me because it felt like a taboo or something'.[81] This statement, as alluded to in chapter one, omits all reference to the condition of coma, and yet this is the condition around which the novel purports to be centred. Furthermore, neither novelist concerns themselves with the real-life issues of coma and the exilic nature of post-coma survival in the homeland to which the patient has returned. Garland, superficially, pays lip service to the possibility that his protagonist may have a brain injury, but this is soon brushed over (as addressed in chapter one). Welsh (also reflecting Garland's obsession with the dreamscape of the unconscious through his constant references to nightmares) never once entertains the possibility that brain injury could have been sustained for his protagonist, despite the fact that he has been within his coma for three years. When Roy awakes, he appears to awake with full cognition intact, in the 'light switch' moment that Johansen criticises.

   Both Garland and Welsh clearly explore how memory affects the traumatic and exilic condition of the victim in fictive approximations of coma that draw upon what the authors understand about the unconscious, which seems to be based upon what psychoanalysis has taught us. This is perhaps why various manifestations of psychoanalytical theory can be so broadly applied to the texts – because these discourses that explore the nature of the unconscious are the closest referents that each novelist has to coma. In the following chapter, I will continue to explore how authors

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[81] Tim Adams, 'Coma Chameleon', *Guardian.co.uk* (27 June 2004)
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/jun/27/fiction.features2> [accessed 23/01/2011], (Para. 9).

build upon existing models of the unconscious and of wider mythologies and symbolism (most notably resurrection and katabatic tales, themselves embodying exilic narratives) in an attempt to mediate the abstract and unknowable state of the unconsciousness of coma.

3:*Why, This Is Hell*. Coma and the Katabatic Archetype.

Then he remembered that death had taken him to pieces, that he was conscious of being the mud and soil, that no mythological personages had greeted or punished him.

- Peter Redgrove, *In the Country of the Skin*

3.1: Introduction

Toward the end of Nikos Kazantzakis's contemporary and controversial re-imagining of the story of Christ, *The Last Temptation*, one famous episode is rendered in a particularly visceral style. The episode in question is the raising of Lazarus from the dead, a biblical story that is significant in this discussion of the literature of coma. Indeed, both the story and image of Lazarus are frequently alluded to in a range of coma texts, as are references to resurrection in general, alongside imagery of 'hellish' descent or *katabasis*. This use of the Lazarus story to describe the coma-state is apparent throughout literature, not least in Robert Mawson's bestselling novel, *The Lazarus Child,* which follows the Heywood family's struggle to cope with their 7-year-old son's coma following a road traffic accident.[1] Internet searches will reveal other, varied examples of this comparison between the resurrection of Lazarus and coma, from discussions of whether the biblical figure was truly dead or in a coma on faith forums,[2] or even news articles using the Lazarus designation to describe victims who suddenly 'arise' from the 'death-state' of coma.[3]

Over the course of the next two chapters, I will be exploring the links between classical and traditional tales of katabasis and coma literature, drawing upon the theories of archetypal psychology and narratology to create a framework against which this symbiosis of coma and descent/resurrection can be elucidated. I will also look closely at the manifestations of the topography of the underworld in specific works of both coma fiction and non-fiction, mapping the journeys of coma-protagonists through these psychological places of the underworld against traditional and mythological geographies.

In this chapter, I will first explicate Judeo-Christian tales of katabasis, drawing parallels between the stories of Lazarus and Christ and works of coma literature. For the

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[1] Robert Mawson, *The Lazarus Child* (London: Bantam Books, 1999).

[2] Gary Demar, 'Does Science Explain Everything?' *American Vision* (2005) <http://americanvision.org/1211/does-science-explain-everything-part-2/#.UAfmdLR5GSo> [accessed 18/07/12] (para. 2).

[3] Joel Kontinen, 'Modern Day Lazarus: Man Regains Full Consciousness After 23 Years in Coma', *Wryte Stuff* (2009) <http://jkontinen.wrytestuff.com/swa558023-Modern-Day-Lazarus-Man-Regains-Full-Consciousness-After-23-Years-In-Coma.htm> [accessed 17/07/12].

purposes of this discussion, when referring to the various depictions of the underworld of Greco-Roman tradition, I will use the designation *Hades*, and the capitalized *Hell* when referring to the underworld of Christian thought. However, because of the locus of both, I will use the term *underworld* as a general term to describe the subterranean place to which all of the katabatic heroes discussed, herein, descend. Similarly, I will use 'hellish' as an adjectival umbrella term to describe general depictions of the underworld.[4]

3.2: *A Pleasant Time in Hades*: **Trauma and the Underworld**

Kazantzakis's revisioning of the Lazarus story is significant to this discussion of coma and resurrection in that the imagery he uses to render the tale can be seen in works of coma literature, both non-fiction and fiction. But before looking more closely at Kazantzakis's interpretation as a model against which representations of the Lazarus story in coma literature can be mapped, it is useful to examine first the source material as it appears (albeit briefly) in John 11: 43 – 44:

> And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

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[4] The concepts of Hades and Hell are united by the fact that in both Greco-Roman and Christian tradition, their location is beneath the earth – they are both conceived as an 'underworld'. However, traditionally the Christian Hell is seen to be a place where sinners are punished, whereas Hades is seen to be a place where all souls reside. The deepest level of Hades, Tartarus, is the one zone where transgressors (usually transgressors against the gods) are punished. This being said, there is certainly interchangeability between the terms 'Hades' and 'Hell'. Indeed, in certain versions of the Bible, 'Hades' is used rather than the designation 'Hell', and in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus of c.425AD which details Christ's 'harrowing' of Hell, a conversation between Satan and the Greco-Roman god Hades, himself, is imagined. It must be noted that up until this 'harrowing', Hell was also a place where all souls went to, regardless of whether or not they were sinners, reflecting both Hades and the Sheol of Hebrew scripture. Indeed, when the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek in c.200BC, the underworld of 'Sheol' was translated into 'Hades' and likewise in modern translations of the Bible, 'Hades' was substituted for 'Hell' (from the Old High German and Old English verb *helan*, meaning 'to conceal'). Once more, the connection to Hades can be made as Hades, himself, in Greco-Roman culture, was invisible, with very few physical depictions of him. James Hillman explains that he was a 'hidden presence', whilst tracing an etymological investigation into the name Hades which, he notes, can be translated as 'the hider' or 'the unseen one'. For further discussion of the etymological and cultural development of Hades/Hell, see Richard N. Longenecker in *The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible*, ed. Donald E. Gowan (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2003), pp. 188-190, James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), pp. 27-32 and Rachel Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, pp. 18-20.

> And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.[5]

The grammatical use of the past simple which implies a completed, unalterable past action in the sentence 'he that was dead' suggests that Jesus brings Lazarus back from the dead, and so has transformed a corpse into a living being once more. Indeed, beyond his own resurrection, this instance of raising Lazarus is the only example of resurrection throughout the four gospels. There is the account of the raising of the daughter of Jairus in Mark 5, but significantly, the language attributed to Jesus is markedly different to the previous passage from John: 'And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth'.[6] These two Biblical sources clearly make the grammatical and physical distinction between the sleep-state and the death-state, despite the fact that they are often seen to be synonymous with each other throughout metaphorical, literary imagery and within mythological tales: in Greek mythology, Hypnos, the god of sleep, is the twin brother of Thanatos, the god of death, and both reside alongside Hades in the underworld over which he rules and which takes his name. Similarly in coma literature, the victim appears to be at once asleep and dead. As previously discussed, this phenomenon can be seen in the novels of both Welsh and Garland whereby the protagonists variably refer to their comas as death states and dreamscapes from which they try to initiate either their 'resurrection' or 'awakening'.

Kazantzakis, however, takes the Lazarus story and radically reinterprets it, building on the notion that this is a resurrection in its truest sense (not just a stirring from a deep sleep) and extrapolating all of the possible consequences of this highly significant event in the life of Christ that takes up such little space within the Bible. Thus, rather than breathing life into the dead, Kazantzakis's Christ merely reanimates the dead. Lazarus, in this sense, becomes an early embodiment of that most staple figure of contemporary horror: the zombie. Martin Scorsese's film adaptation of the novel, *The Last Temptation of Christ*,[7] plays on this conceit by using generic conventions of horror, visually representing the stench of the corpse with even Willem Dafoe's Christ appearing disgusted at his own actions of bringing a corpse back into the land of the living as Lazarus's rotting hand thrusts violently out of the darkened cave in a biblical 'jumping cat' moment.

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[5] *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, The Gospel According to St. John, 11: 43-44.
[6] *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, The Gospel According to St. Mark, 5: 39.
[7] *The Last Temptation of Christ,* dir. Martin Scorsese (Universal, USA and Canada, 1988).

Kazantzakis's sensibilities become even more apparent upon further examination of the section in his novel that describes the aftermath of the resurrection, an event that is only touched upon in the Bible. Lazarus sits 'in the darkest corner of the house', his body 'swollen and green', his face 'bloated' and '[exuding] a yellowish-white liquid' like a 'four-day corpse'. Initially, he had 'stunk terribly' and any visitors he had 'held their noses'. Attached to him are 'small earthworms'.[8] Kazantzakis's imagery is immediately striking, grounded in the language of rot and decay, detailing the degradation of the body and a physical transfiguration that is in stark opposition to Christ's only days later. Even Lazarus's 'stench' can only be covered up and superficially concealed with incense, the predominant scent being 'of earth'.[9] Lazarus's process of returning to the earth (the transition from flesh to dust) has been interrupted and, I suggest, the sensation of this interruption will remain with him forever, etched into his physical self and his psyche. The stench of rot that is superficially concealed may, in time, dissipate; his wounds that have degraded his body may heal; and the worms that cling to him may eventually leave, but the memory and the feeling of his interrupted death will never leave him. Back from the grave, Lazarus is permanently trapped within an earthly limbo in which he is neither dead nor quite fully alive. In Kazantzakis's reimagining of the story, he is reduced to little more than a resurrected corpse, a macabre curio at which his fellow villagers can gawp and marvel in equal measures. Lazarus has performed a *katabasis*, a word derived from the Greek, originally referring to 'any physical descent, through a cave mouth or other such entrance, into the earth'.[10] During the katabatic journey, the hero travels to the underworld, before returning to the 'overworld',[11] days or even hours later. Once back in this land of the living, the katabatic hero will have changed inexorably, their experience of being within the underworld impacting upon them forever. As will be discussed here, much of coma literature, and fiction in particular, mimetically employs this model of descent/resurrection/transfiguration, often overtly alluding to the Lazarus story and the changes that the protagonist undergoes. In the case of Kazantzakis's Lazarus, these changes appear to be purely physical but it soon becomes increasingly

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[8] Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Last Temptation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 382.

[9] Ibid., p. 382.

[10] Rachel Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 19.

[11] For the purpose of this inquiry, I will use Falconer's designation 'overworld' to refer to 'earth', or the world outside of coma, rather than the term 'upperworld', as this, in traditional and classical terms, may refer to any number of realms 'above' the underworld, Purgatory and Heaven included. See *Hell in Contemporary Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press, 2007).

apparent that in *The Last Temptation* (and, indeed, in The Bible), Lazarus does not speak about his ordeal. Moreover, in Kazantzakis's version, it seems as though Lazarus refuses to speak, as evidenced when he is visited by the blind village-chief who asks, laughing: "'Did you have a pleasant time in Hades?'", before going on to warn Lazarus not to reveal 'all the secrets of the underworld'. [12] However, despite this caution, the old man can't seem to help himself, leaning over to Lazarus and saying: "'Worms, eh? Nothing but worms…?'", [13] in an attempt to coax some of these 'secrets' from Lazarus. When Lazarus does not answer, and after waiting 'a considerable time', the old man becomes 'enraged'. [14]

The dichotomy that the villagers are experiencing is embodied by the blind chief: they don't want to learn of Lazarus's travails in the underworld, but at the same time are desperate for that knowledge. This contradictory state of consciousness is reflected in the old man's language, not least in his apparent harmonization of the concepts of 'hellish' descent and 'luck', declaring: "'You're a lucky fellow, Lazarus'". [15] Moreover, the implication, in his elliptical, unfinished question about the worms, is that no sooner has the old man warned Lazarus against revealing the secrets of his katabasis, than he is probing Lazarus about the very same secrets he, seconds earlier, purported to want to know nothing about. His probing implies that he sees the external, physical evidence of the worms as creatures from the underworld that have returned with Lazarus, forcing him to want to know more about Hell. It is Lazarus's refusal to speak, even after this less than subtle and contradictory pressure, that causes the blind man to 'become enraged' and leave abruptly: because he is being refused the knowledge that he both desires and fears. But Lazarus's silence, in itself, provides another key motif. Unlike in the Bible, Lazarus is given the opportunity to speak but seemingly refuses or perhaps, more accurately, he does not have the language to express what he has witnessed and experienced. Falconer touches upon this when discussing the witness testimony of the katabatic hero: 'The wisdom acquired on the underworld journey cries out to be shared, yet at the same time it is unspeakable; it cannot be communicated'. [16] The katabatic journey, therefore, can be seen in terms of a traumatizing experience with the trauma of the descent into the underworld being resistant to language and narrative structures. For both the katabatic hero and the trauma survivor, the traumatic event is insufficiently

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[12] Kazantzakis, *The Last Temptation*, p. 382.
[13] Ibid.,, p. 382.
[14] Ibid., p. 382.
[15] Ibid., p. 382.
[16] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, p. 51.

understood as it occurs and so becomes unspeakable, whilst simultaneously possessing and haunting consciousness. It follows that Lazarus's descent to and ascent from the underworld can represent a Freudian traumatic departure, a journey which cannot be comprehended as it occurs and which cannot be communicated immediately in language.

I suggest that this model of katabatic trauma is pertinent to my analysis of the condition of coma. As discussed, most often the survivor of coma has no recollection of what has occurred within coma, despite having the awareness that they have been trapped within this 'underworld' of the unconscious. But also frequently, coma survivors, due to brain injury, may have the physical inability to communicate their ordeal. This 'hellish' medical condition (the descent into and return from coma) is thereby unspeakable on several levels. Returning to the description of Lazarus's post-resurrection condition, the reference to him sitting in the dark, 'for light bothered him', becomes particularly fascinating. Rather than this being a purely physical affliction (an over-sensitivity to light brought on by being too long in the tomb), it begins to represent his traumatized psyche. His journey into Hell has exiled him from the overworld, represented by the synecdoche 'light'. Lazarus has consequently brought some of the underworld back with him during his traumatic transfiguration and return from the land of the dead. In coma literature, and particularly in those texts that focus upon the victim's emergence from coma, this concept of traumatic transfiguration is similarly explored, with the survivor of coma having to come to terms with the changes that have impacted upon his fragmented, 'resurrected' self.

3.3: *Practising Death*: Coma, Katabasis, Hell, Resurrection

All traditional tales of descent into and return from the underworld are stories of katabasis that incorporate a form of resurrection, so that even Christ's death and subsequent resurrection constitutes a katabatic journey, possibly the ultimate archetype of descent. For this reason, the theories of Jung and the post-Jungian theorist James Hillman are useful, both developing theories of mind that prioritise the role of cultural and social archetypes in shaping the psyche. Indeed, when discussing how the story of Christ has contributed to the development of the collective psyche, Hillman explains that:

> The underworld would be wiped out not at the end of time; it had already
> been destroyed. Christ's dying and resurrection was absorbed by the
> classical mythologem of the *nekyia*, now not a journey, but a
> *descensuskampf*,[17] for Christ harrows hell, and in one version, forces
> Thanatos to hide behind his own throne.[18]

In this way, Hillman continues, Christ is seen to be greater than 'the greatest of man-gods, Hercules'. Despite being able to force Hades from his throne in a fight that embodies a clash between the flesh of the overworld and the shadow of the underworld, Heracles (to use the traditional Greek name, rather than the Roman 'Hercules') comes nowhere near the heights of Christ's greatest triumph: conquering the entire kingdom of Hell, even obliterating death itself for all future generations and also, from this point forth, making Hell synonymous with sin and not just a place, described in earlier mythology, where all the dead go. This, Hillman argues, has had a huge impact upon the development of archetypes within the post-Christian psyche. The notion of Christ's katabasis (or *nekyia*) is further discussed by Northrop Frye in artistic terms, noting that the Hell into which Christ descends is 'often portrayed, especially in fresco, as the body of a huge dragon or shark, which he enters by the mouth, like his prototype Jonah',[19] thus linking the story of glorious katabasis from the New Testament to another tale of Judeo-Christian descent from the Old Testament.

I propose that the fascination with the medical condition of coma into which the victim 'descends' and from which he returns 'transfigured' is a natural development of the fascination with ancient katabatic tales. As I will illustrate, in many works of fiction (and also in some works of non-fiction) the coma is equated with the death-state, often appropriating imagery and narrative threads from a range of katabatic tales from classical and late antiquity. Baldly, coma and the death-state become synonymous because of the mysteries that surround them and the lack of empirical evidence of what occurs 'beyond' these liminal states. We find, then, authors employing katabatic tropes and archetypes in order to try to explicate a medical phenomenon that has only been

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[17] Traditionally, a *nekyia* was an ancient Greek practice in which the spirits of the underworld were summoned and communed with, in order to gain knowledge of the future. It is distinguished from a *nekyomanteia* in that the latter is a mere summoning of the dead, whereas an actual descent (a *katabasis*) has to occur for a *nekyia* to take place. The *nekyia* will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. The *descensuskampf* refers to Christ's harrowing of Hell, his *descensus ad inferos*, during which Christ conquered Hell, rather than merely travelled through it.
[18] James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 87.
[19] Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harbinger, 1963), pp. 62-63.

explored within the modern era. After all, it is within the last 30 years, with advancements in technology such as life support machines, CT, and MRI scans, that survival from coma (the return journey of this medical katabasis) has increased. Indeed, Robert P. Granacher points, in particular, to the identification of primary and secondary brain injury 'in the three decades from the 1970s to the 1990s'[20] as being a key contributing factor towards the increase in survival rates of the victims of coma and brain injury. If authors are using motifs of the katabatic narrative to explore the state of coma, it follows that not only is coma being viewed as a death-state, but it is also being considered as an ultimate, infinitely modern incarnation of the underworld. Coma is seen as a psychic 'underworld' into which the victim descends, his body steadily degrading in the overworld, as if it has, to all intents and purposes, 'died'. Outside of the victim, the inhabitants of the overworld are hoping for a 'miracle' and for the victim's psyche (or 'soul', as Hillman would posit) to rise again, triggering a resurrection in the medical sense.

This fascination with descent/return is nothing new, of course, as testified to by the number of katabatic tales available to us, several of which I will be referring to throughout this chapter. What is most noticeable, however, is wherever there is a katabatic tale that has been largely unexplored or incomplete in some way, there are retrospective writings that attempt to bridge these narrative gaps. In the case of Christ's descent, the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos*, an account appears, strikingly, in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* written around the fifth or the sixth century. It is useful to examine this text of the apocrypha in order to trace the historical development of the figure of Lazarus and his 'story', focusing especially upon how his katabatic trauma is represented. In doing this, parallels between the traumatic experience of Lazarus and the experiences of katabatic heroes of coma literature soon become clear.

As J.K. Elliott notes in the introduction to his translation of the Gospel of Nicodemus, 'The motive for the original composition was to satisfy the curiosity of those who found the canonical biblical writings inadequate',[21] a need mimicked by Kazantzakis's old villager who is desperate to know more of Lazarus's journey to the underworld, and also mirrored perhaps by authors of coma fiction who use the katabatic motif to explore and narrate the elusive medical experience of coma. In this version of the *Descensus* in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, a conversation between Hades and Satan is

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[20] Robert P. Granacher, *Traumatic Brain Injury: Methods for Clinical and Forensic Neuropsychiatric Assessment* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2008), p. 1.
[21] J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 165.

imagined, with Hades, the Lord of the Dead, expressing his abject fear at the prospect of Christ descending into his kingdom. He professes that, 'When I heard then the command of his word I trembled with fear and dread',[22] referring to the point at which he heard Jesus's order to release Lazarus from the underworld. Lazarus, in fact, plays a prominent role within this text, representing the first member (as described in the Gospel of St. Matthew) of the 'walking dead' who arise from the grave at the point of Christ's death on the cross. In short, Lazarus is depicted as the harbinger of Christ's subsequent glorious transfiguration. This version of the harrowing of Hell and the defeat of Hades and Satan purportedly comes from the witness testimony of two such figures similarly raised from the dead on the day of the crucifixion, Karinus and Leucius. Their story alone presents the reader with a plethora of motifs of the 'traumatic condition' of resurrection.

On hearing that Karinus and Leucius have arisen from the dead, several of the villagers, including Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus himself, race to try and find them both and interrogate them about their katabatic journey, in much the same way as the blind villager interrogates Lazarus in Kazantzakis's novel:

> Hearing this oath, Karinus and Leucius trembled in body, and being troubled in heart, groaned. And together, looking to heaven, they made the sign of the cross with their fingers upon their tongues and immediately spoke together and said, 'Give to each of us sheets of paper and let us write what we have seen and heard.' So they gave the paper to them. And they sat down and each wrote as follows…[23]

Like Lazarus, these two members of the 'walking dead' (for that is always what they will be known as and famed for) cannot express the experience of their katabasis and subsequent knowledge of Hell in spoken language, their state of 'being troubled at heart' conveying their traumatized state. When prompted on oath to speak of their ordeal, they can only 'groan', an utterance that appears, superficially, to be rather pathetic yet which conveys an anguished subversion of language itself and which fully emphasises the struggle to communicate the incommunicable: their experience of dwelling within the underworld and being wrenched out of it. They can only finally express their journey into Hell when given paper to write upon, the process of writing creating a certain distancing between experience and expression. Both Leucius and

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[22] 'The Gospel of Nicodemus' (Latin A text) in *The Apocryphal New Testament,* trans. J.K. Elliott, 4 (3), p. 192.
[23] Ibid., p. 191.

Karinus feel impelled to narrate their experience, just as those around them feel impelled to hear their story narrated and their 'hellish' trauma translated into language. The act of writing that the two katabatic heroes undertake therefore becomes a microcosmic embodiment of the traumatic departure. In the temporal space between return from Hell and setting pen to paper (the 'latency period' of this particular katabasic journey), traumatic neurosis takes hold. Thus, in the act of writing about their trauma, the two resurrected men begin to repeat and 'work through' their trauma, the written word granting them a 'voice' through which they can attempt to express their trauma. For the victim, as Kalí Tal posits, 'Trauma is enacted in a liminal state, outside of the bounds of "normal" human experience', and therefore, 'The horrific events that have reshaped the author's construction of reality can only be described in literature, not recreated'.[24] For the katabatic hero, trauma occurs in the ultimate liminal space of the underworld. Whilst Lazarus cannot communicate his ordeal, Leucius and Karinus 'describe' the events of their trauma (as 'reported' in the Gospel itself) but still cannot fully 'recreate' the emotional and psychic disturbance of their katabasis.

This desperate need (and difficulty) to communicate the incommunicable is apparent in the attempts to narrate the descent into coma in both fiction and (more rarely) non-fiction. To illustrate the appropriation of the Lazarus story and the motifs of katabasis as a whole within coma texts, I would like to begin by looking at two poems. The first is the semi-autobiographical poem, 'Lady Lazarus' by Sylvia Plath. In this poem, the narrator shares her frustrations over being successively rescued from her death-state after each of her suicide attempts. Plath's imagery is akin to that used by Kazantzakis, with references to, 'The flesh | The grave cave ate', the 'eye pits', the 'sour breath', and the 'Worms […] like sticky pearls'.[25] As in *The Last Temptation*, the imagery describes the corruption of the body and the effects of descent, rather than a glorious transfiguration, emphasizing the intrusive presence of the grave-worms that continue to attach themselves to the narrator. However, unlike the physical worms that crawl over Kazantzakis's Lazarus, Plath's worms are metaphorical imaginings of the narrator who sees herself as the risen 'living dead', a contemporary interpretation of the resurrected Lazarus. The poet amplifies the use of this biblical archetype further by transferring the spiritual power of God to the interfering medical profession, depicting a scientifically

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[24] Kalí Tal, *Worlds of Hurt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.15 / p. 121
[25] Sylvia Plath, 'Lady Lazarus' in *Ariel: The Restored Edition* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), pp. 14-15.

explicable resurrection that also initiates a form of transfiguration: 'Out of the ash | I rise with my red hair | And I eat men like air'.[26]

The Lazarus story is used as a metaphor for the narrator's return from the death-state, a resurrection that leads to this ominous threat and mythical phoenix-like transfiguration which promises to enact violence and revenge upon the oppressive paternalistic society that refuses the narrator the right to die and fully inhabit the underworld.

The second poem, a predecessor to Plath's (and perhaps an influence upon it through the poet's friendship with Plath and Ted Hughes) has more of an explicit connection to the coma condition. In 'Lazarus and the Sea', Peter Redgrove uses the image of Lazarus to allude to his own coma experiences that were particularly traumatic. Redgrove, whilst subjected to 'an organised programme of bullying and humiliation'[27] during his National Service basic training, suffered a breakdown after which he was hospitalized and diagnosed with incipient schizophrenia. After being transferred to a civilian hospital, he then underwent Deep Insulin Coma Therapy (DICT), a brutal cycle of treatment during which comas were induced in patients over the duration of five or six days a week, each coma lasting up to fifteen minutes. Within deep coma, patients would enter a state in which they lost their muscle tension and corneal and pupillary reflexes before having their system flooded with glucose to bring them out of, 'The life-threatening hypoglycaemic state'.[28] As Neil Roberts points out, about one per cent of patients died from the treatment and more suffered permanent brain damage. However, it was normal practice to continue the treatment until fifty to sixty comas had been induced.

'Lazarus and the Sea' paints a traumatic picture of DICT in which Redgrove sees the coma as a death-state, an organic shadow-world where his body is welcomed and exalted by nature. This vision is complicated, though, by the opening of the fourth stanza where Redgrove writes, 'I could say nothing of where I had been', yet goes on to assert that he, '[…] knew the soil in my limbs and the rain-water | In my mouth…'.[29] The poet acknowledges that his descent into coma triggers a void in consciousness, a 'nothingness' in experience, yet at the same time he tries to navigate through this void by using the language and imagery available to him which is initially grounded in tangible concepts of burial and decay. The further the poem develops, the more complex

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[26] Sylvia Plath, 'Lady Lazarus', p. 17.
[27] Neil Roberts, *A Lucid Dreamer: The Life of Peter Redgrove* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2012), p.36.
[28] Ibid., p. 45.
[29] Peter Redgrove, 'Lazarus and the Sea' in *Selected Poems* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), p. 7.

Redgrove's imagery becomes, creating a network of mythological and archetypal references that the poet knits together in an attempt to narrate and perhaps 'rationalise' this rupture in consciousness brought on by the induced coma. Moving on from this somewhat conventional imagery of decay within the earth, Redgrove writes that, '[…] The knotted roots | would have entered my nostrils', and that, 'Many gods like me would be laid in the ground | Dissolve and be formed again in this pure night'.[30] This suggests that the coma becomes a gateway through which one can reach a pagan ritual of death and re-birth, the narrator's body sublimated by nature in preparation for a re-forming of self or transfiguration, even a 'reincarnation' or 'deification'. In this death-state, Redgrove becomes a god consumed by the earth ready to be born again. However, the use of the past conditional 'would have' reinforces this notion that he has no recollection of where he has travelled to (as testified to, earlier, by the opening line of the stanza), yet he asserts that he has a certain 'knowledge' of his journey into the earth, a katabasis at the end of which he has been transfigured in some way making him 'god-like'. In the same way that he uses archetypal imagery of bodily decay in the earth, Redgrove now uses archetypal imagery of pagan rebirth and reincarnation, and it is the speculative past conditional that suggests that he is merely filling in the gaps of his coma experience with potential mythological concepts and stories. In other words, he creates an imagined narrative of katabasis and transfiguration in order to navigate through the trauma, not only of the cruel medical treatment, but of the void in consciousness that this has left him with. This is a particularly shattering form of katabatic 'knowledge' as it forces Redgrove to confront the fact that there may be no life after death; that the void in consciousness triggered by the death-state of coma is simply a forerunner to the eternal void of consciousness that might follow death. Redgrove explores this further when he writes: 'But where was the boatman and his gliding punt? | The judgement and the flames?' and describes being 'uprooted'. He then questions what brought him back from coma: 'And what judgement tore me to life?'.[31] The violence of the language, the imagery of being 'torn' from the coma and 'uprooted' (literally wrenched from his re-assimilation into nature) reflects the pernicious process of the treatment (the so-called 'judgement' being controlled by the medical staff administering the DICT) but also connects with Kazantzakis's reinterpretation of the original Lazarus story. The narrator shares Lazarus's anguish and reticence about being

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[30] Redgrove, 'Lazarus and the Sea', p. 7.
[31] Ibid., p. 7.

brought back from the dead, not least because of the painful interruption of his journey into the underworld that has cruelly halted his corporeal and spiritual metamorphosis. However, it soon becomes clear that even this is a construction born out of his narrative powers in order not to face the true horror of his katabasis: that at the heart of his inner underworld lies nothing. In this way, the poems of both Redgrove and Plath convey Kazantzakis's notion of the interruption that occurs post-resurrection: the schism that is opened up by aborting the death process, resulting in the victim coming back into consciousness but as a being that is now neither dead, nor fully living. This notion can also be seen in Redgrove's earlier imagery of feeling the 'soil' in his 'limbs'. Like Kazantzakis's creation, Redgrove's Lazarus is still alive, and yet has brought back with him elements of the underworld (the soil into which he imagines he has been interred) in a similar way to how the Lazarus of *The Last Temptation* still smells of soil, still has the grave-worms clinging to him.

Even his burial 'shroud' has 'stuck to his body' and cannot 'be removed',[32] again a constant reminder of his status as a liminal being. However, similar to Plath and her reference to the 'worms like sticky pearls', Redgrove's Lazarus merely imagines these sensations, using archetypal imagery from traditional and classical stories of katabasis and resurrection. In addition, he draws on imagery of earthly burial and depicts his own psychological and physical obsession with mud and dirt to help physicalize and therefore comprehend the return and resurrection from the death-state of coma.

This second half of Redgrove's poem is also striking because of its use of classical references, the 'boatman and his gliding punt' referring to the ferryman of Hades, Charon, in classical Greek mythology, and 'the judgement and the flames' conjuring a scene from the Judeo-Christian Old Testament. However, these archetypes of traditional tales of death and descent are most conspicuous by their absence as the narrator descends deeper into coma (and comes closer to death). Indeed, Redgrove, as narrator, steadily becomes aware that there is nothing to greet him at the end of his journey of descent into his coma, as he discussed in a 1984 interview with Cliff Ashcroft: 'I remember my last thought before nothing was, where's my soul? The universe has gone, there is nothing. Did I expect to see Charon with his punt ferrying me across the river? The thing that knew there was nothing was taken away'.[33] Reading this account

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[32] Kazantzakis, *The Last Temptation*, p. 382.
[33] Peter Redgrove, 'Lazarus and the Visionary Truth' in *The Colour of Radio*, ed. Neil Roberts (Devoran: Stride, 2006), 142-162 (p. 154).

of Redgrove's coma descent, one is reminded of Garland's fictional account of Carl's journey into the deepest level of his coma, where he is little more than 'a voice in a void'. In Redgrove's case, the trauma of the descent and return is not constituted as such by the visions of a 'hellish' underworld, unlike in classical mythology where it is the experience of living within an underworld that embodies, as Falconer explains, 'The absolutely horrific experience from which no one emerges unchanged'.[34] Rather, Redgrove's trauma is formed by the fact that there is no encounter with such archetypal images of Hell. Indeed, his frequent descents into coma only lead to an encounter with nothing, a void in consciousness and a constant awareness of this void which, in turn, is eventually taken away.

To summarise, Kazantzakis's Lazarus experiences a physical degradation of the body; the manifestations of Lazarus in the poems of Plath and Redgrove experience an imagined, psychological corruption of the body, with both narrators seeing their descent into the death-state as a process of fragmentation of the physical self into its constituent parts. In Plath's case, she imagines these parts being used as Christian 'relics' ('A bit of blood', 'a piece of my hair or my clothes'[35]) over which her 'peanut-crunching crowd' can squabble in an effort to be physically touched by the 'miracle' of her resurrection and return from the underworld. In Redgrove's poem, there is a disjunction between the title and the appropriation of the name of Lazarus with the revelation the narrator reaches at the nadir of his descent: that 'the universe has gone, there is nothing', once more illustrating Falconer's notion that the descent journey defies language, is incommunicable. At the end of Redgrove's poem, a question is posed that explores this notion further: how can a void, a nothingness at the end of consciousness, ever be expressed within language? An absolute nothing will obviously be unspeakable, and yet Redgrove persists in trying to speak of it by using the imagery of mythology and of descent narratives which, as in the case of Leucius and Karinus, reveals an impulse to narrate. The void, therefore, the 'absolute nothing' is transformed into a tangible 'something' (an imagined katabatic and transfiguratory experience) and so through this, Redgrove attempts to 'work through', rationalise and come to terms with the real 'Hell' at the heart of his coma therapy.

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[34] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, p. 1.
[35] Plath, 'Lady Lazarus', p. 18.

In the same interview with Cliff Ashcroft, Redgrove also referred to his comas as 'practice deaths'.[36] 'Deaths' is a countable noun, but one which can only be used in relation to populations, never to individuals. While a population may encounter many 'deaths' at many different times, it does not necessarily follow that the population itself will die. In fact, 'deaths' in a population does not mean the end. They occur as part of a continuing cycle of death and birth that allows the population to sustain itself in its environment. This idea of the cyclical nature of life is underlined by the appearance in the phrase of the word 'practice', which suggests repetition. By linking this plural in relation to the death of the individual with 'practice', Redgrove undermines the finality of death itself, so much so that 'death' is no longer an appropriate definition of his state of being: only resurrection will suffice. Interestingly, Plath achieves a similar effect with her opening phrase, 'I have done it again', alongside her reference to the feline myth of having 'nine times to die'. Redgrove's 'practice deaths' helps to reveal his narrativized perception of the coma: that it constitutes a gateway to the underworld, the departure point for a descent into Hell after which resurrection and transfiguration await. For Redgrove, the post-coma 'dreams' which ensued from these 'deaths' and which influenced much of his early poetry in themselves caused a transfiguration, a radical change in identity: prior to his treatment, he was a keen, 'orthodox' scientist; post-treatment, he would become absorbed by dream-states, ritual, reverie, and shamanistic experience. In this way, perhaps, despite their traumatic impact, the induced comas came close to generating a transfiguration in the Christian sense, representing a spiritual metamorphosis and enlightenment of the self that occurs after a descent into an ultimate embodiment of Hell: the void that takes over from consciousness.

Both of these deeply autobiographical poems clearly represent descent into and return from the death-state (Plath) and coma-state (Redgrove), using the archetype of Lazarus in order to communicate the authors' traumatic experience. After their return from the underworld and after the traumatic departure is completed, both authors attempt to find the language through which their trauma can be expressed and almost inevitably they return to one of the ultimate symbols of descent and resurrection: Lazarus. In her warning against the potential totalizing effect of trauma fiction, Tal suggests that, for the real victims, 'Traumatic events are written and rewritten until they become codified and narrative form gradually replaces content as the focus of

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[36] Redgrove, 'Lazarus and the Visionary Truth', p. 154.

attention'.[37] This strips away agency from the real survivor of trauma and therefore 'mediates' the trauma and dilutes its gravity and impact, foregrounding a self-indulgent narrative form that 'fetishizes' trauma, to return to LaCapra. However, for both Redgrove and Plath (two real-life survivors of trauma and of Lifton's 'death encounter') codification, imagery and narrative form that draws upon mythical and biblical archetypes allows the traumatic experience to be narrated, and the 'katabatic' journey towards death to be voiced.

3.4: *A Weird Conduit*: Hell, Coma and the Post-traumatic Messiah

These concepts of coma katabasis and trauma are developed and explored within the popular text, Stephen King's *The Dead Zone*. This is a particularly interesting example of coma fiction as King weaves together scientific concepts and medical research with archetypal tales of descent from the Judeo-Christian canon to create the story of a victim who is transfigured, through his coma descent, into a messianic hero with the potential to save mankind. Again, what is most interesting is how King uses a similar archetypal repertoire of elements to that used in the texts previously discussed, and I will examine this whilst discussing theories of narratology, in particular the influence of mythology and traditional katabatic narratives upon contemporary literature, culture and conceptions of personhood.

   The novel follows the central character, John (or Johnny) Smith, a name that suggests an 'everyman' figure in a Christian morality play. As a child, he is victim to a brain injury whilst ice-skating, granting him psychic powers in which he has fleeting visions of the future, though at this stage he has not fully grasped or comprehended the significance of this ability. These powers are heightened when Johnny is involved in a road traffic accident and he awakens from a 4-year coma (again representing his 'hellish' descent) to a world that has changed dramatically, not least because of the Watergate scandal which unfolded whilst Johnny was in his coma. Now, Johnny, through a kinetic, almost biblical 'laying on of hands', is able to read a person's past experiences and, most significantly, predict future experiences that are yet to occur.

   Johnny's mother, a born-again, fundamentalist Christian, sees her son's power as a gift from God, insisting that he does his 'duty' when the time comes therefore

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[37] Tal, *Worlds of Hurt*, p. 6.

highlighting Johnny's role as a contemporary messiah. King employs a range of Christian symbolism with the coma itself described as a, 'Limbo, a weird conduit between the land of the living and the land of the dead'.[38] Later, the Christian references become more explicit: 'He could almost see them. All the whispering voices of purgatory'.[39]

The reader therefore joins Johnny on his return from his katabasis, caught within a limbo between the underworld of deep coma (into which four years of his life have been submerged and lost) and the distant overworld. King uses metaphorical language to describe Johnny's physical and medical condition that is reminiscent of the patterns of language used to describe Lazarus in the previous texts I have discussed. Johnny's former lover at one point internalizes her musings upon the derivation and implication of the word 'coma', concluding that, 'She didn't like that word *coma*. It had a sinister, stealthy sound. Wasn't it Latin for 'sleep of death'?'.[40] Once more, the interchangeability of sleep and death (the twins Hypnos and Thanatos) is conjured and when Johnny is referred to as, 'The living corpse in the [room]',[41] the image of Kazantzakis's Lazarus is evoked.

King is not concerned, however, with the nature of Johnny's descent itself and the topography of the underworld, unlike in Redgrove's portrayal of the interrupted, shamanistic process of death and renewal within the underworld of coma. Instead, like Plath and Kazantzakis, King is more focused upon the consequences of Johnny's traumatic return from his katabatic journey. This being said, Johnny's return to the overworld is described in terms of rebirth that does correspond somewhat with Redgrove's imagined experiences, as Johnny leaves the 'corridors' that represent his coma-limbo in preparation for his resurrection:

> It began to seem that he was not in a hallway at all anymore, but in a room – *almost* in a room, separated from it by the thinnest of membranes, a sort of placental sac, like a baby waiting to be born […] It came to him that this might be some sort of afterlife, and these bright shapes the shapes of angels.[42]

The common metaphor of rebirth and regeneration is clear as Johnny leaves the clinical

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[38] Stephen King, *The Dead Zone* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2007), p. 137.
[39] Ibid., p. 138.
[40] Ibid., p. 86.
[41] Ibid., p. 133.
[42] Ibid., pp. 138-39

'womb' of the steel hallway to come blinking, once more, into the light, fighting to break through the amniotic sac of his coma. Interestingly, both Jesus and Lazarus's emergence from a dark cave can also represent a re-emergence from the earth itself, a rebirth from the earth-mother. In analysing this image of the 'cave' as the portal to the underworld, it is useful to look at Northrop Frye's work on the influence of mythology, when he notes that, 'The wonderful cave drawings of the paleolithic period may have been connected with an earth-mother cult in which the cave was identified with her womb'.[43] In this way, death and rebirth are two sides of the same coin of the katabatic journey and one that is explicitly described in the above passage. In Johnny's case, there is an almost seamless transition from this biological rebirth of the flesh to a celestial rebirth of the soul with the description of the near-death experience (a manifestation of *anabasis* or Heavenly ascension) as he confuses the hospital staff gathering around his bed for 'angels'. Johnny, at least temporarily, tramps that road trodden by Dante's literary alter-ego throughout the *Divine Comedy*. However, Johnny is not yet ready to enter the *Paradiso* as he returns to his earthly existence where, post-coma, a form of Christ-like transfiguration has occurred, granting Johnny visionary powers that can change people's lives and that can, in the end, save mankind itself as his insights become steadily more disturbing and increasingly more significant. In fact, almost the first thing he realises after his resurrection is that, 'He had changed… He had gone into the darkness with everything, and now it felt to him that he was coming out of it with nothing at all – except for some strangeness. The dream was ending'.[44] This transfiguratory change plays a hugely significant role in the novel and it is Johnny's ability to predict the future that constitutes the quest-objective of the katabatic journey despite the fact that, in Johnny's case, he is a reluctant recipient of such a power. Frye, when discussing the journey of descent and return, touches upon this idea of the quest-objective of katabasis when he writes that: 'At the top of the winding stair one normally attains direct knowledge or vision, but the reward of descent is usually oracular or esoteric knowledge, concealed or forbidden to most people, often the knowledge of the future'.[45] This seems to embody perfectly the result of Johnny's descent with the exception, of course, that his quest is an accidental consequence of a traumatic event. He is that most modern of descent-protagonists – the reluctant hero – rather than the hubristically all-conquering hero of antiquity, like Heracles and Theseus before him.

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[43] Northrop Frye, *The Great Code* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), p. 191.
[44] King, *The Dead Zone*, p. 139.
[45] Frye, *Fable of Identity*, p. 62.

The description, above, of Johnny's transfiguration, his 'strangeness', also helps to elucidate the nature of his katabasis and his experience in Hell: he has 'gone into the darkness' and returned. But it also helps to draw more links between the journey of katabasis and the post-traumatic condition. As Tal posits, 'Trauma is a transformative experience, and those who are transformed can never entirely return to a state of previous innocence'.[46] Again, this reflects earlier manifestations of the katabatic hero and the process of transfiguration that these experience, not least Lazarus's new status as the 'living dead'. Johnny, like Lazarus, changes and within this change lies the destiny of his future existence within the world. King, therefore, is more concerned with representing Johnny's transfiguration that is triggered by his journey into an abstract concept of the underworld (as imagined by contemporary Christianity) rather than the geographical model of Hell depicted in descent narratives of antiquity, alongside such works as Dante's *Inferno*. This abstract underworld sees Hell as an absence of God and, furthermore, an absence of everything – a darkness and emptiness of existence that resonates with Redgrove's first-hand experiences of coma and an experience often cited by the many survivors of coma I have worked with. It is also a conceptual embodiment of Hell that conflicts with the mythological grand-narratives present within other fictional representations of coma that I critique throughout this investigation and one that is emphasized by King's image of the empty, windowless and 'dark' metal corridor of the coma unconscious.[47]

Johnny, having his powers of reading the future awakened at the peak of his re-ascent to the overworld, brings these powers with him, transfiguring him completely. King, in creating a modern messiah, develops a hierarchy of the miraculous acts that Johnny now performs in the overworld, commencing with the resurrection from the coma in the first place. Granted the powers of second-sight, Johnny initially 'reads' the minutiae of people's lives, from family relationships to the whereabouts of long-lost relatives. He then progresses to visions that become preventative measures for domestic accidents, able to intervene, for instance, in what could have been a highly destructive house fire. As the narrative develops, the miracle visions he conjures become increasingly significant: aiding local police to identify and capture a vicious sex criminal; rescuing his employer's son from a freak accident at a local restaurant; and, ultimately, saving the world from a corrupt politician who will lead the country into all-

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[46] Tal, *Worlds of Hurt*, p. 119.
[47] King, *The Dead Zone*, p. 138.

out nuclear war. This hierarchy of miracles reflects the hierarchy of those performed by Christ across the Gospels, for example turning water into wine, walking on water, healing the blind, raising Lazarus from the dead, and finally saving the whole of mankind through his own death and resurrection. In *The Dead Zone*, however, there is no final resurrection for Johnny, only his initial transfigurative rising from the coma. This being said, after Johnny has the vision of the nuclear winter that future presidential candidate Greg Stillson will help to cause, the prophet decides to act, to abide by his mother's final words: 'Do your duty'. Unlike the actions of Christ, however, Johnny's only solution seems to lie in an act of violence directed towards Stillson. Rather than allowing the violence to be enacted upon him in a modern version of the Passion, Johnny decides to assassinate Stillson at a political rally.

The vision he has of Stillson is important to consider when looking at Johnny as a manifestation of Christ. It is unlike his others in that it is obscured by blue and yellow stripes which, Johnny reasons at the time, represent the image of 'the Laughing Tiger', a child's game described to him by his employer's Vietnamese gardener, Ngo Phat. In the game, a child dresses as a tiger, 'And the other children tries to catch him as he runs and dances' [sic]. Phat talks of how, 'The child in the skin laughs, but he is also growling and biting, because that is the game', completing his metaphor by saying that in Vietnam, 'Before the Communists, many of the village leaders played the Laughing Tiger'.[48] He concludes that Greg Stillson also plays this game with the image of the Laughing Tiger reflecting the metaphor of the 'wolf in sheep's clothing' in the Gospel of St. Matthew (ironically Christ's warning against 'false prophets').[49] The Laughing Tiger, though, is an inversion of the Christian idiom in that the tiger is overtly threatening, is clearly a tiger, yet its laughter and pleasantries have the ability to trick everyone into believing that it is something other than a tiger: something to be trusted.

The dual-coloured stripes in Johnny's vision, though, prove not to be a reference to the child's game. His assassination attempt is unsuccessful, Johnny's bullets straying far and wide as he is shot to death by Stillson's bodyguards. However, in the fracas, Stillson seizes a small child and holds him in front of him as a human shield, the photos of which are leaked to the press, thus shattering his political career. This becomes significant in that the small boy in question wears a blue and yellow striped jumpsuit, a key revelation in understanding the function of Johnny's katabasis. All of Johnny's

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[48] King, *The Dead Zone*, p. 437.
[49] *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, 7:15.

visions up until now predict the consequences of a future event or act. By paying heed to these warnings, those involved prevent these consequences from happening, shaping an alternative future and a different reality. The Stillson vision is different in that it already suggests and assimilates the alternative future, intensifying the notion that Johnny was always going to die in a moment of messianic self-sacrifice in order to save mankind. His katabasis has granted him omniscience that will result in the salvation of the world, through his inevitable, unavoidable death. In this, his incarnation as a Christ figure, his katabasis and resurrection from the death state (the coma) and subsequent transfiguration (the prophetic visions) becomes clear to see, his final self-sacrifice only serving to highlight the archetypal Christian metaphor that runs throughout the text.

Alongside the overt comparisons to Christ, Johnny is frequently described as the kind of embodiment of Lazarus present in *The Last Temptation*. As previously mentioned, whilst in his coma, he is referred to as a 'living corpse',[50] and even prior to his accident, because of his physical height and tendency towards slouching, described as 'Frankenstein' by the children at the school in which he used to teach. This too is a germane comparison, the monster of Mary Shelley's classic novel being a reanimated corpse, as is the Lazarus of Kazantzakis's novel. Throughout *The Dead Zone*, Johnny descends into little more than a walking corpse, his physical self gradually disintegrating and breaking apart through the physical strain of the coma and the psychological stress of the visions (a degradation and fragmentation of both the corporeal and psychological self also touched upon within the two poems of Redgrove and Plath). Indeed, his physical transfiguration post-coma can be seen as a reference to Frankenstein's monster, his body laced with scars left over from the gruelling operations he underwent in order to try and remedy the physical effects of muscle atrophy and ligament degeneration caused by the inert coma-state he was trapped within for four years. Johnny, therefore, becomes a walking corpse, much like Lazarus, alongside Leucius and Karinus from the apocrypha. Similarities between Johnny and Christ are also emphasized. After all, as Christ carried the cross to Golgotha, what else was he but a living corpse, moving towards his ultimate purpose on earth which meant that he was, essentially, already dead? Despite the fact that Christ, on several occasions prior to his crucifixion, expresses doubt over his self-sacrifice (most notably in his pleading with God in the Garden of Gethsemene) it is inevitable that he will accept his fate and fulfil scripture that proclaims that God will sacrifice his own son so that

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[50] King, *The Dead Zone*, p. 133.

mankind will be saved. For Christ, as for Johnny, the future has already been written. In this sense, despite Johnny's constant doubts and attempts to walk away from his responsibility granted to him by his katabatic knowledge, the Stillson vision, obscured by the two-tone stripes, becomes his own prophetic 'scripture' and a symbol of his inevitable messianic self-sacrifice in order to save mankind.

It follows that Johnny's feeling that he has 'changed' on re-emerging from coma takes on another dimension: he experiences both a psychological and physical transfiguration that only exacerbates his katabatic trauma. Christ, too, underwent an inexplicable physical change post-resurrection, one that was enough to make his disciple, Thomas, question whether he truly was Christ risen from the dead, or merely an impostor.[51] In a similar fashion to the incarnations of Lazarus seen in previous texts, Johnny descends into Hell and returns with physical scars and psychological knowledge and experience of the underworld which is indelibly imprinted upon his psyche. Indeed, the title of the novel, itself, is a metaphorical nod to the underworld, the ultimate 'dead zone'. Later in the novel, Johnny's physician, Weizak, attempts to describe his patient's unusual condition at a press conference, declaring that: "…A part of John Smith's brain has been damaged beyond repair […] He calls this his "dead zone"'.[52] Going on to refer to this as 'a small but total aphasia',[53] it appears that 'all of these wiped-out memories seem to be part of a "set" – that of street, road, and highway designations'.[54] Weizak then discusses how another part of Johnny's brain has been 'awakened', in an attempt to explain his patient's sudden acquisition of 'second-sight'. As is expected, Weizak strives to justify a supernatural phenomenon by using language that he knows and uses best – the language of science (in this case Johnny's 'aphasia') in an attempt to explain the unexplainable: Johnny's supernatural powers. He therefore endeavours to rationalise the concept of this 'dead zone' within the field of medicine but the fact that Johnny's 'dead zone' has been created alongside his unexplainable powers of second sight means that it will always defy logic. Indeed, his second sight and his dead zone are symbiotic, both arising from the underworld of Johnny's coma which is, itself, incommunicable. However, in a pursuit that mirrors Redgrove's own biographical mission, Weizak still tries to communicate both the void of coma and the second-sight phenomenon through the language that he knows best, attempting to attribute a tangible concept to Johnny's

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[51] *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, The Gospel According to St. John, 20:24-29.
[52] King, *The Dead Zone*, p. 231.
[53] Ibid., p. 231.
[54] Ibid., p. 231.

katabatic trauma of coma.

Because of the nature of this katabasis, 'the dead zone' is imbued with metaphorical, spiritual significance. Johnny has descended into the dead zone and it seems that, like Lazarus, Christ and descent heroes before them, he has brought some of that dead zone back with him, a 'knowledge' which will forever shape future experience. It is significant that Johnny's prophetic knowledge has been exchanged for his knowledge of topographical and spatial awareness in the overworld, a consequence of his newly acquired status as the 'living dead' who cannot take up his place on earth any more than he can in the underworld. Like Lazarus, he stands astride both worlds and cannot quite find the language, beyond the designation 'dead zone', to explain his position in the world, a position made all the more precarious by his geographical aphasia.

The use of Judeo-Christian katabasis, therefore, can clearly be traced through these rather diverse examples of coma texts. In *The Dead Zone*, King also makes reference to Johnny's descent by comparing him to that most renowned katabatic traveller, Jonah, when Johnny (a lexical variation of *Jonah*) muses that he, 'Had been swallowed by a big fish. Its name was not leviathan but coma. He had spent four-and-a-half years in that particular fish's black belly and that was enough'.[55] In this Old Testament story, a wrathful incarnation of God sends a huge fish to swallow Jonah as a punishment for not preaching the Word. Jonah is only released when he prays to God, promising Him that from now on, he will fulfil the role that God has given him. This triggers a spiritual transfiguration through a katabatic journey, his restoration after three days inside the great fish apparently prefiguring the resurrection of Christ, again after spending three days in the 'belly' of the underworld. Johnny also directly reflects his Old Testament biblical counterpart by initially refusing to 'listen' to the visions that have been granted him: by not preaching the 'Word' embedded within his visions. Apart from this direct reference to the story of Jonah, King also references Leviathan, the sea monster and counterpart to the land monster Behemoth, both of which appear in the Book of Job. This image of the sea monster and the descent into its belly is another embodiment of a katabatic journey, as elucidated, once more, by Northrop Frye:

> Later, as mythologies, especially the Biblical one, broke away from earth-mother symbolism, the subterranean world became associated with the bowels of a sinister monster. This monster belongs to a *lower* world, and

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[55] King, *The Dead Zone*, p. 440.

may be thought of as under the earth.[56]

This further explains the imagery of Christ entering the underworld through the mouth of a monstrous creature of the underworld in fresco paintings. In fact, according to Frye, in St. Matthew's Gospel, Christ 'accepted the Jonah story as a type of his own Passion',[57] saying to the Pharisees that: 'For as Jonas [sic] was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth'.[58] For King, it is the medical condition of coma that becomes the monster of the underworld in contemporary thought, Johnny spending four years inside its hellish 'belly'. By constantly reflecting upon and assimilating these archetypal descent heroes and tales of katabasis, Johnny attempts to, like Redgrove, use the language of mythology to communicate the incommunicable and to make sense of his trauma, and King, as author, calls upon these archetypes of antiquity to try and navigate through the incommunicable mystery of the void in consciousness that the coma most often embodies.

Within the next chapter, I will continue to explore the descent myths of antiquity, explicating further how authors of coma fiction use these in an attempt to communicate the trauma of coma, an experience that, for the victim, often constitutes not a complex quest narrative of katabasis, but (similar to Redgrove's experiences) a total void in consciousness.

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[56] Frye, *The Great Code*, p. 192.
[57] Ibid., p. 191.
[58] *The Holy* Bible, King James Version, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, 12:40.

4: *There Is the Trouble, There Is the Toil.* Coma, Katabasis and the Greco-Roman Tradition

Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth.

- Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*

4.1: Introduction

The archetypal katabatic images in Judeo-Christian tradition, as discussed in the previous chapter, are symptomatic of a universal and historical fascination with descent narratives in antiquity, perhaps even influencing the development of the story of Christ's own 'harrowing' of Hell. In Greco-Roman mythology, katabatic 'quest' narratives are rife, depicting flawed heroes such as Theseus, Heracles and, of course, Orpheus, who descend into Hades, driven by their own personal goal, only to emerge inexorably changed and transfigured. Once more, as I will illustrate, similarities can be seen between these katabatic heroes of antiquity and the protagonists of coma narratives.

In this chapter, I will move onto the Greco-Roman tradition of katabatic mythology, using this as a framework to explore, in particular, Iain Banks's novel of coma descent, *The Bridge*, alongside Liz Jensen's *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax*. I will argue that the Jungian notion of a collective unconscious in which shared psychological archetypes inform our understanding of the world has its equivalent in narrative theory, not least in Northrop Frye's extensive work on the influence of fable and mythology upon all works of literature, alongside Paul Ricoeur's ideas of sedimentation. In the final part of the chapter, I will attempt to explicate why this relationship between coma and katabasis has developed, and why the stories and imagery of antiquity continue to be an obsession of authors of coma literature, proposing my own interpretation and application of the Jungian collective unconscious and its operation in society.

But before I look more closely at manifestations of the katabatic hero of antiquity in coma literature, I will firstly, for illustrative purposes, examine another descent in Greek mythology and one that has caused some controversy amongst scholars: the katabasis outlined in Book Eleven in Homer's *Odyssey*. In doing this, I will be highlighting recurrent motifs of the Greco-Roman descent myth which, I will argue, are consistently woven into tales of coma katabasis.

4.2: *Beneath the Fog and the Darkness*: The Underworld of the Mind

In Book Eleven, or the *nekyia*, the witch Circe allows Odysseus to leave her island so that he may commune with the dead in order to fathom what his next course of action should be. As instructed, in the land of the Kimmerians, Odysseus performs a ritual which summons the underworld, allowing him to seek advice from its inhabitants, not least from the blind seer Teiresias. The advice and visions of the future that Odysseus receive (prophetic knowledge akin to Johnny Smith's visions of the future) allow him to shape his future decisions, despite the fact that he still makes errors of judgement, often ignoring these visions altogether. Whilst some scholars, notably D.L. Page, see this not as a full *nekyia* (katabatic journey) but a *nekyomanteia* (a 'calling up' of the dead)[1], Raymond J. Clark asserts that it 'is distinguishable from regular necromantic evocations of the dead in the land of the living',[2] suggesting that what starts out as a necromantic consultation gradually becomes a full katabasis. This being said, when Odysseus first sees Hades, it does seem, through his use of passive verbs, as though it is a conjuration that simply appears *before* him:

> Now came the soul of Teiresias the Theban, holding
> A staff of gold, and he knew who I was and spoke to me.[3]

However, as Clark points out, over time it appears as though Odysseus has actually descended, that a physical journey into the underworld and a dislocation from the overworld has taken place, as seen when Odysseus is addressed by Anticleia, his dead mother: 'My child, how did you *come here* beneath the fog and the darkness | and still alive?'.[4] To this, Odysseus replies, 'Mother, a duty *brought me here* to the house of Hades' [my emphasis].[5] Both statements clearly imply that Odysseus has physically travelled to the underworld and this is emphasized later as Odysseus (when narrating this tale to his wife, Penelope) says that he, 'Descended into the House of Hades'. Circe, too, says of Odysseus, 'Unhappy men, who went alive to the house of Hades, | so dying twice, when all the rest of mankind die only | once…'.[6] As Clark posits, Circe's remark

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[1] D.L. Page, *The Homeric Odyssey* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 48, n. 3.
[2] Raymond J. Clark, *Catabasis: Vergil and the Wisdom-Tradition* (Amsterdam: B.R.Grüner, 1979), p.75.
[3] Homer, the *Odyssey*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), p. 170, Book 11, lines 90-91.
[4] Ibid., p. 172, lines 155-156.
[5] Ibid, p. 172, line 164.
[6] Ibid, Book 12, p. 185, lines 21-23.

suggests that Odysseus, as a result of his experience, 'will be unlike other men' which 'further distinguishes the catabatic journey from a necromantic consultation'.[7]

Odysseus's 'full' *nekyia* is a particularly instructive example of katabasis when discussing the representation of descent narratives in coma fiction. By performing the ritual taught to him by Circe, Odysseus summons the spirits of Hades to appear before him, but then there is an unusual linguistic turn: he and the spirits begin to speak as though Odysseus has physically descended into Hades. It seems as though in the act of summoning Hades to him, Odysseus has also been drawn into it. Modifying Clark's proposition that Odysseus performs a full katabatic *nekyia*, I suggest that although Odysseus may not physically descend into the geographical heart of the underworld, he experiences a psychic katabasis that feels no less real, just as the protagonists of the coma fiction I will be discussing descend into the underworld of their unconscious without a physical journey taking place.

Odysseus's *nekyia* embodies a genuine quest for knowledge which he hopes to gain from the underworld. Rather than Heracles or Theseus, for example, he is not looking to sack Hades, or defy the God of the underworld himself. This form of a katabatic quest for enlightenment is again a running motif throughout coma fiction. As Clark posits, Odysseus will no longer be like 'other men' (like Lazarus and Christ in Judeo-Christian scripture) and this concept is consistently utilized within the narratives of coma fiction that I will explore. Odysseus's quest starts out as a psychological encounter that soon transports him on a physical journey into Hades. In the examples of coma fiction I will be discussing, a similar transition takes place, albeit somewhat inverted. The physical departure (caused by an act of violence) triggers the coma which, in turn, triggers a psychological journey through the underworld. Like Odysseus, the coma victim is depicted paradoxically as being stationary in space, yet simultaneously experiencing a physical journey through the psychic experience.

It is important to note that whereas exterior coma texts, like *The Dead Zone*, concern themselves with the consequences of the return from the underworld, and the impact of this in the overworld, interior coma narratives are more concerned with the descent itself, and the journey through the underworld on the quest to acquire knowledge. Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, discussed earlier, is a paradigm of this katabatic model. Roy's descent and journey through his various layers of consciousness eventually leads him to the monster (there are always monsters in Hades) at the heart of

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[7] Clark, *Catabasis,* p.77.

his psychological underworld, the marabou stork. The knowledge he acquires is the revelation that the monster represents his hidden self. Once acquired, his return from the underworld is initiated and he is 'reborn'. Like Odysseus, he can no longer be like 'other men'. I have also previously discussed how out of Carl's psyche emerge 'Virgilian' guides[8] that help him navigate through his own coma-Hell in Garland's *The Coma*. Odysseus's katabasis is initiated by a ritual which requires him to dig a trench in the ground and make sacrifices and offerings within this rivulet, thus paying tribute to the infernal regions below. This concept of the gateway to Hades opening up within the earth also reflects Lazarus and Christ's re-emergence from their respective caves, their rebirth from the womb of the earth mother and also the place into which they are laid. The cave within the earth is the departure point from which they commence their katabases: their journeys into Hell.

This katabasis that takes the hero beneath 'the darkness' on a journey of enlightenment also connects with another classical Greek text: Plato's 'allegory of the cave' in Book VII of the *Republic*. This extended metaphor outlines the consequences of a 'soul's earthly imprisonment',[9] discussing how we are all, 'Men living in a sort of cavernous chamber underground, with an entrance open to the light and a long passage all down the cave'.[10] This restrictive 'cave' represents the human mind and the potential it has to stagnate, oppressing the individual within its chambers of unenlightened darkness. However, the cave image also represents the possibility the mind offers the individual to escape into the light and shed his 'unquestioning acceptance of material values'.[11] If the mind is a cave, albeit a complex and multi-faceted cave (after all, Plato does not specify exactly how far-reaching this metaphorical 'long passage' is), then this image can be extrapolated to suggest that the narrative of interior coma descent constitutes a katabasis of the psyche. Within Plato's parable, the physical katabasis is transformed into the psychical, and we are once more reminded of the 'cave' being the starting point for a descent to the underworld. The depictions of journeys into the supposed underworld of the coma unconscious, therefore, constitute a psychical katabasis with the mind becoming the 'cave' of departure.

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[8] In Dante's epic vision of the Christian underworld, he transforms the poet Virgil into a literary character and guide through the nine circles of hell, whilst also using many mythological details of Virgil's own underworld present in his epic poem the *Aeneid* (itself influenced by Homeric depictions of Hades).

[9] Stephen L. Harris and Gloria Platzner, *Classical Mythology: Images and Insights* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1995), p. 822.

[10] Plato, *Republic* in *Classical Mythology: Images and Insights*, trans. F. M. Cornford, p. 826.

[11] Harris and Platzner, *Classical Mythology,* p. 822.

This Platonic concept of the mind as cave is exploited in another example of coma fiction, Liz Jensen's *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax,* the title immediately suggesting themes of death and rebirth and reminiscent of Plath's reference to having 'nine times to die' in 'Lady Lazarus'. The novel is centred on a young boy, the eponymous hero, Louis, who lies in a coma following an 'accident'. The split-narrative follows Louis's interior coma narrative, in which he tries to come to terms with his coma-underworld, and the exterior coma narrative of his physician, Dr. Dannachet. The Doctor struggles both to trigger a return from coma for his patient, and also to complete his mission to learn of the true cause of Louis's accident: a suicide attempt after witnessing his mother, Natalie Drax (a victim of the syndrome *Munchausen's-by-proxy*) murder his father by pushing him over a cliff edge. It is the same cliff edge over which the traumatized Louis willingly steps in plain vision of his mother. The guardian of Louis's psychic Hades is the sinister shadow-figure, Gustave, whose face is concealed by bloodied bandages, his speech frequently interrupted by blood-frothed coughing. Over time, this shadowy 'Other' is revealed to represent Louis's murdered father, Pierre, and it is through this revelation, alongside Gustave's 'Virgilian' guidance through Louis's katabasis of coma, that the image of the mind as cave is developed. Gustave, when explaining to Louis how he came to reside in this 'hellish' place, says that: 'I can't remember [how I got here]. Not completely […] I just remember being in a dark place. A cave'.[12] The fact that Gustave, to all intents and purposes, is residing within Louis's mind (the underworld of his coma) exacerbates the image of the mind as cave, its darkness representing the void in consciousness (akin to Johnny Smith's 'dead zone') into which biographical and experiential memory-details sink and disappear.

This cave image is emphasized when, later in the novel, Gustave decides to guide Louis deeper into the 'cave', a journey that significantly involves Louis 'climbing down into the danger'[13] in a trajectory that once more evokes a katabatic descent. At the end of this journey lies the object of Gustave's mission and ultimately (because of the fact that Gustave is a projection of Louis's psyche) the object of Louis's mission: to seek the truth hidden within the deepest layers of his unconscious. This physical landscape of the deepest level of the coma-underworld is described by Louis as 'white stone like bone, like inside a creepy skull'.[14] Louis, unknowingly at the time, uses a pertinent simile, bestowing upon his unconscious the physical designation of the skull / cave in which his

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[12] Liz Jensen, *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), p. 100.
[13] Ibid., p. 175.
[14] Ibid., p. 176.

mind literally resides. On the walls of this cave, scrawled in blood, are the names 'Catherine' and 'Louis', the former name being that of Pierre Drax's first wife, the woman with whom he had planned to adopt Louis from Natalie, before eventually being manipulated into leaving Catherine to be with Natalie herself. Despite being cloaked as a descent into the mind of his father, into his father's 'cave', this katabatic descent is revealed to be a journey into Louis's own mind where he faces up to all of the family secrets that he has repressed in the exterior world of coma. He finally confronts the truth of his mother's syndrome and the repeated, life-threatening dangers to which she has subjected him in order to court attention.

The image of the cave is made more complex, later, when Dannachet learns that Pierre Drax's body has been discovered in a sea-cave cut into the cliff-side over which he was pushed. Like Christ and Lazarus, Pierre was, 'Stuck in that cave for three days'.[15] In this way, it seems as though Louis's katabasis of coma, with his father as Virgilian guide, also acts as a prophetic dream that reveals the location of his father's corpse. It is a katabatic enlightenment that is similar to Johnny's 'gift' of second-sight in *The Dead Zone*. Through the knowledge both characters acquire at the heart of their coma underworld, they are granted a certain vision of the future and, in Louis's case, he is also granted knowledge of the present: an insight into his father's final resting place. Louis's katabasis also chimes with Odysseus's journey into Hades. Both are quests for knowledge that can help to alter their present predicament but which can also potentially alter and influence future actions. Interestingly, though both katabatic journeys are successful in that prophetic knowledge is acquired, neither hero acts upon this knowledge. Odysseus seemingly 're-enacts' the obstacles of the future that have been predicted for him, and Louis likewise fails to act upon his newly acquired knowledge, choosing to remain within his coma and hide from his future life that waits for him in the overworld. The image of mind as cave is also explored in the exterior world of coma. Louis appears to 'awake' miraculously from his coma during a romantic clinch between Dannachet and his manipulative mother, the good doctor rushing to the boy's bedside only to comment that: 'As I looked into the dark pools of his enlarged pupils, it felt as if I were looking at holes to darkness, no more'.[16] This description, alone, is one that evokes the abyss of the mind of the coma victim, the eyes being the cave mouths through which the exterior witness can see the void of consciousness: the

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[15] Jensen, *Louis Drax*, p. 227.
[16] Ibid., p. 92.

incommunicable void of the underworld of the mind.

This common motif of the katabatic cave can be more closely examined by drawing on the theories developed by the psychoanalyst Carl Jung, in particular his work on mythical archetypes and his concept of the collective unconscious. Jung's theoretical concepts of the role archetypes and mythology have in the construction of identity are particularly instructive when analysing patterns of archetypal tropes throughout biblical and mythological narratives and will allow me to explicate further the passage of these tropes into representations of coma. The conceptual cave of the mind, then, and its potential to act as a departure point for a psychic katabasis would represent one of the 'eternally inherited'[17] archetypes that humans, according to Jung, have stored within their psyche. As the father and originator of what would become archetypal psychology, Jung posits that all humans share certain images within a 'collective unconscious', archetypal concepts such as 'mother', 'God', 'hero', and 'the wise old man', but rather being fully formed, they are instead empty vessels, 'primordial images' into which the subject pours his own individual associations of 'conscious understanding'.[18] As Hall and Nordby explain, the archetype is 'a [photographic] negative that has to be developed by experience'.[19] For example, the Jungian archetype of 'the shadow' represents the unconscious, often constituting the subject's darker side which is not generally acknowledged or with which the subject does not identify. Re-examining *Marabou Stork Nightmares* from a Jungian perspective, this 'shadow' is represented by the stork itself which, in turn, represents the dark side of Roy's unconscious. For Roy, this archetype is 'filled out' with the 'conscious experience' of his criminal and violent deeds that he has committed throughout his life in the overworld that lies outside of the underworld of coma.

Jung's concept of a shared, inherited collective unconscious is one of his more radical and controversial theories, most notably because his justifications as to how one acquires this are at best vague, attempting to attribute the cause to biological factors. He calls this unconscious a, 'Psychological instance of the biological "pattern of behaviour," which gives all living organisms their specific qualities',[20] yet fails to

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[17] Carl Jung, *Psychological Reflections*, eds. Jolande Jacobi and R. F. C. Hull (New York: Princeton/Bollingen, 1973), p. 38.

[18] Carl Jung, 'The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious', *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Vol. 9 Pt 1, trans. R.F.C. Hull, eds. Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London & Henley, 1959), p. 79.

[19] Calvin S. Hall and Vernon J. Nordby, *A Primer of Jungian Psychology* (New York: Mentor, 1973), p.42.

[20] Jung, *Psychological Reflections*, p. 40.

provide any real evidence of the kind which a solid biological theory would require. However, the archetypes that Jung discusses constantly occur within literature and I argue that it is the need for humans to narrate and share stories that has led to the development of such a collective unconscious or bank of recognizable archetypes. As discussed earlier, it seems as though, amongst other functions, such archetypes are drawn upon in order to narrate and navigate through difficult, often traumatic, experiences. They provide a reservoir of language and imagery which allows the communication of the incommunicable through a process of codification of the trauma. This creates a necessary distancing between the victim/narrator and the narrative itself, a dynamic that is clearly represented in Welsh's novel. Northrop Frye, in analysing the role of archetypes in narrative development, postulates that, 'Stories are told about gods, and form a mythology. The gods take on certain characteristics […] The same types of characters get into legends and folk tales, and, as literature develops, into fiction'.[21] Frye's narrative 'food chain' can, I suggest, be used to explicate the Jungian collective unconscious further, thus drawing a parallel between theories of psychoanalysis and of narrative. It is through this gradual evolution of narrative and constant exposure to archetypal stories and imagery that has allowed these to become assimilated into the unconscious of the subject. This process therefore provides us with a bank of imagery and narrative tools that can be accessed when all other attempts at communication struggle or fail entirely.

For Jung, archetypes manifest themselves in 'archetypal imagery', the specific 'personalized' form that the generalized archetype of the collective unconscious takes within the psyche of the subject. For example, as discussed, in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, the 'shadow' for Roy becomes the 'stork'. For Louis in Jensen's novel, the 'wise old man' becomes Gustave/Pierre who attempts to aid and guide Louis out of the underworld of coma. Such archetypal imagery, Jung proposes, become most apparent within cultural, religious and mythical texts, but also arise most prominently from dreams and fantasies. For this reason, it is important to examine how the many manifestations of the underworld within interior coma narratives often possess dream-like, or rather, 'nightmarish' qualities: the false realities and distorted half-memories of Garland's novel; the stork nightmares of Welsh's. In such texts, there are the consistent reminders of the symbiotic relationship between death and sleep. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in Greek mythology, Thanatos, the god of death, and his twin brother

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[21] Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), p. 40.

Hypnos, the god of sleep, resided within the kingdom of Hades, the god of the underworld. Moreover, Morpheus, the god of dreams, was Hypnos's son and also dwelt within Hades. Given this historical and mythical tradition, it comes as no surprise that throughout our culture, the concepts of sleep and death are commutable. In Christian thought, this symbiosis of sleep and death is particularly present in St. Paul's letters. In 1 Corinthians, he writes, 'Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed | In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed'.[22] This is an especially germane passage as Paul explains what will happen to both the dead and the living prior to the Second Coming of Christ. This process of an ethereal, non-specific 'change' is highlighted, drawing a parallel between sleep and with language similar to that used by King when describing Johnny's post-katabatic transfiguration. Indeed, when describing his protagonist's return from the 'darkness' of coma, King writes, 'The dream was ending',[23] once more equating the death-state of coma to the dream-state of sleep. These interchangeable archetypes of sleep and death are employed by authors across a range of coma literature with the coma itself represented as a form of sleep/death-state, the 'dreams' of which constituting infernal visions of the underworld of the mind. This appropriation of the sleep/death archetype therefore demonstrates the Jungian collective unconscious in operation and we can elaborate upon this symbiosis of states of consciousness by examining the work of the post-Jungian theorist, James Hillman, whose theories in general are invaluable when explicating the archetypal image of the underworld in psychology.

Hillman was instrumental in developing Jungian thought into what is now known as archetypal psychology, an approach that proposes the practice of discussing and analysing the influence of the varied polytheistic mythologies upon the consciousness of the individual and his psychological life. These core principles of archetypal psychology are useful for the analysis of how archetypal imagery is assimilated by authors when writing about the descent and resurrection from coma. In his seminal work, *The Dream and the Underworld*, Hillman advances Jungian theory by proposing that dream, in fact, represents a kind of death, a descent into the underworld or a katabasis of the mind that one experiences every time one sleeps. He writes that, 'Where do contents of consciousness go when they fade from attention? Into the

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[22] *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.
[23] King, *The Dead Zone*, p. 139.

unconscious, says psychology. The underworld has gone into the unconscious: even become the unconscious'.[24] This underworld of the unconscious is descended into when one dreams and the dreams themselves conjure 'hellish' images of people and places: shades or *eidola*. These immaterial spirits represent real people from the overworld but, like Jung's 'primordial image' of the archetype, they are somehow empty, devoid of the *thymos* (the body) yet craving attention of the flesh (hence the blood sacrifice that Odysseus performs). These *eidola* are described by the ghost of Achilles, in the *Odyssey*, as, 'The senseless | dead men…[the] mere imitations of perished mortals'.[25] Desperate to hold onto what once made them human, they nevertheless fail to understand why they need to do this, anchoring into Achille's use of the adjective 'senseless' as they have become detached from the corporeality of their human form and motivations that existed within the overworld. In short, these *eidola* refer to 'an archetypal person in human shape'.[26] The image of Gustave in *Louis Drax* is one such 'senseless' *eidolon*, a shade in Louis's coma-underworld that is unable to remember the exact details of his life in the overworld, even possessing a different name, yet inextricably drawn to the fragmented memories of that world, desperate to re-unify them. Thus, for Louis, Gustave/Pierre only represents his father and is merely an archetype with the purpose of guiding Louis out of coma, in a similar way to how Catherine in *The Coma* is not really Carl's lover, but an archetypal 'Virgilian guide' in the guise of Carl's lover from the overworld. Topographical *eidola* also appear frequently within interior coma narratives, the false realities of the narrator's shadow-world in Alex Garland's *The Coma*, for example. In another work of coma fiction, Nicholas Royle's *Regicide*, the interiority of the protagonist's coma (a katabatic hero, also named 'Carl) is depicted as an oppressive cityscape, the author implying that a map that Carl finds is actually a drawing of his coma-damaged brain, the *gyri* and *sulci* representing the Orwellian streets of the city.[27] In these novels, the coma-protagonist, like Drax, must travel downwards and deeper into the nadir of their coma-underworld in order to gain katabatic knowledge and return to the overworld. In *The Coma*, this lowest point is referred to as a 'void'; in *Regicide* and *The Dead Zone* as 'the Dark' and 'the darkness' respectively; in *Louis Drax*, the 'danger', all reminiscent of the tenebrosity of the archetypal Hadean underworld and Plato's metaphor of the cave.

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[24] James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 65.

[25] Homer, the *Odyssey*, Book 11, lines 475-476, p. 180.

[26] Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*, p. 61.

[27] Nicholas Royle, *Regicide* (Oxford: Solaris, 2011).

When Odysseus performs his katabatic *nekyia* he similarly encounters such *eidola*, at one point reaching out to touch his dead mother Anticleia, who simply disappears in armfuls of vapour. Indeed, Odysseus says of this encounter, 'Three times | I started toward her, and my heart was urgent to hold her, | and three times she fluttered out of my hands like a shadow | or a *dream*'[28] [emphasis added]. There is yet another overt connection made here between death and dream which exemplifies the dream-as-death archetype upon which Hillman builds an entire theory of dreaming as katabasis. The very fact that often after we awake from sleep, the memories of a dream eventually fade away, sink back into the unconscious, reflects this notion of a return from the underworld, with the 'shades' we encountered no longer within the grasp of the consciousness of the waking world. In Greco-Roman mythology and culture, Hades, as a god, had no temples and no fixed image and was frequently described as 'invisible', much like a dream. He is therefore an embodiment of a mysterious and terrifying void, a presence that can only be described through its negative value. As Hillman posits, 'Hades is not an absence, but a hidden presence – even an invisible fullness'.[29] This is a statement which embodies much of our dream-experience: we know we have dreamt, are indeed replete with that knowledge, yet the specifics of the dream itself often remain elusive. In this way, I argue that this process of post-katabatic 'forgetting' is indicative of the plight of the coma survivor who has an awareness of his descent into coma (the 'katabatic knowledge' of his transfiguratory 'change') but cannot remember the details of the descent itself (the hidden-presence at the end of the psychic descent).

Jung, among other theorists and scholars (including Northrop Frye), points towards the development of depth psychology as being a key influence upon how humankind has navigated towards an understanding of the inner workings of the mind and the unconscious. Freud, in particular, mapped out a topographical model of the mind that, like Dante's vision of the cosmos, consists of various levels to which one can travel. The very nature of depth psychology is to attempt to delve into the darkest depths of the psyche in order to confront the particular *eidolon* at the heart of the disturbance: to bring that shadow into the light and to normalize it in rational, concrete terms, thus stripping it of its mystery – its 'hellish' qualities. Such psychological archetypes now occupy coma literature, as seen, for example, in *Louis Drax*. Like the depth psychologist and the katabatic hero of antiquity, the eponymous hero also journeys into the deepest realms of

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[28] Homer, the *Odyssey*, Book 11, lines 205-208 p. 173.
[29] Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*, p. 28.

his coma-underworld in order to excavate and retrieve what Rosalind Williams refers to, in her analysis of underworld topographies, the 'absolute truth'[30] about his mother. It is only this psychological manifestation of a geological practice that will allow him to return to the overworld. He performs, in short, the Freudian 'dream-work' of his coma descent and through this, is able to face the Jungian archetype of the 'shadow': the truth of his mother's syndrome and her systematic abuse. This notion of psychological 'excavation' often emerges in common parlance, as we are asked to *dig deep* or to *dredge our minds*, or even to 'get "down to bedrock"',[31] itself an archetype that metaphorically concretizes the vertical topography of the psyche. As Hillman concludes, '[Freud] has returned to psycho-therapy the realm of inner space. Here Freud begins to write interior geography and to make a voyage in the imaginal. Through the dream, he rediscovers the underworld'.[32] Freud, himself, refers to dream as the *via regia*, the royal road to the unconscious. Perhaps, as Hillman suggests, he also discovered the katabatic path from the cave mouth of the mind to the underworld of dream, a psychological and archetypal model of hellish descent that has allowed authors to depict the interiority of coma: the 'sleep of death'.

4.3: *The Lower World:* Coma and the Katabatic Excavation of the Underworld

One text, in particular, that takes this archetype of dream-as-katabasis and superimposes it over the coma condition is Iain Banks's novel *The Bridge*. Similarly to Welsh, Banks creates a multi-layered topography of the interiority of coma, though unlike Roy in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, the unnamed narrator of *The Bridge* has no real control over the transitions between layers of consciousness. Each layer also possesses its own distinct narrator, so whilst the layers may certainly evoke those created in Welsh's novel (the autobiographical narrative, the slips into a primal brogue of the Scottish persona, the fantasy/quest mythologem, the descent into the underworld), there is always a disjunction between narrators, causing a disruption in narrative form and flow. This implies that the Master-narrator (the victim trapped in coma) is for the majority of the novel unaware of the presence of his fractured alter-egos who constantly irrupt within his unconscious, jostling for narratorial supremacy. Also, whereas Welsh certainly

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[30] Rosalind Williams, *Notes on the Underground* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), p. 49.
[31] Frye, *Fables of Identity*, p. 65.
[32] Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*, p. 16.

alludes to katabatic motifs, Banks openly exploits mythological archetypes, painting a vivid landscape of the katabatic dream-journey of coma.

The complex narrative structure of the novel is scaffolded by clearly delineated, individually titled sections, themselves containing undertones of the katabatic quest-narrative. The novel is split into three main sections (plus a fourth, shorter postscript, the 'Coda' section). These sections, 'Coma', 'Triassic', and 'Eocene', are then each split by another sub-section, 'Metaphormosis', 'Metamorpheus', and 'Metamorphosis' respectively, which are then split into further sections or chapters, one to four or, in the case of the final 'Metamorphosis' section, split into four named parts: 'Oligocene', 'Miocene', 'Pliocene', and 'Quaternary'.[33] There are several conceits at play within this intricate matrix. The first thing to note is that this core three-part structure embodies the structure of the archetypal katabatic quest, the three stages that Joseph Campbell, writing extensively on the narrative form of mythological tales, would call the 'departure', the 'initiation', and the 'return'.[34] In this dream-like katabasis of coma, it is the coma itself, as is the case with *Louis Drax*, which proves to be the departure point, the descent from the cave-mouth of the mind into the underworld of the unconscious – the nightmarish world of 'the bridge'. The use of geological epochs is also revealing when analysing the representation of descent. As the novel progresses, each section is chronologically moving forward in terms of epoch, ending with the most recent period at the time of writing the novel: the 'Quaternary'. Each period represents significant 'geological' and evolutionary change, suggesting that throughout his katabasis, Banks's narrator is in a constant state of developmental flux. This leads to a form of katabatic transfiguration as he gradually re-unifies his fractured pre-coma identity, an identity that will nevertheless remain forever changed through the process of 'destruction and rebirth of the self through an encounter with the absolute Other'.[35]

Each of the epochs is also marked by significant extinction events leading to radical shifts in evolution, for example, during the 'Eocene' period, there was a major extinction event known as the *Grande Coupure* or 'the Great Break'. This refers to the disruption in evolutionary continuity and is marked by the dawn of the first modern mammals. This epoch is used to commence the third section of the novel, and the narrator's third stage of his journey (his 'return'), implying that he is in a constant state of flux as he battles to find his way back to the overworld. This return 'leg' of his

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[33] Iain Banks, *The Bridge* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1986).

[34] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Bollingen, 1968).

[35] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, p. 1.

infernal journey is integral in any katabatic quest, as Falconer explains when she writes that, 'There *has to be* a return in katabatic narrative, but it need not be the hero who returns'.[36] In this statement, Falconer argues against Clark who posits that there can be no katabasis without a return to the overworld of the hero himself. However, in the case of *Louis Drax,* as I touched upon earlier, there is no return by the end of the novel. Moreover, Louis 'chooses' to stay within his coma rather than return to the overworld, a narrative twist that is evocative of Campbell's discussion of 'the refusal of return' depicted in several quest-narratives, whereby the hero fails to complete the 'full round' of his quest. [37] However, in support of Falconer, this 'refusal' does not mean that Louis fails to perform a true katabasis. Because of the knowledge that Louis acquires at the heart of his descent, Louis realises that the overworld has become more of a Hell-state than that of his coma. In fact, as the forest fires that grip France rage on, threatening the hospital in which Louis is housed, the entire topography of the overworld is transformed into an infernal vision. At the point at which Natalie Drax throws herself into the conflagration, a final act of defiance and self-victimization, Dannachet describes her as, 'Hurtling into hell':[38] the irruption of Hell on earth. In this sense, and through this inversion of the physical overworld and the psychic underworld, Louis does 'return' from his Hell-state, complete with katabatic knowledge, without ever actually returning from coma. He simply opts not to make the final physical (and medical) leg of the journey out of his disorder of consciousness. In the case of *The Bridge,* technically it is not the hero, or in this case, multiple heroes who return: these are just individual, isolated facets of the unnamed narrator's psyche, as I will discuss later, who are constantly metamorphosing and evolving through the journey of descent. In the end, when the narrator escapes from coma, it is not these heroes who ascend but an altogether different, re-assimilated hero, the elusive name of whom is still only hinted at by Banks.

This use of 'Eocene' with its connotations of disruption and change is also reflected within the build-up of disruption between the various narrative threads, as the individual narrators (the 'heroes') battle for narrative supremacy. The use of increasingly modern epochs as the novel progresses highlights the concept of evolutionary change, death and rebirth, and emphasises how the extinction of the old makes way for the new. The geological references also connect with the concept of the descent to Hades through the

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[36] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, p. 45.
[37] Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* p. 193.
[38] Jensen, *Louis Drax*, p. 216.

earth as the narrator's psychological descent is described in terms of the physical world. At the point at which we meet him, the narrator is moving through the layers of the earth to get to the underworld. The novel begins in coma, the departure point for the underworld, and so as the narrator descends, he reaches the deepest part of the earth – the 'Triassic' section of the novel, from which he must attempt to return. The closer he gets to the overworld, the more recent the epoch. This structure creates another topographically vertical model of the mind and of consciousness, the layers of which the narrator must 'excavate' in order to escape the underworld and return to the overworld.

The theme of evolution and transfiguration is further emphasized through the structural designations, 'Metaphormosis/Metamorpheus/Metamorphosis'. These somewhat meta-textual delineations help to shed a light upon Banks's use of mythological and traditional archetypes to represent the katabasis of coma. 'Metaphormosis' implies that the entire novel is an allegory with the idea of coma utilized as an extended metaphor for 'hellish' descent during which the mind is constantly appropriating and assimilating mythological motifs in order to cope with the trauma of the underworld of the unconscious. This is a process that exemplifies the workings of Jung's 'collective unconscious', alongside Frye's notion of the absorption of religion and myth into fiction. In an attempt to explain the phenomenological world and the trauma that caused the coma, metaphorical and archetypal 'coma dreams' are generated within the unconscious of the protagonist, forming an entire narrative of katabasis which provides the victim with a tangible coping strategy and also with the potential *via regia* out of the Hell of the unconscious. With the designation 'Metamorpheus', Banks draws a parallel between the coma-state and the sleep/dream-state, using the Greek god of dreams who, as mentioned, dwells within the underworld. In the third instance, 'Metamorphosis', Banks returns to the root word upon which his other titles are based. Metamorphosis again emphasizes the notion of change and transfiguration, the coma itself being compared to a pupal stage within which, through the dream-like katabasis, the victim is constantly evolving and gaining the knowledge at the heart of his psychological Hades before returning to the overworld, forever changed. It is significant that the very field of psychology is named after Psyche, the ancient Greek goddess of the soul and is also a word that, in one of its archaic forms, refers to a 'butterfly', a creature that experiences a metamorphosis, emerging from a 'katabatic' pupal stage. In *The Bridge*, the coma psyche of the Master-narrator, like its

etymological and entomological counterpart, is forever evolving and metamorphosing with geographical and physical forms playing a key role throughout the novel in contributing to this change. It is within one such form, the sinister, oppressive structure of 'the bridge' that the central narrator, John Orr (a pun on a geological 'ore', again representing the physical world) resides.

In this dream-world of coma, the bridge is an imposing, constantly-evolving structure that stretches over a seemingly endless expanse of water. The landmasses between which it stretches cannot be seen in either direction, evoking a sense of limbo. Orr, the main hero trapped within the coma-underworld, has no recollection of how he has ended up in this place; he only knows that he was 'fished…out of the sea'.[39] This immediately reinvents classical katabatic mythologies where the descent-hero has to cross vast expanses of water to reach the edge of the world where the land of the dead meets the land of the living. The Mesopotamian *Gilgamesh* mythology and Odysseus's own *nekyia* are two examples of this archetypal narrative. Throughout mythology, the sea itself is often represented as a departure point for a katabatic journey as Frye explains: 'The lower world [is] reached by descent through a cave or under water',[40] reflecting Louis Drax's katabasis, similarly initiated by his plunge into the sea.

The socio-political environment of the bridge itself is highly oppressive, with bureaucratic divisions of social class laid in vertical relation to one another. The further down the bridge you are forced to live, the lower your social class (and the more insignificant you will be), reflecting David Pike's observation that one of the chief tendencies of certain narratives of descent, such as Aristophanes' *Frogs* and Lucian's *Voyage to the Underworld*, was to create and satirise 'a transparently social or political allegory of contemporary life on earth'.[41] Each of Banks's spatial divisions also reflects the delineations within Dante's topographical imagining of Hell, which itself adopts ancient archetypes of 'hellish' society and includes satirical undertones akin to those to which Pike alludes. It is therefore instructive to note that at one point, when Orr has been unfairly and abruptly stripped of his relatively high status as a psychiatric patient, he is condemned to dwell in the nether regions of the bridge, living alongside the faceless masses. At this lowest point the environment is described as 'cold and dark' with 'grey waters' that 'crash white outside'.[42] Mapping Orr's descent through the

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[39] Banks, *The Bridge*, p. 83.
[40] Frye, *Fables of Identity*, p. 59.
[41] David L. Pike, *Passage Through Hell* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 7.
[42] Banks, *The Bridge*, p. 224.

layers of the bridge against classical concepts of the underworld, this lowest point of the bridge becomes comparable with the lowest zone of Hades, Tartarus, which, as Hillman explicates, was, 'In the imagination of late antiquity […] a region of dense cold air without light'.[43] Traditionally it is in this 'pneumatic region'[44] where the shades who have made some form of terrible transgression (usually against the Gods) are subjected to horrendous, repetitive punishments, for example Sisyphus who is forced to roll a huge rock up a hill, only to have it roll all the way to the bottom before he manages to get it to the summit. Tartarus is frequently described as 'an almost bottomless pit of anguish and despair',[45] and this is emulated by Orr's own descent into the lower depths of the bridge where he suffers anguished punishment, stripped of all his trappings of status and position and removing what little identity he has. He is condemned to become one of the faceless *eidola* of the lower reaches.

Aside from the references to Tartarus, there are numerous allusions to Christian imagery of Hell that appear within the world of the bridge, infernal visions that arise out of its geological and mechanized fabric. It is revealed that the Master-narrator once studied geology, before training and working as an engineer. Several times, this narrator's 'dream-brother' (his archetypal *eidolon* in the form of Orr) encounters violent accidents within the bridge, happenings that conjure images of mechanical suffering and Hell-fire. At one point, Orr inspects a sketch of the bridge that his Virgilian guide, Abberlaine Arrol, has drawn for him. It depicts trains that are 'grotesque, gnarled things, like giant maggots' and 'girders and tubes' that 'become branches and boughs, disappearing into smoke rising from the jungle floor; a giant, infernal forest'.[46] Orr's appraisal of this gift from Abberlaine takes the form of the exclamation, 'Imaginative', a rather stoic comment that is loaded with irony as it is his imagination (his katabatic coma 'dreams') that causes this place to be created. This visual interpretation of the bridge makes open reference to it being an 'infernal' place, a sinister, smoking forest that invokes Dante's departure point for the *Inferno*. This artistic impression of the underworld of the bridge, combining topographical details of both Hades and Hell, clearly contains monsters (that tradition for classical interpretations of Hades) but these monsters are grafted to the physical environment, onto the ironwork of the bridge so that the metal, itself, becomes organic and the creatures are integrated into the physical

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[43] Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*, p. 38..
[44] Ibid., p. 38.
[45] Harris and Platzner, *Classical Mythology*, p. 200.
[46] Banks, *The Bridge*, p. 157.

engineering of the place. Thus, the girders become branches; the trains are maggots; the engine a 'fiery lizard'. They are no longer topographical, passive features of the dream-Hell, but threatening, evolving, organic abominations that attempt to seize hold of the tortured shade who runs, screaming, from its depths.

The manifestation of the bridge, like the characters Orr encounters there, is in fact an *eidolon* (to use again Hillman's taxonomy) taken from the Master-narrator's past life and assimilated into the dream-Hell of coma. As the novel progresses, it is revealed that the bridge represents the Forth Rail Bridge that stretches into Edinburgh, a feat of engineering that is a constant source of macabre fascination for the Master-narrator. It is an element of the overworld, rendered into something altogether more foreboding in its dream-shadow equivalent. In this world of the bridge, Orr continues to encounter infernal visions that include train crashes and platform explosions, resulting in violence and terror enacted upon the inhabitants: the shades of the underworld, punished with fire and 'brimstone'. These, too, are dreamlike *eidola* representing aspects of the Master-narrator's psyche and experiential memory which are only fully understood when their connections to the overworld are made with the narrator realizing that they represent the car crash he was involved in which propelled him into his katabatic coma. The crash, it is revealed, was caused by him driving whilst drunk, absent-mindedly marvelling at that masterpiece of engineering down-river, the Forth Rail Bridge, leading him to take his eyes off the road and consequently follow the path of descent into his coma underworld. In a similar way to Roy in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, these *eidola* are conjurations from the narrator's unconscious, shades that dwell within the dream-Hell of the psyche and which represent memories from the overworld that Orr must interpret in order to return to that world.

Initially, the *eidolon* that Orr is seeking is embodied by what he refers to as the 'Third City Records and Historical Materials Library', a building that appears to be 'lost' within the kaleidoscopically shifting and metamorphosing structure of the bridge. Orr refers to his search as a 'quest' and at one point enters one of the huge mechanical lifts of the bridge, instructing the operator to take him to floor 52. This promises to be the location of the Third City Library but on arrival, the doors open to reveal not a library but a 'scene of terrible disaster'.[47] Imagery of mechanical destruction and collapse alongside descriptions of a scorching, all-engulfing inferno pervade the novel once more, yet another vision of Hell that is created within Orr's katabatic quest and

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[47] Banks, *The Bridge*, p. 64.

another one that hinders his progress. On encountering this scene, Orr decides to retreat back to his 'normal' ordered existence within the bridge. The imagery of the mechanical chaos again represents the trauma of the Master-narrator's car accident whilst also conveying his fascination with engineering, a preoccupation that has been repressed into his coma unconscious. But it is also significant that this particular *eidolon* is in the place where the library should be. The library becomes an ultimate embodiment of knowledge (in this case knowledge of the self) that the Master-narrator seeks through the unconscious quest of his katabatic alter-ego John Orr. The library holds the key to identity and consequently the key to 'awakening' from the coma: the knowledge of the car accident and of the events leading up to his descent into the unconscious. However, he is not yet ready to face up to this traumatic knowledge, just as Roy, throughout *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, is frequently not prepared to face up to the true identity of the monster at the heart of his descent (the marabou stork). Similarly, Louis Drax refuses to accept who Gustave actually represents within his coma underworld. In a process that reflects Freud's theory of 'remembering, repeating and working through'[48] (discussed in chapter two), all three characters persistently re-live the same dream-like visions before they are finally ready to come to terms with what these visions or *eidola* really portend.

In *The Bridge*, the Master-narrator has to keep 'digging deeper' into his unconscious, descending further on his katabatic quest to retrieve the knowledge that will allow him to understand fully the *eidola* that appear all around him, just as Louis, led by Gustave, has to descend deeper into the skull-cave. One such *eidolon* created by Banks, in a conceit that was later appropriated by the BBC drama *Life On Mars*,[49] is the haunting vision of a man wired up to a life-support machine that keeps appearing on Orr's television set, alongside the intermittent 'bleeps' on his phone-line that he deems to be an intermittent fault but which clearly represent the noise of the life support machinery in the overworld. The fact that Orr fails to make the connection between these images and the Master-narrator's situation only serves to illustrate how far he is embedded within his coma underworld. This image becomes an ultimate *eidolon*, representing his corporeal presence in the overworld but 'recast' as a bodiless shade in the underworld. The closer Orr comes to katabatic knowledge as he descends deeper into his coma, the

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[48] Sigmund Freud, 'Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, 12 (London: Hogarth Press, 1958.

[49] *Life On Mars*, dir. Various, BBC One, 2006.

more the Master-narrator begins to understand what these *eidola* denote.

Another example of a 'hellish' *eidolon* that is particularly significant in causing the Master-narrator's final departure from the underworld, is the heroine of the bridge (and Orr's Virgilian guide), Abberlaine Arrol. Clearly, as the various narrative threads switch between one another, she comes to represent the Master-narrator's lover of the overworld, Andrea, the rather aloof object of his desire who cannot commit to a monogamous relationship and to whom the narrator is driving, drunkenly, at the time of his accident. Throughout Orr's quest, there are subtle suggestions of this connection between the underworld and the overworld, most notably in the handkerchief that Abberlaine gives to Orr. The circumstances surrounding this simple transaction are important to consider. The couple are involved in a rickshaw accident on the bridge (another *eidolon* that references the Master-narrator's road-traffic accident). Orr hands Abberlaine his handkerchief so that she can stem the blood running from her nose. Later, Abberlaine hands back the handkerchief to Orr – it has been washed and now bears the monogram of his initial – 'O'. Following this episode, when he is stripped of everything and condemned to the cold, isolated 'Tartarus' of his coma consciousness, the handkerchief is one of two items that he is allowed to keep, the other being the picture Abberlaine drew for him. It is the monogram on the handkerchief that saves it from being impounded, due to the fact that the monogram does not fit the description of the inventory that the foreman of the search-and-seizure officiously wields. As Orr descends further into the world of the bridge, the Master-narrator's autobiographical narrative begins to develop and gradually reveal more information about his life leading up to the accident. In one recollection, he describes a cherished scene of lovemaking between him and his partner, Andrea. Andrea is menstruating, and uses a white scarf to stem the blood-flow. Later, the narrator finds the scarf in his car, 'The blood stain, dried in a rough circle'.[50] He says that this stain 'wouldn't shift', no matter how many times he washes it. However, when he hands it over to Andrea, she washes it clean with ease and hands it back to him, 'Monogrammed with his initials'.[51]

These episodes serve to emphasise the notion of 'hellish' *eidola* of the coma unconscious that represent memories of the overworld. The 'O'-shaped stain in the overworld 'wouldn't shift' – in the underworld of the coma, no matter how many times Orr washes the handkerchief, it is always bloodied by various twists of fate. This

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[50] Banks, *The Bridge*, p. 319.
[51] Ibid., p. 320.

emphasises the concept of the *eidolon* that insistently transmits and communicates memories of the overworld (the handkerchief has to be bloodied and can be nothing else), thereby presenting Orr (and therefore the Master-narrator) with a metaphor that has to be unlocked and interpreted in order to escape from the underworld of coma. These dream *eidola* are merely images within the underworld of the coma, and as Hillman suggests, they 'are not substantial', but are instead 'ideational forms and shapes, the ideas that form and shape life, but are so buried in it that we may only "see" them when pulled out in abstractions'.[52] The link between traditional visions of the underworld and the dream-underworld of the coma can be seen in this notion of *abstraction*. The *eidola* are drawn out and extricated through the process of descent, allowing the katabatic hero to try and make sense of them in order to return to the surface of the overworld with the transfiguratory knowledge recovered from the heart of his 'hellish' unconscious.

In Orr's coma katabasis, these *eidola* constantly appear around him in various forms and it is only when these accumulate and conflate that knowledge is reached. At this point, the autobiographical narrative develops and the links are made between this memorial story and the 'hellish' visions of Orr's descent. This relationship between the overworld and the coma underworld can also be seen when Orr and Abberlaine first make love. The frequent references to the 'hissing gas fire' are reminiscent of descriptions used within the autobiographical narration when detailing a holiday that was taken together by the Master-narrator and Andrea, a holiday that largely consisted of love-making. The sound of the fire becomes an immediate aural *eidolon,* thereby knitting the scenes and experiences together. However, despite the initial thrill of the passion and connection between Orr and Abberlaine in the dreamworld of the bridge, something is not quite right:

> Its climax chills me though; something makes it worse than joyless, makes it frightening, terrifying […] a memory. Ancient and fresh, livid and rotten at once; the hope and fear of release and capture of animal and machine and meshing structures; a start and an end.[53]

Banks's use of ideational opposites underscores the image of the 'hellish' *eidolon*. The act of lovemaking is at once 'ancient' and 'fresh', existing both within the immediate experience of the sexual shadow-act, but also within a much older memory

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[52] Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*, p. 51.
[53] Banks, *The Bridge*, pp. 232-233.

of the overworld that remains buried within the unconscious and which manifests itself in this sexual act of the underworld. The lovemaking is also 'livid' and 'rotten' – both containing blood (for something to be livid, for something to bruise, it has to have blood) and devoid of blood, like the archetypal 'hellish' shade; and it is both the 'start' and the 'end'. This last oxymoronic coupling is perhaps most interesting. On one level, it could represent the start of his sexual relationship with Abberlaine whilst inherently representing the end of his relationship with Andrea, but it also perfectly embodies the result of any katabasis. It represents the ending of one life as the hero knows it, and the beginning of another caused through the acquisition of 'hellish' knowledge which means that the descent hero can never be the same again, transfigured for perpetuity and no longer like 'other men' (to once more return to Clark). These *eidola* of Abberlaine and the sexual act are both devoid of *thymos* within the coma-underworld, yet replete with distant memories of the waking-overworld. The very descriptions of the sexual act being 'chilling' and having a feeling that is 'less than joylessness' suggests that Orr is carnally engaged with a being that is not fully alive, but not fully dead. She is a woman who exists within the underworld of his mind, yet who actually exists, just out of reach, in the overworld. The 'little death' of his orgasm becomes a reminder that, to all intents and purposes, he is sleeping with a psychic embodiment of the 'living dead'. Through this scene that Banks carefully crafts, the image of another Greco-Roman katabatic hero is conjured: Orpheus. In the story of this tragic hero, Orpheus manages to charm Hades and Persephone into releasing his dead wife, Eurydice, from the underworld on the condition that as he leads her into the overworld, he must never look behind him. Of course, he cannot resist this fatal temptation and inevitably turns around at the very point of leaving Hades (in an action that is mirrored by the story of Lot and his wife in the Old Testament). What is significant within the Orpheus myth is that it is the discomfort he feels by being in the presence of his wife's *eidolon* that causes him to turn around in the first place, hearing no footsteps or voice, thus emphasizing the idea of the *eidolon* being an empty vessel, devoid of *thymos* and little more than a shadow of the past.

Orr ultimately describes this sexual act by saying that he has, 'Just fucked the bridge'.[54] He has penetrated the heart of his coma-Hell and has been granted more knowledge, albeit knowledge that he has not yet fully grasped. Despite this initial lack of insight, from this point onwards he descends further into the underworld, finally able

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[54] Banks, *The Bridge*, p. 232.

to leave the mechanical topography of the bridge and move into the world beyond. In short, it is this particular intersection of the *eidolon* of the underworld and the memories of the overworld that proves to be a springboard towards the final quest for katabatic knowledge. Once he has finally taken this jump and moved beyond the world of the bridge, Orr suddenly finds himself in a war between two bureaucratic armies, attacking each other from speeding trains that hurtle away from the bridge until they reach land whereupon they burrow downwards into the very centre of the earth. Through this narrative development, the geological divisions of the novel are stressed once more, reflecting the idea of physical descent and the Master-narrator's increasing desire to dig deeper towards the heart of his coma-Hell and seize hold of the katabatic knowledge which will trigger his transfiguration and process of 'rising'. The deeper Orr travels into the earth, the more extreme his visions of Hell become, but also the more traditional they become in a Catholic sense of *contrapasso*, where the 'form of retribution [is] exactly suited to the nature of each sin'.[55] Earlier, in one particular moment of clarity, Orr considers why he is trapped within this Hell-state, saying, 'I do not know why I am here. Because I did something wrong'.[56] The seamlessness between this call-and-response utterance, between the doubt and the certainty, echoes the notions of Hell being a place of punishment where the individual is so accustomed to their torture that they almost become senseless. They passively accept their fate, in the full knowledge that they have committed a wrongdoing and deserve their punishment in some way, but forgetting the specifics of their transgression. Later in Banks's novel, captured soldiers are thrown into 'pools of boiling mud'.[57] They are then dragged out again, with more mud shovelled onto them so that they become 'gnarled statues', symbols of the punishment that awaits other rebels or transgressors in this psychical underworld. Betrayal constitutes the ultimate sin in this world where faceless factions go to war over an unknown cause (an *eidolon* that represents the Master-narrator's own disgust at the senselessness of the Falklands War of the overworld). Similarly, within the ninth circle of Dante's Hell (a place that, like *The Bridge*, also punishes traitors), the transgressors are punished by being turned into gnarled and distorted statues, trapped in time. However, unlike the traditional Christian image of Hell-fire, Dante envisions his innermost circle of Hell as being a place of utmost cold, Satan himself held in a frozen lake of blood. Once more, the symbiosis of Hell and Hades and the mythological

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[55] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, p. 25.
[56] Banks, *The Bridge*, p. 186.
[57] Ibid., p. 311.

traditions of both can be seen, Dante's ninth circle echoing the cold, pneumatic region of Tartarus, rather than the traditional Christian image of Hell. Banks, too, adopts this 'magpie' approach, developing his own vision of the underworld based upon archetypal imagery of both the Christian Hell and of the Greco-Roman Hades.

At the furthest extremity of his descent, Orr finds himself at the edge of another body of water, again the archetypal symbol, in the mythology of antiquity, of the division between the land of the living and of the dead. Here, he once more encounters an old man who whips the corpses of men that wash up on shore. The first time they met was in a dream Orr had whilst he lived within the bridge. Back then, Orr could extract no dialogue from the stranger; now, the old man lets slip a telling utterance in reply to Orr's pressing question: 'What happened here? What happened to all these people?' to which he responds: 'They didn't listen to their dreams'. Orr does not say anything. Instead, he sets off again 'for the distant line of light which fills the horizon like a streak of white gold'.[58] This interchange is apposite to the entire representation of the coma descent. The words of the old man imply to Orr that the reason why he is still being punished, being psychologically *scourged* within this Hell of the unconscious, is because he, too, is not listening to his dreams. It is an unconscious signpost towards the fact that he is flagrantly refusing to decode the 'hellish' visions, the *eidola* that are appearing all around him within his coma. Again, this endorses Hillman's theory of dream, embodying the archetypal descent into the underworld and it is these words that prove to be the final catalyst for the Master-narrator's return and 'awakening' from the coma underworld. No sooner are they spoken than Orr suddenly turns and heads towards the light, finally beginning to understand what the *eidola* in his coma 'dreams' represent. The 'white gold' light takes on both physical and metaphorical connotations, constituting the bright, clinical light of the hospital room penetrating his eyelids and forming a horizontal slant of light, but also representing the spiritual incandescence of transfiguration that enlightens the soul and allows for resurrection and passage back into the land of the living.

As discussed, the novel can be examined through the lens of Hillman's theory of dream as underworld, but it can also be analysed using earlier theories of dream-states as posited by Freud and Jung and upon which Hillman developed his own praxis of dream analysis. Furthermore, the whole novel is preoccupied with the notion of psychoanalytical 'dream-work'. Whilst living in the bridge, Orr has frequent sessions

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[58] Banks, *The Bridge*, pp. 362-363.

with his psychotherapist, Dr. Joyce, a specialist in dream-analysis who advocates this approach in order to unlock Orr's lost memories, including the core aspects of his lost identity: his name, past life and how he came to live within the bridge. At the start of the novel, Orr seems reluctant to engage in this dream-work, supposedly inventing more 'interesting' dreams that compensate for his 'real' dreams that he deems to be, 'Too banal to be worth analysing'.[59] This practice of 'inventing' dreams is significant as everything that occurs within the 'hellish' world of the bridge is an invention of the Master-narrator's unconscious: in the darkest reaches of coma, all is dream. Dr. Joyce therefore is an *eidolon*, representing yet another Virgilian guide who can lead the way out of coma, similar to the role of the nurse in *The Coma* who helps Carl to confront the truth of his own inner Hell: that he is still trapped within his coma dreams. Akin to both Garland's novel and Welsh's, in *The Bridge* dream-archetypes persist in trying to reveal to the Master-narrator the truth of his predicament and to unify the fractured narrative threads of his coma underworld. Here, we may once more return to Hillman and his analysis of how dream-'persons' may operate within the inner Hell of the dream-state: 'The dream image of a human person cannot be taken in terms of his actuality, since the image in a dream belongs to the underworld'.[60] As discussed, the *eidola* in the novels of Garland, Welsh and Banks are not the 'actual' individuals of the waking world, the Catherine of the underworld not really representing the 'real' Catherine of the overworld in *The Coma* any more than Joyce represents any particular doctor that the Master-narrator has encountered in his overworld. Instead, what ties together the *eidola* in all three novels is that they each represent the same archetype: the Virgilian guide (or in Jungian terms the 'wise old man/woman') whose job it is to ensure safe passage of the katabatic hero out of the dream-Hell of coma.

Despite their differences, both Jung and Freud, in their praxis, were concerned with extricating particular dream images (Hillman's *eidola*), deconstructing and demystifying them until all of their connections to the 'dayworld' were made clear. Whereas Freud was dedicated to analysing how the dream-image manifested the repressed wishes of the 'id' (often sexual), Jung focused more upon how dreams were attempts to 'individuate' the archetypes of the psyche, that is, the varied and conflicting incarnations of the self that co-exist within the individual. The Jungian archetype of the 'shadow', in a similar way to Freud's id, holds the key to impulsive, often destructive

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[59] Banks, *The Bridge*, p. 22.
[60] Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*, p. 61.

and self-destructive desire. Through this process of individuation, dreams attempt to bring into equilibrium the various aspects of the psyche in order to 'unify them into a harmonious, balanced whole'.[61] Jung concludes that by doing this, dreams may well constitute projections of past experience, or even embodiments of repressed desires, as Freud postulates, but they also have the potential to pave the way for, 'Realizing the aims of the developing personality'.[62] Thus, rather than looking at how an individual dream represents a particular complex of the unconscious (a goal in Freudian analysis), Jung would instead analyse sequences of dreams ('dream series') with the aim of discovering which archetypes of the collective unconscious were under-developed, leading to solutions as to how to enhance the psychic life and bring it into equilibrium. This idea that dreams can actually suggest to us, not only how we are currently living our life, but also how we may live our life in the future (should we listen to the dream image and individuate the parts of our psyche that are under-developed) led to Jung's rather controversial concept that dreams can often have a prophetic quality at their centre. To highlight this notion, Jung proposes that:

> Dreams prepare, announce, or warn about certain situations, often long before they actually happen. This is not necessarily a miracle or pre-cognition. Most crises or dangerous situations have a long incubation, only the conscious mind is not aware of it.[63]

This so-called illusion of precognition is created by the unconscious. During the process of dream, the unconscious generates suggestions of the consequences of continuing to ignore the individuation process of the psyche, so for example if one continuously had dreams of daring, life-threatening behaviour, it might suggest that the 'shadow' is overly dominant, creating a certain sense of inevitability that some danger may well befall the dreamer in the overworld. This was the case for one of Jung's patients who repeatedly had visions of his own death. These visions eventually came to fruition due to the fact that he was a thrill-seeker and often climbed mountains without harnesses, a risk that was repeatedly reflected within his dream-states, thus creating the illusion of dream-'prophecy'. This Jungian approach to dream-work, I suggest, is once more evocative of the katabatic quest: the descent into a shadowy underworld in order to reach self-enlightenment and knowledge of the future. Moreover, it is an approach that

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[61] Hall and Nordby, *A Primer of Jungian Psychology*, p. 119.
[62] Ibid., p. 119.
[63] Carl Jung, *The Collected Works of Carl Jung*, Volume 18, trans. R.F.C. Hull, eds. Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London & Henley, 1977), p. 208.

is conveyed in several of the works of coma fiction discussed, with the katabatic heroes Carl, Roy, Louis and John Orr descending into the underworld of coma in order to individuate the fragmented parts of their psyche and reach the katabatic enlightenment that will allow them to return from their coma, 'reborn' and 'transfigured'. One is also reminded of Johnny's prophetic waking dreams in *The Dead Zone*, a gift of knowledge brought back from his coma underworld that seems to embody Jungian thought in its fullest 'prophetic' sense, alongside Louis's own vision of his dead father trapped within a cave.

Throughout *The Bridge*, Banks is preoccupied with developing katabatic dream *eidola* archetypes, 'enigma codes' that the Master-narrator, alongside the reader, must 'crack' in order to unravel the mystery at the heart of the novel – at the heart of the coma-Hell. Banks bestows upon the Master-narrator (and the reader) the role of Jungian psychoanalyst, setting them both the task to draw out the dream-images of the underworld and make the connections between these and their equivalent manifestations in the overworld. Banks's position as a post-Freudian/Jungian writer is further exemplified by one of the other narrative threads that he creates: the folkloric narration of an illiterate, Scottish barbarian. Written in a thick brogue, this fantasy-narration persistently intrudes upon both Orr's journey of katabasis and the Master-narrator's biographical revelations. The Barbarian's story draws on archetypes of descent mythology and overtly so. In one sequence, in a hybridization of fairytale and myth, he is set the task of travelling into the 'Underwurld' [sic] in order to rescue the 'Sleepin Byooty', following the model of the archetypal katabatic quest in the vein of Orpheus or, more pertinently, Heracles. Like that man-god, instead of passively interacting with the shades of Hades, the Barbarian battles against them. Within this sequence, Banks openly draws a parallel between the coma descent and the katabasis of antiquity, the Barbarian encountering such mythological figures as the ferryman of the river Styx, Charon (here pronounced 'Karen') and Sisyphus, the doomed transgressor (discussed earlier), who keeps rolling, 'This huge fuckin chuckie right tae the tap aw the hill'.[64] Truly Herculean in his aggression, the Barbarian disrupts this repetitious punishment, helping Sisyphus with the boulder by leaving it at the top of the hill, a dream action which implies that the Master-narrator, too, has the power to put a stop to the repetitious nightmares that grip him and sustain his coma-Hell. In other words, these archetypal 'dream series' of the underworld allude to the possibility that, like the greatest man-

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[64] Banks, *The Bridge*, p. 212.

gods Heracles and even Christ, the Master-narrator has the power to conquer the underworld (to *harrow* the Hell of his unconscious) and rise again, reborn and transfigured as a messianic man-god akin to Johnny Smith.

At the end of this quest into the underworld, the Barbarian finally locates the goal of his katabasis, the 'Sleepin Byooty', a designation that immediately resonates with the Wijdicks' identification of the Sleeping Beauty trope in filmic representations of coma. However, this particular fairy-tale 'princess' turns out to be no such thing, as we see in the following extract focalized through the Barbarian:

> …a man lyin in bed, all white-faced an asleep. There's these big things like metal chests on theyre sides all clustered around him an wee bit things like strings attached tae him. Fuk aw else.[65]

The *eidolon* of Orr's narrative (the bed-ridden coma patient) also makes an appearance at the heart of the Barbarian's own story and in both cases, he embodies the knowledge at the heart of all katabic quests. However, it is only one element of the entire catalogue of knowledge represented, as discussed, by the 'Library' and the Master-narrator must collect all pieces of the jigsaw if he wishes to return to the overworld. In short, looked at in isolation, this image of the coma-victim means nothing; it is only when put into sequence (in a Jungian 'dream series') that it begins to make sense and cohere into a fully-formed katabic knowledge within the hero's psyche. These are therefore archetypal and primordial images of the Master-narrator's 'self' that is locked inside coma and which needs to be 'individuated' if a return to the overworld is to be achieved. The Barbarian represents either the Freudian 'id' or the Jungian 'shadow', encapsulating deeply primal, violent and sexual urges that have the potential to result in self-destruction. Depending upon the theorist, the specifics of how such a psychic archetype is operating within the dream-Hell of coma would vary dramatically. For this reason, I wish to elucidate this discussion of dream as underworld by analysing two specific sequences, approaching them from both theoretical positions.

At one stage of the novel, Orr awakens from a particularly vivid dream in which the Barbarian rapes the dismembered yet still living corpses of what appear to be vestal virgins. Filled with self-disgust, Orr internalizes the fact that, 'It was worse than that […] I was there, that was me'.[66] For both Freud and Jung, the dream of the Barbarian would represent an aspect of the psyche that needs to be confronted, supported by Orr's

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[65] Banks, *The Bridge*, p. 217.
[66] Ibid., p. 105.

exclamation, 'That was me.' In fact, in this 'hellish' dream-world of coma, every image is part of the Master-narrator's overall psyche, the understanding of which is essential for his departure from Hell. However, a Freudian reading would focus on the violence of the sexual act, proposing that this represents a repressed wish from the overworld. This wish of the Master-narrator would be that he had been more forceful with Andrea in making her take more responsibility for their relationship, thereby forcing her to commit, whole-heartedly, to his sexual virility: to his libido. A Jungian approach would not be preoccupied with the Barbarian's brutal act per se but would rather look to how the Barbarian, as 'shadow', is constantly fighting its way into consciousness and oppressing other psychical archetypes that are less aggressive and less threatening. The Barbarian's narrative, therefore, becomes a warning to the psyche, an indication that the other archetypes of the Master-narrator's unconscious must fully individuate themselves in order to reunify his fragmented psyche, thus reforming an equilibrium of selfhood and triggering an awakening. Moreover, if the 'shadow' was always dominant within the Master-narrator's unconscious, it can perhaps explain the cause of the accident in the first place. It is revealed that he is particularly jealous of Andrea's relationship with her lover in France, who has MS. Towards the end of the novel, in the increasingly revealing biographical narration, it is said of the Master-narrator that, 'He had dreams about the dying man in the other city, and sometimes thought he could see him, lying in a hospital bed, surrounded by machines'.[67] This is reminiscent of Orr's visions of himself immersed in coma, and so on a Jungian level, the car accident can be seen as an inevitability, a product of an increasing move towards self-destruction in order to pull Andrea's focus away from her lover and to force her into caring for the Master-narrator. This, in turn, creates an inner Jungian 'complex' that prevents him from commencing the return leg of his katabasis as whilst he is in his coma, he can still hold onto Andrea and the thought that she might be caring for him instead of his love-rival in France. However, despite these subtle variations in psychoanalytical praxis, both Freud and Jung would insist upon the importance of interpreting the archetypal dream images. For the katabatic hero of Banks's novel, it is this interpretation that is the key to unlock his 'resurrection' from coma.

This eventual resurrection from the Hell-state is triggered by the Master-narrator, in his various guises as John Orr, or the Barbarian, or any of the *eidola* that inhabit the underworld of his unconscious. In fact, returning to the old man on the beach and the

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[67] Banks, *The Bridge*, p. 337.

final knowledge he provides ('They didn't listen to their dreams') one may think once more of Jung's archetype of the 'wise old man'. After all, it is this shade that initiates Orr's final journey out of coma which I would now like to look at more closely.

I have discussed, earlier, how in order for the Master-narrator to arise from coma (to move upwards out of the underworld of his unconscious) he must, in the guise of John Orr, descend and dig deeper into this unconscious. This, therefore, becomes a paradoxical and oxymoronic course: an 'inversion' in which the Master-narrator can only move up and out of coma by going deeper into its hellish 'landscape'. This psychical manifestation of a topographical 'inversion' that occurs at the deepest point of the descent journey is reminiscent of the Dantean model of escape from hell during which there is, in Falconer's words, a 'turning upside down at a zero point and a return to the surface of some kind'.[68] In the *Inferno*, Dante travels down through Hell until he re-emerges on the other side of the earth; he and Virgil climb down Satan's body, reaching the deepest point of Hell at which point the inversion occurs: 'I raised my eyes, believing I should see | the half of Lucifer that I had left; | instead I saw him with his legs turned up'.[69] He has descended into the earth via one hemisphere and ended his katabatic journey emerging into the other hemisphere, staring at the stars and leaving Satan behind forever. In *The Bridge*, a similar inversion occurs, an inversion that is again accentuated by the geological denominations of the chapters. As Orr further traverses the world of the bridge, the deeper he journeys into its geological landscape, burrowing into the volcanic layers of the earth and so therefore delving deeper into his unconscious. In moving towards the 'core' of this world, he comes closer to the surface of the waking overworld, a paradox represented by the increasingly modern geological epochs used as section-titles for the novel. As Falconer suggests, 'Katabatic inversion thus inverts the hero's sense of entrapment into one of liberation or insight'.[70] Such depictions of 'hellish' inversions are rife within the literature of mythological descent. Hillman, for example, discusses how in the Egyptian underworld imagination, 'The dead walked upside down so that stuff of their bowels came out through their mouths'.[71] In another one of Orr's many visions of Hell, he imagines that, 'The bridge is part of a circle', Banks again drawing on Dante's topographical model of the nine circles of Hell. However, interestingly, Banks also employs archetypes from classical mythology, not

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[68] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, p. 45.
[69] Dante Alighieri, *Inferno* in *The Divine Comedy*, Canto XXXIV, lines 88-90, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (Everyman's Library: London, 1995), p. 61.
[70] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, p. 53.
[71] Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld,* p. 183.

least this 'hellish' inversion of faecal matter. At one point, Orr dreams of being trapped in a different manifestation of the bridge, staring at macabre sexual orgies on the shore opposite, where the women, in an image reminiscent of the sirens in the *Odyssey*, call to him to join in their sexual depravity. He cannot cross the water, however, because of the 'carnivorous fish' which inhabit the water, embodying the monstrous guardians of the underworld inherent in mythology (the Greco-Roman hellhound of the underworld, Cerberos, being one such example, and one that appears in the Barbarian's own descent). Orr details his frustrated revenge upon these 'Hell-bags': 'I waited until I needed a crap, then threw the turd at them. Those obscene brats *used* it in one of their filthy sex games'.[72] In a scene that harks back to Hillman's discussion of Egyptian inversion within the underworld, faecal matter, a symbol of discarded, 'dead' matter, becomes a symbol of sexual desire and virility. Such a depiction of an archetypal inversion creates an overall vision of the underworld, a mirror world that seems to represent the overworld in the form of *eidola*, yet which subverts and inverts all of the meanings and associations of that world.

Within the 'inverted' world of both Hell and the coma, time, too, becomes subverted, just as time becomes suspended and distorted within the world of dream. In archetypal manifestations of the underworld, there occurs at once the impossible re-running and collapsing of time (the repetitious punishments of Sisyphus and Ixion, for example, that never reach a conclusion) and yet the descent hero must move through time and space in order to fulfil their katabasis and return to the overworld. The *Inferno* is a paradigm of this portrayal of the dichotomy of Hell-time whereby Dante perceives *eidola* trapped in time, and yet his own journey is framed by a time-scale, descending at 6am and re-emerging at 6pm. Set against this oxymoronic inversion of time is again the other inversion of place: the return to the overworld by climbing further into the underworld. It is this sudden inversion that occurs in such works as the *Inferno* that can also be seen in coma literature, not least in *Louis Drax* in which, as discussed earlier, Louis, by travelling deeper into the Hades of his coma, comes closer to inhabiting a place of overworldly respite, whereas the overworld itself transforms into a manifestation of an archetypal, burning Hell.

In another example of Greco-Roman descent literature, the *Aeneid*, Virgil writes:

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[72] Banks, *The Bridge*, p. 187.

> The way downward is easy from Avernus.
> Black Dis's door stands open night and day.
> But to retrace your steps to heaven's air,
> There is the trouble, there is the toil. [73]

However, this depiction of the difficulty of the katabatic return is contentious, as explicated by Falconer in her discussion of Eduard Norden's work on the 'hellish' inversion of return when she writes that, '[The difficulty of return] is only true in a limited sense; it is easy to go to Hades by dying, but difficult to cross over when alive; and the return journey in most cases occurs swiftly and with little hindrance'.[74] The key word in the extract from Virgil is 'retrace'. It implies that a return involves travelling back over the 'hellish' lands already covered, yet this does not occur in the *Inferno*. Dante travels *through* Hell to come out on the other side, a return he describes in less than seven lines. Odysseus, too, at the end of his own katabasis, seems to find the return easy, simply turning away from the teeming, tortured souls of Hades and returning to his ship. A process of toilsome 'retracing' is avoided. Even Theseus's return from the labyrinth at Minos (in an 'earthly' version of the descent myth) is easy; he does, in fact, retrace his steps, yet his passage is made effortless through the gift of Ariadne's thread. Contrary to Virgil's statement, katabatic return seems to be not so difficult and this model is likewise exploited in coma fiction. In *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, no sooner has Roy faced up to his inner demons than a return is triggered; in *The Coma*, a similar transition occurs, the return triggered by confronting the simple contents of a briefcase, and in *The Bridge*, the return seems to be entirely in the Master-narrator's hands. Like Carl, at the deepest point of the Hades of coma, all the hero of Banks's novel has to do is to make the cognitive decision to return, and a return will be granted. As the Master-narrator says, 'The choice is not between dream and reality; it is between two different dreams'.[75] In the end, return from the underworld is all about choice, an active decision that is in itself an inversion of Orr's passive helplessness within the Hell-dreams of coma. Again, in *Louis Drax*, return from Hades is a matter of choice, as summarized by Louis in the novel's final lines: 'I know that one day, if I want to, I can do it. I can take

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[73] Virgil, the *Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (Harvill Press: London, 1984), Book VI, lines 126-129, p. 164. The original text reads:
facilis descensus Averni:
noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis;
sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras,
hic opus, hic labor est
[74] Falconer, p. 43.
[75] Banks, *The Bridge*, p. 380.

one step forward. And then another'.[76]

   Far from being an arduous task, then, the katabatic return appears to be rather simple, and this simplicity is similarly represented in the works of coma fiction discussed. However, I suggest that the real Virgilian 'toil' is metaphorically embodied in the post-katabatic 'transfiguration'. For the katabatic hero, despite gaining some form of enlightenment from the underworld, something of their old self has been lost, changing them inexorably. For Lazarus, despite the second life that has been granted him, I argue that he will always be considered as the man who arose from the dead; for Orpheus, he will always know that the cause of losing his wife for the second time was his own doubt in the promises made to him by Hades himself; and even Heracles, despite 'conquering' the underworld, is left with the unsettling knowledge that after he dies, whilst his spiritual form will ascend Mount Olympus and join the gods, his physical form will be trapped in the underworld forever. And for many of the real-life survivors of coma, the 'katabatic' knowledge that they have emerged from the 'underworld' forever changed will become the Virgilian trouble and toil of their post-coma condition.

4.4: *The Limits of Mortality*: Coma, Restitution and the Function of Boundaries

It is clear, from the discussions within these two chapters, that much of coma fiction (both interior and exterior) is preoccupied with equating the medical condition, not only with dream and sleep, but with mythological and biblical narratives of 'hellish' descent, resurrection and transfiguration. Even within the biographical work of Redgrove and Plath, mythological archetypes are used to navigate through the experience of the 'death-state'. Throughout this chapter, I have examined how the development of depth psychology, in which the locus of the unconscious is placed at the deepest part of the self within a topographical model, serves to echo underworld mythologies. I have also discussed how Freud and Jung draw links between both classical and traditional descent narratives and the model of the mind, and how Hillman develops these ideas to generate an entire theory based upon the conceit that dream *is* the underworld. Rosalind Williams, in her work on the archetype of actual and imaginary subterranean worlds, observes that, 'Since the nineteenth century […] excavation has served as a dominant metaphor for truth-seeking […] In this respect scientific inquiry retains an aura of the

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[76] Jensen, *Louis Drax*, p. 227.

mythological, since the heroic quest for scientific truth has the pattern of a descent into the underworld'.[77] In short, the archetypes of mythology and, in particular, of descent, are so far embedded into consciousness that humankind almost takes them for granted. As Paul Ricoeur observes in his appraisal of Frye's ideas about the longevity of mythological narratives, 'If an archetype designates a stable conventional order, this order can be established in terms of its correspondence to the order of nature and its recurrences – day and night, the seasons, the years, life and death'.[78] This seems to explain why these archetypes are still in existence: that no matter how distant they now are from their original mythological source material, they have over the centuries helped to form, 'An already existing order of words [that] is not pure chaos',[79] therefore allowing humankind to attempt to make sense of the world. At this point, it is perhaps useful to examine Ricoeur's development of narrative theory in a little more detail, as the ideas he proposes, I suggest, draws attention to the link between the Jungian concept of the archetype and narratological discussions of the role of mythological archetypes in the creation of selfhood. Indeed, Ricoeur, in development of Aristotelian theories of emplotment and narrative, asserts that, 'Fiction contributes to making life, in the biological sense of the word, a human life'.[80] This statement almost directly echoes Frye's observation that, 'Literature […] has a lot to do with identifying the human world with the natural world around it, or finding analogies between them'.[81] Literature, therefore, is not just a record of human experience with which the reader has a passive relationship. Instead, it actively informs one's knowledge of the world and helps to develop one's understanding of the self. Thus, as Ricoeur proposes:

> Fiction, in particular narrative fiction, is an irreducible dimension of *self-understanding*. If it is true that fiction is only completed in life and that life can be understood only through the stories that we tell about it, then an *examined* life, in the sense of the word as we have borrowed it from Socrates, is a life *recounted*.[82]

In support of this statement, Ricoeur points towards the interplay between the analyst

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[77] Rosalind Williams, *Notes on the Underground,* p. 49.
[78] Paul Ricoeur, '*Anatomy of Criticism* or the Order of Paradigms' in *Centre and Labyrinth*, eds. Eleanor Cook, Chaviva Hosek, Jay MacPherson, Patricia Parker and Julian Patrick (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 1-13 (p. 9).
[79] Ibid., p. 9.
[80] Paul Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative' in *On Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 20-33 (p. 20).
[81] Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, p.49.
[82] Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', p. 31.

and the analysand in psychotherapeutic sessions, with the latter encouraged to draw out 'story-fragments' into 'a narrative which would be at once more bearable and more intelligible'.[83] In Jungian practice, of course, this unification of story-fragments would be encouraged by tracing them through archetypal imagery and narratives, mythologies, fables – that which forms the collective unconscious. Here, Ricoeur's concept of 'fragments' is mirrored by Jung's concept of the 'fragmented' self that needs to be fully 'individuated'. It is also a term that, I suggest, Jung would find more acceptable than Freud's designation 'archaic remnants' that he used to describe the 'dream-images' that Jung consistently argued were 'analogous to primitive ideas, myths, and rites'.[84] Jung heavily criticized Freud's use of 'remnants', arguing that this contributed to a 'prevailing depreciation of the unconscious as a mere appendix of consciousness […], a dustbin which collects all the refuse of the conscious mind'.[85] Ricoeur's 'fragments', rather than Freud's 'remnants', is suggestive of something that can be potentially re-formed into a cohesive form once more, a concept central to the Jungian approach to 'dream-work' in which the symbolic and archetypal 'language' of dreams is 'translated' from its cultural form into one that speaks of the 'truth' at the heart of the unconscious. Similarly, central to Ricoeur's work on the importance of narration in the formation of selfhood is the idea of 'sedimentation' and 'innovation', concepts that, I suggest, correlate with Jungian concepts of the 'archetype' and 'translation'. The 'sediment' refers to the universal historical archetypes, the 'models that constitute, after the fact, the typology of emplotment which allows us to order the history of literary genres'.[86] 'Innovation' constitutes the assimilation and redevelopment of such archetypal tropes (the sediment), allowing the possibility for 'a later experimentation in the narrative domain',[87] in other words, individual creativity and reinterpretation of the 'sediment' into new, personal narratives. In this sense, we can once more return to Frye's theories of narrative, not least his notion that in literature:

> Everything is new, and yet recognizably the same kind of thing as the old, just as a new baby is a genuinely new individual, although it's also an example of something very common, which is human beings, and also it's linearly descended from the first human beings there ever were [sic].[88]

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[83] Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', p. 30.
[84] Jung, *Collected Works*, p. 206.
[85] Ibid., p. 206.
[86] Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', p. 24.
[87] Ibid ., p. 25.
[88] Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, p. 45.

Here, Frye uses the image of biological 'inheritance' to describe how literature constantly assimilates and reinvents what has gone before, conveying Ricoeur's concepts of 'sedimentation' and 'innovation'. However, whilst Frye uses biology and genetics as a metaphor for how literature has developed, in Jungian terms, such a 'literature' has been biologically 'inherited' through the collective unconscious. I suggest, therefore, that the 'sediment' can be seen to be the conceptual, literary equivalent of the Jungian collective unconscious. As both Ricoeur and Frye suggest, there is a constant reinvention and innovation of literature and literary archetypes (the 'sediment') and this, I suggest, has its equivalent in the Jungian collective unconscious that also perpetually evolves. In other words, literature holds the 'sediment' of all historical human experience, emotions and attempts to understand the world. In this way, this allows the individual both to assimilate and innovate the sediment in literature, perhaps allowing him to continue to try to make sense of the world and thereby continue to develop 'new-but-different' literature. This process helps to further elucidate Ricoeur's assertion that: 'Fiction contributes to making life'. In this way, Jung's collective unconscious is not necessarily unlocked by literature, or by tracing the links between literary or mythological archetypes and the mind. I suggest that the collective unconscious *is* literature. In his discussion of the katabatic journey (one particular aspect of the 'sediment'), David Pike observes that, 'It requires the descent through hell to teach the protagonist allegorical interpretation'.[89] Perhaps writers of coma fiction are consistently using and innovating sedimentary archetypes from the mythologies of descent to try and come to terms with the fear and chaos that the coma itself represents: that they are creating allegories to help to rationalise coma.

But the question remains: why this *particular* medical condition? The range of coma texts examined over the course of these last two chapters and the parallels of literary and mythological archetypes employed certainly seems to suggest that authors have elected to speak for the victims of coma and to create allegories of katabasis continually. In doing so, coma fiction, in particular, fills in the gaps of experience with archetypal narratives and imagery in an attempt to navigate through an incomprehensible concept (a total void in consciousness) by equating it with a vastly more comprehensible concept (a semi-conscious state – sleep and dream and the 'hellish' descents this state can initiate). As discussed in the light of Redgrove's work, an *absolute nothing* cannot be communicated, so it has to be narrated through the

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[89] David L. Pike, *Passage Through Hell*, p. 113.

medium of a near-tangible *something*. In this sense, authors, like the creators of mythologies and religious stories before them, attempt to express the unspeakable by grounding it in archetypal images – the 'order of words' to which Ricoeur refers. During a seminar talk given in London to the Guild of Pastoral Psychology, Jung observed that, 'Now, we have no symbolic life, and we are all badly in need of the symbolic life. Only the symbolic life can express the need of the soul'.[90] Here, the Greek word *psyche* is again evoked. Once meaning 'soul', it now implies 'mind', and so Jung's comment can be linked to Ricoeur's insistence upon the self's 'genuine demand for narrative'.[91] This Jungian 'need of the soul' (or Ricoeur's 'narrative demand') becomes a fundamental need for the human mind to comprehend the incomprehensible and to strive continually to find ways to communicate the incommunicable. By concentrating on the dwindling of Christianity and religious faith in the West, perhaps Jung failed to see that the symbolic life also resides within literature. It is literature that both reveals authors' concerns and obsessions with unanswered questions, but which also exposes their need to try and answer those questions in an attempt to alleviate the inner fears of the unknown – to maintain, as Ricoeur states, the 'stable conventional order'. As Frye suggests, 'When a system of myths loses all connexion with belief, it becomes purely literary'.[92] I argue that this does not necessarily mean that it loses all of its power and influence upon the individual and upon society. Instead, it provides one with the tools with which one can narrate, 'work through' and comprehend the world in which one lives and all of its obstacles. The narration of illness and trauma is one such example of the symbolic life, with the writers of coma fiction confronting and challenging the potential void of death by appropriating archetypes of descent, resurrection and, ultimately, immortality. The coma victim is perhaps, himself, an *eidolon*, a reminder that one can be alive, yet appear dead, devoid of all psychic associations that had hitherto been seen to constitute identity: a 'hellish shade' of the victim's former self. For the majority of those who are lucky enough to return from this 'death-state', the lack of memory of the coma-state (and often of their previous identity) becomes representative of the absolute, all-consuming nothing that may come with death, and that is prior to birth. The coma victim becomes an image of there being no life after death, of the total void in consciousness, and regardless of one's religious stance, this represents an ultimate, archetypal fear, made all the more dreadful by the

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[90] Jung, *Collected Works*, p 274.
[91] Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', p. 29.
[92] Frye, *Fables of Identity*, p. 32.

fact that it is a state of consciousness that can never be communicated; can never be narrativized. It is, by definition, unspeakable and therefore a trauma that is unassailable: the abstract concept of a void.

In his work on the dead, and his explorations of the places where the dead co-habit the world of the living, Robert Pogue Harrison explores the human need to delineate and 'contain' space. His discussions are particularly pertinent to this notion of the need to 'contain' the abstract coma experience through archetypal depictions of spaces of the underworld. Claiming that 'places are located in nature, yet they always have human foundations', Harrison goes on to assert that places 'do not occur naturally but are created by human beings through some mark or sign of human presence'.[93] Harrison therefore suggests that out of the abstract notion of 'space' humans craft more tangible embodiments of 'place' by creating concrete, bounded 'landmarks'. It is this process that allows nature to 'become bounded', thus granting man the power of 'human containment'.[94]

This creation of place as a form of human containment of an abstract concept is at the heart of traditional tales of katabasis. The construction of subterranean topographies is an attempt to concretise and rationalise the abstract concept of death and the afterlife. By attributing physical, traversable landscapes to the underworld and, moreover, by allowing their heroes to return from these places, authors of katabatic narratives are able to 'contain' death by describing it in terms of tangible, imaginable and topographical imagery. Similarly, as discussed earlier, the pursuit of depth psychology was to 'contain' the somewhat abstract concept of the mind within a more 'bounded', perceptible model: a physical and geographical landscape. I therefore argue that many writers of coma fiction, in their creation of such interior, psychological landscapes of the underworld are attempting metaphorically to harrow the hell of a liminal space. In other words, by 'binding' the unconscious state of coma within topographically concretized and archetypal depictions of a physical underworld, these writers are attempting to contain and comprehend coma.

This process of containment is common within the works of fiction I have discussed, with authors creating places out of the abstract space of the unconscious (just as Plato concretized the space of the mind into the place of the cave). In Liz Jensen's novel, the interior space of Louis's unconscious becomes concretized and 'bounded' in the form of

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[93] Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 18.
[94] Ibid., p. 19.

his own cave which, in turn, increasingly maps the subterranean topography of Hades. At the deepest point of descent, and shortly before reaching the point of katabatic enlightenment, the cave is described as 'a freezing mouth breathing out'.[95] Here again, a comparison with the deepest part of Hades – Tartarus – can be made through the reference to cold air, expelled from the 'mouth' of the cave. Banks's novel borrows topographical motifs from traditional representations of both Hades and Hell to represent a vertically-structured 'hellish' society, the layers of which the coma victim must travel through in order to return to the 'waking' overworld. At one point, when Orr is cast down to the lowest reaches of the bridge (this particular novel's version of Tartarus), he wakes from a nightmare and believes he is 'encased in ice'.[96] This not only stresses the references to Tartarus, through the depiction of a 'cold' landscape, but also chimes with Dante's own nadir of Hell in the *Inferno*, itself influenced by various strands of Greco-Roman thought as dramatized in the katabatic works of Homer and Virgil. Banks even openly alludes to katabatic descent in the narration of the Barbarian alter-ego, who has to travel through the Hadean topography of the 'Underwurld' [sic], and is at one point told to, 'Beware Lethe, the waters of oblivion'.[97] The 'containment' of the space of the mind in a physical place is once more emphasized, this particular reference to Lethe, the river of forgetfulness within Hades, acting as a warning to the Master-Narrator to battle against the potential oblivion of coma. Ultimately, the underworld topography attributed to the interior state of coma allows authors and readers alike to rationalise the terrifying prospect of a violently-induced, prolonged state of unconsciousness. Through literature, through the exploration of the 'sediment' and the process of 'innovation', authors are striving to 'navigate' through the void of unconsciousness. In this way, and to return once more to Ricoeur, we are constantly 'applying to ourselves the plots that we have received from our culture… [in an] …attempt to obtain a narrative understanding of ourselves'[98] and this innovation of the sediment is clearly visible in the works of coma fiction discussed.

Arthur Frank, in his work on illness and patient narratives, writes that, 'Any sickness is an intimation of mortality, and telling sickness as a restitution story forestalls that intimation'.[99] Much of coma fiction (and certain examples of non-fiction) embody this principle and in particular, by adopting the ultimate archetype of the restitution story,

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[95] Jensen, *Louis Drax*, p. 174.
[96] Banks, *The Bridge*, p. 194.
[97] Ibid., p. 21.
[98] Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', p. 33.
[99] Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 85.

the katabatic journey and return from the underworld, such literary works articulate an understanding of mortality. Significantly, in all of the works of fiction discussed, the protagonist returns from his coma underworld (or at least, gains the knowledge of *how* to return). In this way, by allowing their protagonists to travel through and return from a physical underworld, both writers of coma literature and of katabatic tales of antiquity are, in turn, allowing humankind to 'translate' and 'work through' incidents of trauma and the Liftonian 'death encounter'. These attempts to overcome this confrontation with mortality (which, Frank argues, 'cannot be part of the story' of restitution[100]) ultimately leads to a sense of hope and the promise of survival. Indeed, as Frank further argues, 'Turning illness into story is a kind of meta-control',[101] an attempt to overcome the confrontation with the fragility of life that is acquired, often, through experiencing serious illness. However, we must remember that Frank primarily refers to the writer of illness who has experienced the illness first-hand, proposing that, 'People who are written on from the outside have lost their voices'.[102] In this way, whilst the writer of coma fiction, in the drive to generate hope, fulfils the fundamental need to overcome the potential void that occurs after death, he also 'overwrites' the majority of first-hand experience of the coma-victim, thus stripping him of voice and agency and contributing to the misleading representation of coma itself, the dangers of which I will address in my final chapter.

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[100] Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, p. 95.
[101] Ibid., p. 32.
[102] Ibid., p. 71.

5: *Everything Must Leave Some Kind of Mark*. Selfhood and the Post-coma Condition

> When everything is taken away, nothing is left.
>
> This is false.
>
> The equation of everything and nothing, the subtraction of the remainder, is totally false.
>
> It is not that there is no remainder. But this remainder never has an autonomous reality, nor its own place: it is what partition, circumscription, exclusion designate… what else? It is through the subtraction of the remainder that reality is founded and gathers strength…
>
> <div align="right">-Jean Baudrillard, 'The Remainder', Simulacra and Simulation.</div>

5.1: Introduction

Over the course of this investigation I have primarily explored the representation of the interiority of coma: the largely fictional approximations of the individual's subjective experience of the coma itself, and the psychic impact upon selfhood that occurs within this liminal state. I have argued that for the most part, such representations depict the conditions of coma and head trauma as being akin to conventional states of psychological trauma, ultimately implying that the effects of coma and brain injury are 'curable'. One example of the post-coma subject that I have examined is Johnny Smith in Stephen King's *The Dead Zone* and his manifestation of a 'resurrected' and messianic 'zombie'. Despite the fact that King does not address the possibility of cognitive, post-lesional impairment in his depiction of Johnny's post-coma plight, I discussed how there was some attention to accuracy in the overall portrayal of the physiological impact of coma, muscle atrophy being one such example. Interestingly, despite this lack of focus upon post-coma traumatic brain injury (TBI), Johnny's second-sight becomes imbued with metaphorical undertones of brain injury, each vision he has having the impact of a secondary 'accident' or injury that progressively takes its toll on his entire physical and psychological wellbeing.

In response to the Wijdicks' damning appraisal of the portrayal of coma in contemporary motion pictures, and referring to their focus on Almodóvar's *Talk To Her*, Joseph J. Fins concurs that whilst the director's portrayal of Alicia's recovery from coma is 'mere fantasy', his 'depiction of a young ballerina's recovery from the vegetative state is metaphorically powerful'.[1] It can be seen, therefore, that King's portrayal of Johnny Smith's post-coma recovery is similarly 'metaphorically powerful',

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[1] Joseph J. Fins, *Neurology*, Volume 68 (1), January 2007, p.79.

a figurative distillation of the struggles of living with TBI manifested within a horror-fantasy narrative. Alternatively, this could simply be a further example of the lack of representation of brain injury in coma narratives, a misgiving that is held by the Wijdicks brothers and communicated in their counter-response to Fins. Fins's speculation that, 'The cinematic distortion may have been used deliberately to show another perspective or to inspire', the Wijdicks concede, is interesting and an alternative 'take on the screenwriter's frame of mind'. However, they conclude that, 'Coma is just another device to tell stories in movies such as thrillers or comedies'.[2] As discussed in chapter one, Eelco and Cohen Wijdicks could also have added 'romance' to this list of genres.

Within this chapter, I will continue to explore this debate around realistic versus metaphorical portrayals of coma and brain injury by turning to another example of an 'exterior' coma text: Tom McCarthy's 2005 novel, *Remainder*, with its representation of the fractured post-coma identity. Examining how the novel represents the post-traumatic, post- coma self (one manifestation of the 'new wounded' that Catherine Malabou refers to in her most recent work on the survivors of coma and brain injury[3]), I will address how it highlights postmodern and neurological debates surrounding the concepts of selfhood and authenticity. I will also draw links between this particular fiction and real-life cases of the 'split-subject' in coma survival, apparent in the story of Mark Hogancamp portrayed in the documentary film *Marwencol*. Taking Jacques Derrida's concept of the trace and Jean Baudrillard's notion of simulacra and the hyperreal, I will look at how these theories are addressed in the novel and through McCarthy's representation of a post-coma protagonist, whilst also looking at the extent to which these theories can be assimilated into current conceptions of post-lesional brain plasticity and the 'neuronal personality'.[4]

In response to Baudrillard's often nihilistic position, I argue that far from being an insidious condition of a culturally vacuous postmodern world, the process of simulation and the creation of simulacra are inherent strategies of the human brain in its ability to process information, adapt to its world and, ultimately, to survive beyond even the most traumatic physical or psychological injury.

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[2] Eelco F.M. Wijdicks and Coen A. Wijdicks, *Neurology*, Volume 68 (1), January 2007, p. 80.

[3] Catherine Malabou, *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

[4] Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do With Our Brain?*, trans. Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p.58.

5.2: *Like Something That's Come Out of Something*: **Authenticity – Elasticity – Plasticity**

Remainder portrays an unnamed narrator's recovery from coma and his difficulties of coping with a traumatic brain injury that was caused by 'something falling from the sky'.[5] The accident, itself, has left 'a blank: a white slate, a black hole',[6] a physical and psychological consequence of the accident that is exacerbated by the fact that the Enactor, to use Zadie Smith's designation to refer to *Remainder's* protagonist,[7] is forced into a position whereby he is not allowed to talk about the accident. This is a constrictive condition of the £8.5 million pay-out he receives from the shadowy organization that is indirectly responsible for his plight, and a caveat that seems strictly academic as, by the Enactor's own admission, he 'never had any memory of it in the first place'.[8]

Crucially, since the accident, the Enactor no longer feels 'authentic' (a crisis of identity reflected in McCarthy's refusal to name him): his 'movements are all fake. Second-hand'.[9] Indeed, he comes to the gradual realization that he had 'always been inauthentic'[10] and, moreover, that everyone that inhabits the world around him are plagued with the same affliction, seeing them as 'self-conscious' and 'false' *characters* that put in 'amateur performances'.[11] Immediately, the novel introduces debates surrounding the constitution and construction of identity, subjectivity and authenticity, and the impact that coma and brain injury has upon selfhood. For this reason, it is useful to look first at some of the theories of authenticity and the development of the subject that are most pertinent to this novel, most notably the Freudian designation of the 'split-subject'.

Freud's denomination of the id, ego and super-ego called into question exactly which one of these multiple, competing 'selves' residing within the subject was the truly 'authentic' self. As Charles Guignon posits in his extensive work on selfhood and authenticity, the discovery of the 'heart of darkness' that the id represents called into

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[5] Tom McCarthy, *Remainder* (Richmond, Surrey: Alma Books, 2010), p. 5.

[6] Ibid., p. 5.

[7] Zadie Smith, 'Two Paths for the Novel' in *The New York Review of Books* (20 November 2008), <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2008/nov/20/two-paths-for-the-novel/?pagination=false> [accessed: 15/01/14]. In her review of *Remainder*, Smith avoids the use of 'protagonist', contending that that particular designation is 'a word from another kind of novel', most notably any novel from the Realist canon.

[8] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 8.

[9] Ibid., p. 23.

[10] Ibid., p. 24.

[11] Ibid., p. 27.

question the 'placid assurance that human beings are fundamentally good at heart, their natures having been distorted only by socialization'.[12] Freud, therefore, saw the id as the truly authentic self, its dark desires only tempered by the ego and super-ego, concluding in *Civilization and Its Discontents* that 'human beings are not gentle creatures in need of love'.[13] This primordial aggression is summed up, by Freud, in the Latin phrase: '*Homo homini lupus*'[14] – man is a wolf to man – and because of this propensity to enact violence, humans have developed the super-ego, an 'internalized sense of a moral authority that promises punishment for infractions of a moral code'.[15] This identification of a tripartite model of selfhood meant that if the id (the 'real' self) was controlled by the super-ego (a product of socialization and moral control) as well as the ego (an 'appendage that is added on to the id in the course of its development'[16]) then in psychoanalytical terms, authenticity of selfhood was constantly being compromised. As Guignon observes, 'Seen from this angle, to be authentic is to openly express all the rage, raw sexuality and cruelty within you'.[17]

I have discussed, extensively, how this concept of the 'split-subject' has been used in many works of interior coma fiction, with the protagonist often having to relocate his so-called 'authentic' self in order to emerge from coma, Roy in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, for example, forced to accept his 'true' barbaric and id-like nature that he consistently tries to repress. But even before Freud came to prominence, the American psychologist William James proposed that a 'normal' individual may contain many selves, all operating on multiple levels and achieving different purposes according to the needs of the individual at any given moment. The subject, according to James, is constantly 'adopting different masks appropriate to different contexts':[18] father, husband, work colleague, friend, lover. If the individual is no longer an autonomous, cohesive and unitary 'soul', but an 'unfolding, centerless play of persons',[19] it follows that there is also a 'decentring' of what it means to be authentic. Despite the fact that the individual constantly adopts different masks of subjectivity for different purposes, it does not necessarily mean that each one is inauthentic or that any particular one of them

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[12] Charles Guignon, 'Authenticity' in *Philosophy Compass*, 3/2 (2008), Blackwell Publishing, 277-290 (p. 280).
[13] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 48.
[14] Ibid., p. 48.
[15] Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 102.
[16] Ibid., p. 98.
[17] Ibid., p. 105.
[18] William James, *The Principles of Psychology Vol. 1* (New York: Henry Holt, 1890), p. 294.
[19] Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, p. 113.

is the true 'authentic' self that is concealed by the other masks.

Interestingly, this postmodern 'play' of selves and of authenticity refutes the Platonic notion that the actor, in engaging with the identification and appropriation of different characters (or masks) jeopardises the authenticity of his soul. This is a concept that Jean- Jacques Rousseau further developed through his own theories of authenticity and of his conception of the one 'true' self of a 'naturally occurring' individual 'that is preyed upon and entrapped by society'.[20] In his seminal work, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Lionel Trilling explicates Rousseau's position with regard to the performance of the actor: '[B]y engaging in impersonation at all the actor diminishes his own existence as a person'.[21] This rather arcane concept, however, seems to resonate with the Enactor's distaste for the inauthentic 'actors' he sees all around him in *Remainder*. However, it is precisely this fluidity of subjectivity and authenticity, the movement between different 'masks of identity', that perhaps chimes most with modern, neurobiological models of selfhood and which is represented in many works of coma literature, not least McCarthy's novel. Moreover, real-life cases of post-coma brain trauma, whereby the identity of the victim is changed inexorably, expose the huge problems inherent in Rousseau's entire concept of authenticity and his promotion of individualism.

Thomas Docherty, in his discussion of Gilles Deleuze's theory of selfhood and authenticity, points towards the importance of the concept of 'becoming' which, I suggest, connects with current neurobiological concepts of a self that is constantly evolving according to changes in its environment. Docherty writes that, 'For Deleuze, […] one is never in a state of being (a being that would allow me to give an account of 'my identity') but only becoming (in which 'I' never quite coincide with myself').[22] This, of course, means that selfhood (and therefore the possibility of achieving authenticity) is always elusive, in a state of flux, thus reflecting the 'decentred subject' of postmodernity. But it also reflects the neurobiological model of the pre-conscious 'proto-self'[23] proposed by the influential neuroscientist Antonio Damasio. This proto-self, Damasio writes, is 'a coherent *collection of neural patterns which map, moment by moment, the state of the physical structure of the organism in its many dimensions*'[24]

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[20] Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 18.

[21] Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 64.

[22] Thomas Docherty, *Confessions: The Philosophy of Transparency* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 30.

[23] Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 153.

[24] Ibid., p. 154.

[original italics]. This unconscious process of mapping such neural patterns, or 'signals', occurs, according to Damasio's tests, across multiple regions in the brain and points towards a constant state of development 'in the process of regulating the state of the organism'.[25] This biological pre-conscious functioning, therefore, is a 'ceaselessly maintained first-order collection of neural patterns'[26] that sets in motion an entire chain of 'becoming' and flux within the ongoing construction of selfhood and identity. The proto-self is born out of the non-conscious neural signalling of the organism, which then allows the development of the 'core self' and 'core consciousness', which, in turn, gives rise to the possibility of an '*autobiographical self*' which permits '*extended consciousness*'. At the end of this chain of 'becoming', then, '*conscience*' is finally reached.[27] The subtlest unconscious shift or change in the proto-self, therefore, has huge ramifications for the chain of becoming, affecting the organism's development of selfhood and, consequently, its sense of authenticity. As Catherine Malabou summates, 'From one end of the chain to another, Damasio explains, one must assume that the brain somehow recounts its own becoming, that it elaborates it in the form of an "account"'.[28] Again, Malabou refers to this process of 'becoming' with the brain taking an account of itself within this perpetual state of flux. By implication, then, one must recognise this on-going development of selfhood in order to feel a sense of authenticity.

This sense of becoming and authenticity, of course, is thrown into extreme crisis, as in the Enactor's case, when the brain suffers a severe injury: when a huge rupture in the conception of one's selfhood occurs, and it is this crisis of authenticity that McCarthy invokes within his novel. Described by many critics as an 'anti-Realist' novelist (Smith, in fact, suggesting that the novel itself is a violent 'rejection' of 'lyrical realism'[29]), McCarthy explores a crisis of identity and authenticity *par excellence*: the decentring of an already decentred subject – the postmodern man. Ultimately, for McCarthy, 'becoming' seems to depend upon one's understanding of who one once was and so he examines the struggle to regain authenticity when the anchor-points of a previous identity are shattered by coma and traumatic brain injury.

The Enactor's emergence from coma acts as an immediate reminder of his struggle to feel 'authentic'. His 'no-space' of coma gradually, like a developing Polaroid, becomes his 'no-past' of post-coma cognitive confusion, sitting in bed but failing to

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[25] Damasio, *The Feeling*, p. 154.
[26] Ibid., p. 154.
[27] Ibid., p. 230.
[28] Malabou, *What Should We Do With Our Brain?*, p. 60.
[29] Smith, *Two Paths for the Novel*, p. 1 and p. 10.

remember anything about himself. At the very start of the novel, the Enactor admits that the memories of the accident that do come back might well be inventions of his 'traumatized mind'.[30] He then metaphorically describes the eventual recovery of 'memories' with the majority of his past returning 'in instalments, like back episodes of some mundane soap opera'.[31] This depicts a sense of detachment from his own memories as he stands as isolated witness to the gradual piecing together of a fragmented self. The episodes come back and slot into place, but the context within which they are being reassembled has shifted enormously. Because of the brain damage that he has sustained and because of the gaps in memory that still exist within his traumatized brain, alongside his detachment from the majority of memories that do return, what he 'becomes' post-coma is a 're-edited' (or 're-booted') self. McCarthy later extends this metaphor. Caught in a slapstick repetition of journeys between a phone-box and his London flat (due to the fact that he keeps forgetting items that he needs to remember in order to break this cycle), the Enactor reaches a heightened state of self-awareness. Caught in a pattern of stuttering movement, turning towards his flat a couple of steps, then turning back, he realises that two men are staring at him from across the street, seeing him 'jerking back and forth like paused video images do on low-quality machines'.[32] This makes the Enactor feel 'self-conscious, embarrassed', and despite the fact that his injured brain makes the decision to go back to the flat and retrieve what he needs to move forward, he begins to procrastinate further, but this time deliberately, introducing some 'play' into the scene. He pretends to 'weigh up several options and then come to an informed decision', using physical language to inhabit this 'role' fully by using his right finger to indicate his thought processes. By his own admission, this becomes a 'performance' that allows his movements to 'come across as more authentic'.[33] He therefore becomes an actor in his own 'video images', seeing his authenticity as something that is based upon how he is perceived by others, not by how he feels himself. The importance he places upon authenticity, in this scene, seems based upon his desire for others to see him as being 'authentic' and 'real' and so this leads to a double-bind: 'performing' authenticity so that others can see him as being authentic but this very process of performance exacerbates his feeling of being inauthentic. Later, he refers to his recovered memories as 'the wrong holiday photos back from the

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[30] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 5.
[31] Ibid., p. 6.
[32] Ibid., p. 15.
[33] Ibid., p. 15.

chemist's',[34] demonstrating an absolute lack of empathy for this alterity of 'another history': a re-shot, re-photographed self that is detached from his new 'performative' self.

   His self-conscious performance, above, is not just simply a consequence of his embarrassment within that particular moment of realizing he is being watched, but is a larger result of his brain injury. A short moment after this incident, he describes his process of walking along a road as 'like a blind man's fingers reading Braille', concentrating on each separate movement and motion. As he concludes, 'That's the way I've had to do things since the accident: understand them first, then do them'.[35] This reduction of instinct and rupture in mind/body unity continues to haunt the Enactor and exacerbate his crisis of authenticity. Throughout the novel, McCarthy renders this rupture in selfhood using the metaphor of technology, as seen when the Enactor, making an over-enthusiastic grab for his landline telephone whilst being told of his 'pay-out', yanks it out of the wall socket:

> [T]he connection had been cut. I stood there […] holding the dead receiver in my hand and looking down at what the wall had spilt. It looked kind of disgusting, like something come out of something.[36]

This minor mishap serves as a metaphor of the Enactor's plight: the connection has been cut between his pre-coma and post-coma selves. His post-TBI apathy and emotional neutrality (common in many cases of brain trauma[37]) certainly reflect this, earlier, when he reveals that he did not feel like 'doing anything'.[38] In many ways, he is the 'dead receiver', taking in external signals and impulses, but neither knowing what to do with them or, most importantly, not really caring what he does with them: a functional failure of his non-conscious neural signalling, to return to Damasio. Even the 'settlement' fails to arouse him; indeed he is more concerned with the irksome half-a-million (the point-five decimal 'remainder') that corrupts the perfection of the circuitous whole integer of the 'eight'. In the same way that he is disgusted by the mess that his broken phone leaves, he is similarly disgusted by the person he is 'becoming'. The

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[34] McCarthy, *Remainder*., p. 23.
[35] Ibid., p. 15.
[36] Ibid., p. 9.
[37] See, for example, Moyra Williams, *Brain Damage, Behaviour, and the Mind* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1979) and Trevor Powell, *Head Injury: A Practical Guide* (Bicester, Oxon: Winslow Press, 1994).
[38] McCarthy, *Remainder*., p. 7.

Enactor is the *'something'* that has come out of 'something', the repetition of this abstract pronoun not only a subtle allusion to his post-TBI aphasia but also to the incomprehension of both who he once was and who he is now and is to come.

In her overview of brain injury recovery and the brain's resistance to injury, Catherine Malabou refers to brain 'plasticity' as 'a form's ability to be deformed without dissolving and thereby to persist throughout its various mutations'.[39] It is precisely this 'strange sculptural power' of lesional plasticity, Malabou argues, 'that produces form through the annihilation of form'.[40] This dichotomy of creation through destruction is sharply observed by McCarthy, and consistently explicates the crisis of authenticity. The Enactor's re-formed self has been born out of his 'remoulded' brain; whilst it is still made out of the same *material*, it has now taken, to extend the metaphor, a new 'shape'. The very notion of plasticity suggests that the brain is malleable, resistant, yet by its very definition it can never fully return to its original form because of the permanent damage that has been caused. This being said, in the Enactor's case, most of his memories alongside his 'biographical self' have returned but to a newly formed 'brain' or 'shell' (like old videotape wound around the spools of a new plastic casing). In this regard, lesional plasticity creates two senses of self shaped from the same material yet conflicting through their difference in form. Indeed, from a neuropsychological perspective, Gronwall, Wrightson and Waddell observe that, 'The majority of the improvement which is seen after a head injury is due to reorganization of the brain which is undamaged […]. Functional areas take over from the areas which are no longer functional'.[41]

The plasticity of the brain is therefore remoulded and creation is born out of destruction: *something comes out of something*. It is this neurobiological model of plasticity that motivates Malabou to warn against the proliferating confusion between psychopathology and psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis proposes the possibility of the 'return to a previous state';[42] psychopathology refutes this possibility because of the permanence of brain plasticity. In other words, juxtaposed against neurobiological plasticity, there is psychoanalytical 'elasticity' in its championing of a therapeutic regression to a former state of being and a 'healing' of the 'wound' of trauma.

This notion of post-coma/TBI plasticity is examined in close detail by McCarthy in

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[39] Malabou, *The New Wounded*, p. 58.
[40] Ibid., p. 58.
[41] Dorothy Gronwall, Philip Wrightson and Peter Waddell, *Head Injury: The Facts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 16.
[42] Malabou, *The New Wounded*, p. 48.

one particular sequence of the novel that describes the Enactor's physical rehabilitation. In a passage that echoes Gronwall, Wrightson and Waddell's discussion of the reorganization of functional/non-functional areas of the brain, the Enactor speaks of his physiotherapist who had to 'route the circuit that transmits commands to limbs and muscles through another patch of brain – an unused, fallow patch'.[43] McCarthy, then, paints a picture of 'becoming' a future self that is both physically and mentally frustrating, that is forced to compartmentalise every subtle manoeuvre involved in an individual movement, for example, the 'seventy-five manoeuvres involved in taking a single step forward',[44] each of which the Enactor has to learn in order to 're-route' his damaged brain. It is this painstaking process that seems to be inherent in the growing fissure between mind/body existence that questions the Enactor's authenticity, as he has to think, over-think and learn 'all seventy-five' manoeuvres, thus suffocating instinct and spontaneity inherent within the simplest of physical actions. The Enactor observes that this process of 'learning' how to walk is itself inauthentic: 'In the normal run of things you never *learn* to walk like you learn swimming, French or tennis […] you stumble into it, literally'.[45] It is this inauthenticity of having to 'learn' to walk post-coma that leads him to the devastating conclusion that, 'My movements are all fake. Second-hand'.[46] This arises from the awareness that he is no longer the person he used to be and that this person he is 'becoming' is being partly constructed through the artifice of motor-function rehabilitation.

All of this being said, the whole question of authenticity becomes even more complex when the Enactor begins to see the authentic in the inherently fake – when he takes a trip to the cinema with his pre-coma 'friend', Greg. Watching a screening of Scorsese's *Mean Streets*, the Enactor is struck by just 'how perfect De Niro' is,[47] seemingly executing each action perfectly. He is, as far as the Enactor is concerned, 'perfect, seamless', an observation at which Greg scoffs. The Enactor then replies: '"He's natural when he does things. Not artificial, like me. He's flaccid. *I'm plastic*"' [emphasis added]. Here, echoing his physiotherapist's words, the Enactor pointedly refers to his crisis of authenticity.

It is ironic that the Enactor sees authenticity and spontaneity in cinematic performance and, in particular, in an actor who is famous for his meticulous adherence

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[43] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 19.
[44] Ibid., p. 21.
[45] Ibid, p. 21.
[46] Ibid., p. 23.
[47] Ibid., p. 23.

to 'the method', that painstaking process of making a performance seem real and 'authentic'. In fact, the Enactor, commenting on how actors perform physical movements, suggests that, unlike him, 'They're just doing their thing, real, not thinking anything'.[48] In this observation, the crisis of his post-coma authenticity and very selfhood is exemplified, implying a complete collapse of his ability to distinguish between fiction and reality and amplifying his need for performance. But McCarthy's role as postmodern novelist is also at work here, this section in particular drawing on Jean Baudrillard's concepts of the 'more real than real'[49] and cinema becoming 'more cinema than cinema' that appear in his work, *The Evil Demon of Images*. Chiefly, Baudrillard refers to certain exponents of the American new-wave of the 1970s, and the obsessive preoccupations to capture the 'real': Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*, Sydney Lumet's *All The President's Men* and, in one particular sequence of analysis, Peter Bogdanovich's *The Last Picture Show* that are all 'a little too good, better adjusted, better than the others'. In being charmed by the 'more real than real' of *Mean Streets* and De Niro's performance (themselves arising out of the realist movement of the New-Wave), the Enactor is duped by cinema's 'ever-increasing perfection, absolute reality'.[50] It is this illusion of the real that heightens the Enactor's sense of inauthenticity all the more, despite the fact that DeNiro's 'authenticity' is clearly rehearsed. Ultimately, for the Enactor, if authenticity can only be achieved by inhabiting a 'fluid' and spontaneous self, then it will prove to be perpetually elusive due to the fact that he is haunted by the 'trace' of his pre-coma self. Anything he does now in his pursuit of becoming a new self will be forever superimposed over the self he had become prior to coma. In short, the 'remainder' of a previous selfhood prevents the 'reformed' self to 'feel real' or authentic.

5.3: *You've Got a Scar Right There*: Self – Coma – Trace

The turning point for the Enactor comes when, at Greg's behest, he makes an appearance at 'David Simpson's party'. Meeting the Enactor at the door of his flat, the party's host exclaims, "'Oh! Hello! […] I heard you were… you know, better'".[51] As he

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[48] McCarthy, *Remainder*., p. 24.
[49] Jean Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images* (Sydney: The Power Institute of Fine Arts, 1997), p. 30.
[50] Ibid., p. 33.
[51] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 57.

utters this somewhat 'normalizing' greeting, the Enactor observes that, 'His eyes were scanning my forehead above my eyes; Greg must have told him about the plastic surgery on the scar'.[52] Earlier, when the Enactor meets his friend, Catherine, at the airport, the first thing she says is, '"You don't look like – oh yes, you've got a scar right there"',[53] before running two fingers down the length of the scar.

The plastic surgery represents the attempt, on behalf of medical staff, to conceal the rem(a)inder of the accident, yet the 'trace' of it both remains and reminds. This trace signifies both who the Enactor once was and who he is not now, and the virtual obscurity of the injury highlights this crisis: he 'looks okay' but the trace of the scar is a constant echo of the absence of his pre-coma self. To appropriate the knotty language of Derridean deconstructive analysis, the scar represents the 'absent-presence' of the trace of the accident and of the Enactor's pre-coma self. It is useful, therefore, to explore in more detail Jacques Derrida's concept of the trace (this absent-presence) and how McCarthy appropriates this for the novel in his exploration of neurological trauma.

In his development of the concept of 'the trace', Derrida examines how 'elements' (linguistic sounds, signifiers, memories) are neither simply present, nor simply absent, thus emphasizing the undecidability of language and of metaphysics as a whole. The trace is a constant 'sliding' between absence and presence, an acceptance that elements can be both/and, rather than either/or that challenges the metaphysical presumptions of 'being' and the repletion of presence. On a linguistic level, take, for example, the word 'dog'. The /d/ sound may be exchanged for /c/ or /h/. The sounds in themselves may be lacking in 'full' meaning, but the difference between them affects the concept (element) to which they refer. Derrida would see this as 'presence in action'. When the word 'dog' is uttered, listeners will not hear /c/ or /h/; the sound that is present is /d/, as these multiple consonant sounds cannot be uttered simultaneously. The other sounds are therefore absent. However, Derrida does not side with such a simple binarism, as first proposed by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. These absent sounds, in Derrida's view, are not simply absent. To identify and understand the concept to which /d/og refers, it must be understood that /d/og is not /c/og; is not /h/og. Therefore, for /d/og to be meaningful, it has to be dependent upon the other sounds from which it differs. In this regard, Derrida argues, /d/og carries with it the 'trace' of the other consonant sounds, sounds which are not simply absent or simply present, but absent-

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[52] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 57.
[53] Ibid., p. 28.

present.

On a metaphysical level, the image of the zombie can be used to explore this notion of the absent-presence of the trace. For Derrida, the cinematic portrayal of the zombie was the ultimate image of undecidability and the ultimate play between absence and presence. The zombie occupies the uncertain space between the living and the dead and may be 'either' alive 'or' dead, depending upon one's interpretative preference. However, it is 'neither' alive 'nor' dead since neither of these existential states fully describes the state of the zombie. Therefore the zombie, like Schrödinger's eminent cat, can be seen to be *both* alive *and* dead. Cutting across and playing between these categories of existence, then, the zombie is a paradigm of undecidability. It seems hardly surprising, then, that the image of the zombie, the 'living dead', extends into coma literature. Within the coma, the victim is neither dead nor fully alive, representing the absent-presence of the trace of who he once was. I have already examined how, in *The Dead Zone*, Johnny is manifested as a zombie-figure, a member of the 'living dead' who has 'arisen' from the death-state of coma. Malabou's definition of post-lesional plasticity can likewise be seen in light of Derrida's philosophical notion of undecidability: a phenomenon that is *both* destructive *and* creative.

Returning to *Remainder*, the Enactor is either/or who he was and who he is becoming, but he is also neither/nor these selfhoods. He is haunted by the trace which means that he can neither be who he was, nor fully become who he should strive to become. This also means that he is both of these things, a condition of his brain injury that constantly arises through everyone's insistence that he 'looks the same'. To all outward appearances, he even seems to act the same. He has the same physical appearance, the same memories and the same functional behaviours… or rather, he has the same physical appearance (barring the scar); the same memories (barring those that have not returned, most notably, that of the accident); and the same behaviours (barring his lack of auto-affection). He is the same-but- different; the absent-presence of his former pre-coma self that constantly haunts his on-going process of 'becoming' and his natural, neuronal state of 'flux'.

Damasio, writing on the survivors of brain injury, makes a particularly pertinent observation in regard to this 'same-but-different' concept: 'The distinction of the patients with damage to the retromedial sector of the frontal lobe is that their problems seem confined to their strange social behaviour. For all intents and purposes, they look

the same'.[54] This misconception is illustrated by McCarthy through both Catherine and David Simpson's very real need to look for the difference in the Enactor, and their sense of disappointment at not finding the difference, leading to an assumption that there has been no change in him: that the accident has left no trace or 'remainder'. Malabou similarly examines the persistence of the trace in brain injury survivors, asking:

> How can one deny, even in cases of very serious damage, that something like a psychic structure or profile remains intact? How can one deny that a style of being endures despite the alterations and disturbances that it undergoes? Even if a subject no longer recognises us, don't we always recognise him within his very metamorphosis?[55]

From this standpoint, the absent-presence of the brain injury survivor may manifest itself in the perceptions and the remembrances of who he once was, archived within the minds of his loved ones. Because of their need for him to 'return' to himself, and their insistence (maybe to avoid instigating an overly traumatic recovery) on his not being 'changed' in any way, the survivor both 'lives on' as his 'old' self, whilst attempting to become his new. It is interesting to note Malabou's use of the word 'being' in this passage – the reference to the fact that the 'style of being' seems to rely upon the memories of the pre-coma, pre-TBI self. This 'being' seems to be an obstacle for future and on-going 'becoming', therefore creating a crisis of selfhood. Looking across case-studies of brain injury survivors who seem to demonstrate traces of their pre-injury selves, Malabou insists that 'something remains […] that resists the ordeal of trauma'. She then goes on to ask, 'And doesn't this prove that, regardless of the apparent metamorphosis, the victim of brain damage or trauma has not entirely become someone else?'.[56] To Malabou, this 'trace' is a presence of who this person once was. However, the presence of this trace can be questioned from a Derridean perspective that would see this trace not as a full presence, but rather as 'the simulation of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself'.[57] In other words, the trace of the former 'self' is only a 'simulation' of that self (not, as Malabou sees, an actual 'remainder' of the self) as the 'original' self has been lost through brain injury. All attempts to reassimilate such a trace will only lead to further dislocation and fracturing of the subject – a reminder that one can no longer be who one once was. From this position,

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[54] Antonio Damasio, *Looking For Spinoza* (Orlando: Harvest/Harcourt, 2003), p. 143.
[55] Malabou, *The New Wounded*, p. 68.
[56] Ibid., pp. 69-70.
[57] Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p 156.

the Enactor's same-but-different post-coma existence is merely a simulation of who he once was, based upon the absent-presence of his pre-coma self.

The shadow of the trace, therefore, affects the Enactor acutely. He is unable to develop and inhabit a new future self as what he 'becomes' is unavoidably superimposed over who he once was, dislocating him from himself and shattering his sense of authenticity. As he proposes, on multiple occasions, 'Everything must leave some kind of mark'.[58] Like Freud's reference to the 'mystic writing pad',[59] a child's toy that was rather like the modern Etch-A- Sketch (and an analogy that Derrida, himself, refers to), despite the fact that one element is seemingly wiped off the plastic cover sheet of the pad to make way for a new inscription, there will always remain the indelible print in the wax layer of the toy below the sheet. In short, there will always be the trace of the Enactor's pre-coma self, lying beneath his future 'inscriptions' of post-coma selfhood. Thus, to cite Edward E. Sampson's insightful and precise observation in his navigation between theories of selfhood and Derridean deconstruction, 'The trace, which is absent from consciousness, forms the basis of consciousness itself'.[60] Indeed, if the concept of 'becoming' is developed further, then the human subject can be interpreted as developing along a constant chain of differences that reflects Derrida's postulation that, 'There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces'.[61] For the Enactor, though, coma and brain injury has ruptured and accelerated the natural order of 'becoming' (the chain of the trace) and so he realises that he must annihilate this remainder by reassimilating it into the perceived 'whole' of a pre-coma self if he wishes to 'feel real' and authentic once more.

It is at David Simpson's party when he is offered the lifeline, he thinks, that will allow him to do precisely this: when he confronts the last time he did feel 'whole' and 'real'. Wandering restlessly through the flat, he realises he is following a circuit that '[has] the pattern of an eight'.[62] This is another carefully crafted allusion, by McCarthy, both to patterns/circuits and the 'remainder'. Since the accident, the Enactor sees patterns and circuits in everything. These provide comfort for him as they represent unbroken systems and feedback loops that are authentic 'totalities' that temporarily distract him from confronting his own fractured selfhood. This craving for circuits and

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[58] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 11.

[59] Sigmund Freud, 'A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad' in *General Psychological Theory* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 207-212.

[60] Edward E. Sampson, 'The Destruction of the Self' in *Texts of Identity*, eds. John Shotter and Kenneth Gergen (London: Sage, 1989), p. 11.

[61] Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), p. 26.

[62] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 60.

patterns also seems to be a 'trace' of his 'no-space' of coma, or, more precisely, of his 'lightening'[63] of coma in a description that employs the same language as that used by Ruthann Knechel Johansen, discussed in chapter one. During this period, the Enactor, in a semi-conscious state of cognitive confusion, finds himself in imagined spaces, 'large sports stadiums' and 'athletics venues'.[64] He sees himself sprinting around the asphalt circuits, with a commentary running over the top of his imagined exertion. He knows he has to recite this commentary to the 'rhythm of [the] beeps' of his 'plastic lung' that keeps him alive in the world outside of coma in order to survive. This surreal image of a circuit of survival is the only 'memory' that the Enactor takes with him into the post-coma world of recovery, and it is another trace over which he must re-build his selfhood and authenticity. The Enactor's obsession with closed circuits also reflects his traumatic compulsion to repeat and his inability to come to terms with the traumatic event that was erased even as it happened. McCarthy, in a 2008 interview, himself draws attention to his representation of the erasure of the traumatic event, and the gap that 'demands to be substituted or supplemented',[65] leading to a 'kind of stuttering, repeating, looping logic'.[66] Yet the Enactor's figure-of-8 movement through David Simpson's flat is not just a re- enactment of this coma trace of sports stadiums. It is an evocation of the eight million he has received for the 'settlement', the rem(a)inder of the accident, which he claims he cannot remember, but of which he cannot speak even if he wanted to. The settlement is actually eight *point-five* million, the point-five being the decimal remainder for which the Enactor holds disgust: 'Why had they added the half? It seemed so messy, this half: a leftover fragment, a shard of detritus'.[67] Like the trace of his former self, this mathematical remainder is messy and complicated, standing in the way of a perfect 'whole'.

However, despite the Enactor's security in his figure-of-8 movement at the party, it is within another 'remainder' that he finds something like true security, this particular remainder, as he observes, being a precursor to 'the event that, the accident aside, was the most significant of my whole life'.[68] Whilst embarking on another circuit around the flat, the Enactor happens upon an 'extra room' off one of the corridors, a room that

[63] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 51.
[64] Ibid., p. 51.
[65] Tom McCarthy, 'What's Left Behind: An Interview with Tom McCarthy', conducted by Roger Orwell in *The London Consortium* (London: Static, 2008), p. 2.
[66] Ibid., p. 2.
[67] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 9.
[68] Ibid., p. 60

'seemed to have just popped up beside it like the half had in my settlement: off-set, an extra'[69] – a remainder. This room is a bathroom, and inside it the Enactor has 'a sudden sense of déjà-vu'.[70] He sees a crack in the wall beside the mirror and bathtub, images that he remembers seeing before, but it is the specificity of the crack that seems to be most vivid, most 'crystal-clear, as clear as in a vision'.[71] It is this crack that evokes the trace memory of a previous time and a previous life, and this then begins to evoke other traces, an entire signifying chain: his room in a flat; a building opposite with red roofs, black cats lounging on them; the smell of liver cooking in the flat below, the 'spit and sizzle' loud in his ears; a pianist rehearsing; an old woman taking rubbish out of her flat, saying something to him as he passes her, him saying something back; iron banisters; a patterned, tiled hallway; marble floors. He 're-remembers' every little detail or more precisely (and by his own admission) he *mis*-remembers these details as he later admits: 'I don't think this was a straight memory. It was more complex. Maybe it was various things all rolled together: memories, imaginings, films'.[72] Regardless of this possibility of him faking this memory, he realises that in this other place (this 'trace-space') all of his 'movements had been fluent and unforced. Not awkward, acquired, second-hand but… seamless, perfect. They'd been *real*'. He further asserts, 'I'd been real – *been* without first understanding how to try to be'.[73]

McCarthy, then, paints another complex relationship that the Enactor has with the trace. At once, he is disgusted and repelled by it (at one point recoiling at a smear of oil on his shirt sleeve, or the mess that his yanked-out phone socket leaves behind), whilst also being morbidly drawn to such 'kinks' in the circuit. It is within the 'remainder' of David Simpson's flat that the Enactor thinks that he has found his salvation. He decides to use his settlement money to recreate, rebuild and 're-enact' this chain of traces of his pre-coma 'memory' in order to re-inhabit these trace-memories and consequently, he hopes, to feel real again. His new *modus operandi* becomes his need to 'recreate' the trace into a fully-operational, 1:1 scale *wunderkammer*, despite the fact that the oddities of memory-traces that will be recreated may well constitute the ultimate paradigm of an absence: false memories. McCarthy's image of the crack is particularly germane to the Enactor's re-ownership of the trace: it is, itself, an absent-presence, a trace of what used to be there with the plaster falling away and the paint around the aperture chipping and

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[69] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 60.
[70] Ibid., p. 60.
[71] Ibid., p. 61
[72] Ibid., p. 76.
[73] Ibid., p. 62.

flaking. The crack is only understandable through its difference from the whole and the crack becomes a counterpoint to the Enactor's scar. Despite the attempt to conceal this scar, the trace always remains; instead of covering the trace of the crack, the Enactor will now embark upon a journey to recover it, using it as the kernel (a kernel constituted by an empty space) around which an entire, simulated, 'hyperreal' building (together with its inhabitants) will be recreated, in an attempt to reassimilate himself into the whole, and thus, to feel real again.

5.4: *They Looked Like Mine but Weren't Mine*: Trauma – Simulation – Assimilation

Jean Baudrillard's seminal essay 'The Precession of Simulacra' opens with a reference to Jorge Luis Borges's short story, 'On Exactitude in Science', that 'finest allegory of simulation',[74] according to the theorist. In it, Baudrillard explains, the cartographers of the Empire create a map that is so meticulously detailed that it 'ends up covering the territory'.[75] Now, Baudrillard argues, 'the territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it', with 'the real' disappearing in a precession of simulations, thus 'substituting signs of the real for the real itself'.[76]

According to Baudrillard, signs have become fractured, with an almost viral production of 'floating signifiers' infecting the world; signifiers that have broken away from their corresponding signifieds, thus no longer corresponding to any objective 'reality'. He observes, in this 'precession of simulacra', that signs have to progress through four stages before they evolve into simulacra: the first being 'the reflection of a basic reality' (the sign represents reality); the second being a distortion of reality ('it marks and perverts a basic reality'); the third phase conceals the fact that there is a total 'absence of a basic reality'; and the fourth stage in which the sign has no relation to any corresponding reality: it has become 'its own pure simulacrum'.[77] Within this system, reality quickly disappears and becomes a simulation or, more accurately, becomes a simulation of a simulation: a copy of a copy. In short, there is what Baudrillard refers to as a breakdown of the reference principle of images: the basic reality that the sign

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[74] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra' in *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss and Paul Putton (New York: Semiotext[e], 1983), p. 1.
[75] Ibid., p. 1.
[76] Ibid, p. 2.
[77] Ibid., p. 4.

represents and then distorts is already a simulation in itself, thus it has become impossible to 'recognise' reality as it now no longer exists. As Madan Sarup explicates, for Baudrillard, society now functions within a postmodern world 'in which all we have are *simulations*, there being no 'real' external to them, no 'original' that is being copied'.[78]

I now turn to television and, in particular, the influx of so-called 'reality-TV' programmes over the last two decades. As I will demonstrate, society's obsession with the 'representations' of reality within such programmes exemplifies Baudrillard's notion that the image has ceased to embody an objective, pre-existing reality. Reality-TV purports to constitute a window onto an objective reality but increasingly becomes detached from it. At a purely technical level, such programmes are edited and re-edited in order to present reality or rather, the reality that producers wish to communicate (the more real than real) in order to define story arcs and 'characters' more sharply with the sole purpose to entertain. Baudrillard refers to the absurd 'phantasm' within such shows: of 'filming […] as if TV wasn't there', leading to a situation of spectatorship during which it seems 'as if *we* weren't there'[79] within this transaction of viewing. This illusion of invisibility leads to one believing that what one is seeing is real, naïvely lulled into the assumption that the 'players' in such programmes are also unaware of the presence of television: that their behaviours are real and that they are 'really' showing the audience their true selves, unaffected by the intrusion of all of the trappings of the medium. This 'loss of the real' has accelerated, with reality-TV subjects becoming 'celebrities' (and sometimes becoming reality-TV subjects once again, in the case of *Big Brother's* Jade Goody). Another case in point is that of Chantelle Houghton, a non-celebrity sent into *Celebrity Big Brother 4* in 2006, posing as a celebrity who then went on to win the competition and 'become' a celebrity. Houghton, therefore, becomes the 'own pure simulacrum' of the fourth order of simulation, her first appearance as a celebrity having no reference to an objective external reality (a breakdown of the reference principle). This simulacrum, in turn, 'precedes' the 'reality' of her 'becoming' a celebrity thereafter. This is a clear example of the 'Ouroborus' of reality-TV: the media eating its own tail. Indeed, Tony Thwaites, in his discussion of Baudrillard's 'four stages' of simulation, refers to the fourth stage as 'an involution that swallows its

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[78] Madan Sarup, *Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, Second Ed. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 144.
[79] Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', p. 44.

own tail',[80] a comment that immediately evokes the image of the Ouroboros. Currently there is the manic production of programmes within the oxymoronic genre of 'scripted-reality', with shows such as *The Only Way Is Essex* and *Made In Chelsea*. The very name of the genre indicates a palpable loss of the real and the production of simulacra. It seems no coincidence that in recent series of *Celebrity Big Brother*, large proportions of the 'contestants' consist of 'characters' from scripted- reality TV shows, again demonstrating the loss of the real and crisis in authenticity.
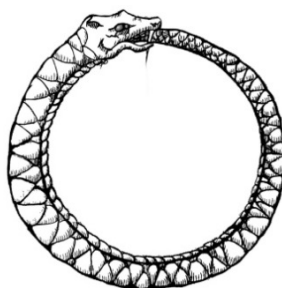
The Ouroboros, an ancient symbol depicting a dragon or serpent eating its own tail, often symbolizing something re-creating itself, cyclicality or self-reflexivity.

Such a system of production, re-production and simulation (and therefore a loss of the real) is clear to see in *Remainder*, with the Enactor embarking upon a mission to re-create the building (and its inhabitants) 'awoken' in his unconscious. But of course, as discussed previously in relation to the 'trace', by the Enactor's own admission his recreation is not necessarily based upon an objective reality, a 'straight memory'. Instead, it is based upon a *bricolage* of fragmented images and senses that may have come from many different sources, even 'imaginings, films'[81] that have been re-edited. In this regard, then, the Enactor's simulation has no reference principle: it is the copy without an original, not a 'mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept'.[82] However, for the Enactor, it is of no concern to him that his simulacrum (and simulacra within his building) represents reality, thereby inadvertently privileging 'a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal'.[83] All that matters to him is his memory of being in this place and feeling real – itself a simulacrum of who he once was and once felt. As soon as the Enactor leaves David Simpson's party, he embarks upon a frenzied

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[80] Tony Thwaites, 'Miracles: Hot Air and Histories of the Improbable' in *Postmodern Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Niall Lucy (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 264-281 (p. 273).
[81] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 76.
[82] Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', p. 3.
[83] Ibid., p. 2.

attempt to capture what was 'recovered' from his 'memory':

> I decided to safeguard [these memories] by sketching them out. I gathered all the unused paper I could find around my flat and started drawing diagrams, plans, layouts of rooms and floors and corridors. I blutacked each one to my living-room wall as I finished it; sometimes I'd run three or four or five into a big block, a continuous overview. When I'd run out of blank paper, I used the reverse side of letters, bills and legal documents – whatever came to hand.[84]

This description of frenetic sketching and commitment to paper of memories, whilst not reaching the extremity of Borges's cartographers' map-simulation, evokes the same obsession. In fact, one could argue that this obsession is eventually fully realized in the actual construction of the Enactor's building. The Enactor's sketches that run over onto multiple sheets of paper resonate with the image of the expanding map: the cartographic exercise out of control. In his critique of modern society, Baudrillard points towards the 'hysteria of production and reproduction of the real' in order for society to restore 'the real which escapes it'.[85] In trying to simulate a non-existent real, the Enactor becomes caught up within such a postmodern hysteria, a frenzy of production and re-production in order to recapture the elusive lost real. However, this 'frenzy' of reproduction is made even more complex by the fact that the lost real he is trying to reproduce is a previous conception of his selfhood.

Employing Nazrul Vyas, or Naz (a 'facilitator') to act on his behalf, the Enactor is able to realise his simulations. However, no matter how many staff Naz and the Enactor hire to find the perfect location for the simulation of his building (and entire pre-coma memory) or how much money is invested in location scouts, it seems that only the Enactor is capable of finding the perfect spot, gradually coming to the realization that 'it wouldn't be my building unless I found it myself'.[86] But even the Enactor struggles initially. On seeing buildings that 'came closest' to those in his post-coma 'memory', he says that, 'They *looked* like mine but weren't mine'.[87] This statement is immediately indicative of a breakdown of post-coma 'reality' as it becomes unclear whether he is looking for a 'simulation' of his building, or the building itself, a building which may have no real referent in the first place. In the end, though, he does find 'his building', the 'reality' of which is confirmed by the fact that it is close to a sports track, one very

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[84] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 68.
[85] Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', p. 44.
[86] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 91.
[87] Ibid., p. 92.

similar to that created in his coma: 'The tracks I'd seen in my coma had been like this one […] I stood against the green fence, looking in and thinking about the commentaries I'd had to give during my coma'.[88] And immediately, in this moment of reverie, he turns around and sees 'his' building. The *realness* of this simulation, then, seems to be a direct correlative to the Enactor's re-emersion into the unreality of his coma flashback.

This paradox of the real and the simulation appears throughout the novel with the Enactor constantly caught on the cusp of feeling real and feeling as though he is a simulation. McCarthy represents this paradox through his protagonist's continuing faith in the principle that reality and 'realness' lies within rehearsal, a notion also embodied by McCarthy's reference to De Niro's performance in *Mean Streets*. However, during discussions with Naz over the people the Enactor needs to populate his building (the old 'liver' lady; the pianist; a motorbike mechanic), he balks at the use of 'performer' to describe these people: '"Performers isn't the right word… Staff. Participants. Re-enactors"'.[89] This notion of 're-enactment' again invokes the notion of simulation, and the simulation of simulations 'which transforms the real into the hyperreal'.[90] This concept of hyperreality (in which all that is left of the world is a 'reality' that is made up of simulations and simulations of simulations) is sharply realized by the Enactor's simulations of the gaps and voids in his consciousness and in the pre-coma memory. Like Redgrove describing an intangible 'nothing' in terms of a tangible 'something' (the descent into coma in terms of a descent into the underworld in his poem 'Lazarus and the Sea', discussed earlier), the Enactor tries to embody the 'non-spaces' of his consciousness. When trying to 're-remember' the entire building in which he last felt real, he had left blank spaces in his diagrams. In translating these absences into physical, architectural spaces, the Enactor creates what he calls 'neutral space' with 'doorways papered and cemented over, strips of wall left bare',[91] although these forgotten parts 'should be blank in reality', according to the Enactor. The principle of this architectural approximation of the void also extends to some of the re-enactors within the building whose faces the Enactor cannot remember. These people (including the concierge of the building) wear blank hockey masks and the Enactor makes a point of justifying this decision: 'Her face had never come back to me – or to be precise, it

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[88] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 98.
[89] Ibid., p. 95.
[90] Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', p. 50.
[91] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 113.

had come to me, but only as a blank – so I'd decided she should wear a mask to blank it out'.[92] Here, again, is a total loss of the real, with a simulation of voids in consciousness that become more real than the objects and places and people to which they refer. It is significant, then, that both Naz and the Enactor, in order to achieve this, turn to staff who are in the business of reproduction of 'the real' through simulation: Frank, a film set designer, and his assistant, Annie, a props buyer. Again, McCarthy explores the Enactor's dichotomy of the pursuit of authenticity through the channels of artifice: the mechanisms and devices of the film industry.

The Enactor's hunger to recapture the lost real does not just stop at simulating absences; he also assimilates and simulates memories that were never of his 'reality', as seen in his simulation of the building's courtyard: 'Swings were being installed that day. I hadn't seen swings in my original vision of the courtyard – but they'd grown there later, as I thought about it further'.[93] Earlier, in a conversation with his pre-coma friend Catherine, the Enactor asks her, '"What's the most intense, clear memory you have?"'. She describes a play-area near to where she lived in Chicago, with swings 'on concrete, with a lawn around them'. As she describes this scene, her eyes are 'sparkling' and full of wonder, her voice trails off and the Enactor says, 'She didn't need to go on. I could see her seeing the swings'.[94] This point at which Catherine loses herself in her memory becomes sexually arousing for the Enactor; he feels her becoming totally consumed and at one with her memory, something, post-coma, that he has not yet been able to achieve. Thus his assimilation, recreation and simulation of Catherine's swings indicate once again the loss of the real. The fact that he doesn't acknowledge the source of his new 'memory' demonstrates that the image has become detached from its referent, and so by becoming part of the Enactor's so-called real memory, it no longer refers to the real: it is merely the simulation of somebody else's evocation of a childhood memory that made her 'relive' it at the moment of remembrance. Or to complicate this act of simulation further, it becomes the simulation of the Enactor's pleasure at seeing Catherine's pleasure evoked through her own recollection of a childhood memory: a copy of a copy of a copy. The Enactor's simulation of Catherine's 'reality' then influences his own 'reality': the re-memory of when he last felt real that 'preceded' the moment when he heard about Catherine's memory and then assimilated and simulated that memory within his own memory. As Baudrillard would argue, this process of

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[92] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 128.
[93] Ibid., p. 115.
[94] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

assimilation (here represented by the co-opting of Catherine's memory into the Enactor's own memory) is not necessarily 'unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference'.[95] In this, we again see the image of the Ouroboros, and it is therefore significant that the Enactor is fascinated with the '8' of his £8m settlement, and with performing 'figure of 8' circuits. It is also the reason he is disgusted with the .5 'remainder' of the settlement. The figure of 8 is not only seen to be a perfect unbroken loop (a seamless form that the Enactor wishes to adopt with regard to his identity) but also, laid horizontally, it represents infinity and is also identified, in modern mysticism, with a variation of the Ouroboros:

$$\infty$$
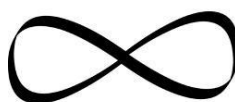
However, the constant haunting of the 'remainder' of his pre-coma self (again represented metaphorically by the 'ugly' half-a-million pounds of his settlement) suggests that the Enactor's quest to feel real again is doomed from the very outset, and this fate becomes immediately apparent in the first re-enactment within his building.

The first suggestion of a problem comes when the building is initially put into 'on mode' (to use the Enactor's description) and the cooking of liver downstairs begins. But the Enactor cannot get over the fact that there is something wrong with this, despite the fact that Annie (his 'props' facilitator) has promised him that the pans used to fry the liver have been 'broken in'. However, to the Enactor, the liver still smells 'a bit like cordite',[96] despite the fact that he does not really know what cordite is. It the trace of a signifier that has become detached from its specific signified (the smell of a discharged gun) but re-attached, in the Enactor's mind, to the sensation of an unspecific unpleasant smell.

Next, in his attempt to eliminate the post-coma sensation of all of his movements feeling like they are 'duplicates, unnatural, acquired',[97] he tries to re-enact the movement of brushing past his waist-high kitchen units in order to watch the black cats lounging on the red-roofs of the building opposite (a building he has also bought and

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[95] Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', p. 11.
[96] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 131.
[97] Ibid., p. 75.

had redeveloped according to his re-memory). However, this seemingly simple motion proves to be far from that, his shirt catching and snagging 'for half a second too long' on the counter-top. Needless to say, this 'wasn't right' – wasn't how he remembered it,[98] and even after multiple attempts, the movement is not as deft as he wants it to be (or re-remembers it to be). As he concludes, 'It was difficult, this whole manoeuvre: I would need to practise'.[99] McCarthy once more explores an idea of realness achieved through practised spontaneity or rehearsed authenticity, the Enactor falling into the trap (set by post-coma rehabilitation) that he is trying to avoid. After all, in order to be able to perform this rehearsed re-enactment, he has to learn how to move again, post-coma, through practice and rehearsal. Here, then, McCarthy suggests that the Enactor's quest for authenticity is a futile one, his recreation of the trace of a previous life, his simulation of a lost real, permanently dooming him to a retrogressive obsession with 'being' rather than the progressive system of 'becoming' a future self.

His failure and dissatisfaction with simulation and repetition is clear when the Enactor moves from his apartment during the first re-enactment and explores the rest of the building, leading to his encounter with one of the re-enactors: the old 'liver' lady who, as he passes, is tasked with placing a bag of rubbish outside her flat. The Enactor re-remembers the fact that she says something to him, although he cannot remember what. It is then decided that she should make something up on the spot, and this is precisely what she does do: '"Harder and harder to lift up"', to which he immediately replies, '"Yes. Every time"'.[100] The words just 'come' to him and it is at this point when he feels a tingling and lightness in his body, granting his physical self the ability to 'glide fluently and effortlessly through the atmosphere around it'.[101] It is the same feeling that he describes in the moments just before the accident, as though all of his simulations (unbeknownst to him) are actually to try and re-create the moment before the disaster: the last time he felt real, inhabiting his lost, pre-coma self. However, in the stairwell of his building, this sensation soon fades and he quickly has the desire to recapture this 'new' moment, once more halting the process of 'becoming' by simulating that already absent-presence of dialogue that occurred within the lost moment of the immediate past. The second re-enactment instils the same sensation; the third fails, the old lady re-enactor inadvertently introducing a different parabola through

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[98] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 132.
[99] Ibid., p. 132.
[100] Ibid., p. 135.
[101] Ibid., p. 135.

which she lifts the bag of rubbish and the bag itself leaving behind a 'sticky-looking patch on the floor'.[102] This is a motif of detritus (of a remainder) that runs throughout the Enactor's life: oil on his sleeve or a coffee stain on his trousers that become symbolic of the trace of the lost memory of the Enactor's 'accident' which I will explicate later in this discussion. But McCarthy also uses the motif of the stain to illustrate the 'stain' of the Enactor's lost self, the self against which all attempts to create and 'become' a new self will be judged and found to be wanting.

McCarthy, in the writing of this first 're-enactment', presents a puzzling dichotomy once more: the Enactor wishes to recapture his lost 'real' through rehearsed production, re-production and simulation, yet he seems to get the greatest pleasure and sensation when the genuinely spontaneous occurs – the impromptu dialogue born out of the moment of simulated interaction between him and the liver lady. In other words, he feels most real and authentic in a moment of spontaneity, and yet he ignores this in order to re-enact this new moment, thus undermining its authenticity and, as a consequence, all of his 'realness'. As Daniel Lea cogently posits in his analysis of the anxieties of authenticity in *Remainder*, 'Such re-enactments are attempts to access the authentic through the profoundly inauthentic process of endless recreation, robbing the moment of its spontaneity through forensic aestheticization and examination'.[103]

Later, the simulacrum of the building is threatened further when, walking down the stairs as he listens to his re-enactor pianist practising Rachmaninov, the Enactor meets the pianist. It transpires that what the Enactor is listening to is a recording, a 'loopback',[104] that the pianist has created, complete with rehearsed and practised 'mistakes': another copy of a copy of a copy. This exposure of the artifice of the simulacrum affects the Enactor profoundly, forcing him to slip into a state of 'rage and dizziness',[105] violently disagreeing with the pianist that his copy is 'the same thing'. His quest to feel real again is once more threatened, just as De Niro's 'real' performance in *Mean Streets* would be threatened should Scorsese's camera come into shot.

As a result of these growing disillusionments, the Enactor's creation of simulacra grows beyond the building and become increasingly eccentric, bizarre and dangerous, with McCarthy suggesting that the more manic the Enactor becomes in his pursuit of the real, the more detached from reality he becomes. In one episode, he and Naz hire re-

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[102] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 147.
[103] Daniel Lea, 'The Anxieties of Authenticity in Post-2000 British Fiction' in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 58 (3) (Chicago: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2012), 459-476, (p. 467).
[104] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 147.
[105] Ibid., p. 147.

enactors to re-enact an incident at a car mechanic's garage during which it appears that the screen-wash poured into the Enactor's car engine has been 'transubstantiated' into pure nothingness. However, on starting the engine, the blue fluid pours through the dashboard, gushing all over him (and staining his trousers, another image of detritus and the remainder) thus 'turning the scene of a triumphant launch into the scene of a disaster, a catastrophe'.[106] Interestingly, in his re-enactment of this scene (which even has someone 'playing' his role: a re-enactor of an Enactor, in a *mise-en-abyme* of simulation), he does not have his staff perform what actually happened, but what he thought and wanted to happen – for the washer fluid to 'disappear upwards. Become sky'.[107] Here, McCarthy not only represents the 'fourth order' of simulation (the image bearing 'no relation to any reality whatever') but also creates a metaphor that speaks of the Enactor's over-arching goal post-coma: to re-integrate and transubstantiate himself into the loop of the 'real' and to obliterate the remainder by re-assimilating the trace of a former self. In this sense, I would argue that perhaps McCarthy represents the Enactor as a perfect example of a simulacrum: a copy without the original. This once more seems indicative of Malabou's discussion of destructive plasticity during which 'the permanent dislocation of one identity forms another identity – an identity that is neither the sublation nor the compensatory replica of the old form'.[108] Whilst most of the Enactor's memories have returned, the form of his brain has remoulded itself so they have returned, in essence, to a different 'shell' that, whilst made from the same material of its original, cannot ever return to the shape of its original form: the 'mould' is broken and the 'copy' is left with no original.

It is this pursuit of the impossible that leads to the growing dissatisfaction with all of his simulations, even his re-enactment of a gangland shooting in which he replaces the murdered man with himself. In this scenario, he slows down the re-enactments of the shooting to greater and greater degrees, in a desperate attempt to become at one with the event itself. This is a technique that he begins to employ throughout his building resulting in his instructions to his extremely confused concierge to 'do nothing even slower'.[109] But despite the 'performance' of meticulous slow-motion re-enactments, he can never fully incorporate or assimilate the trace and can never be at one with the lost real. Thus, the Enactor's mania of simulation threatens to become over-saturated and

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[106] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 162
[107] Ibid., p. 169.
[108] Malabou, *The New Wounded*, p. 18.
[109] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 207.

implode, a consequence of which Baudrillard is all too aware. As Douglas Kellner explicates in his critical appraisal of Baudrillard's theoretical positions, the proliferation of simulation presents a '"cool" catastrophe for the exhausted subject, whose fascination with the play of objects turns to apathy, stupefaction, and an entropic inertia'.[110] In line with this argument, as his simulations increasingly begin to spiral out of control, the Enactor sinks into entropic fugue states, 'waking comas'[111] that, like his actual coma, begin to blur the boundaries between the 'real' and authentic and the 'fake' and inauthentic. Within these states (brought on by excessive and obsessive 'slo-mo' re-enactments) he cannot 'move for stretches of time, or register any stimuli'.[112] His doctor concludes that he is 'manifesting […] the autonomous symptoms of trauma' through his 'addiction' to opioids: the 'endogenous opioids' that are released every time he re-enacts a particular traumatic event.[113] The Enactor, then, has become addicted to the 'panic-stricken production of the real and the referential'[114] leading to periods of catatonic inertia: the implosion of simulacra. In this, McCarthy again draws parallels with post-coma, post-traumatic repetition compulsion in order to confront the 'lost event' of the catastrophe, the Enactor trapped in the mania of simulation in order to achieve this confrontation. This mania comes to a head in the Enactor's final act of simulation, and one that constitutes McCarthy's most obvious reference to Baudrillard's ideas: a re-enactment of a bank robbery.

One of Baudrillard's most notable claims in 'The Precession of Simulacra' is that if you were to stage a 'fake' hold-up within a bank, there would be nothing to separate this from the real as the signs of this simulated robbery would inevitably be the exact same signs of a real theft: 'The web of artificial signs will be inextricably mixed up with real elements'. Baudrillard gives examples of a 'real' police officer shooting on sight, or a bank customer who will 'really' die of a heart attack. Thus, by staging a fake bank robbery, 'You will unwittingly find yourself immediately in the real'.[115] The simulation will therefore be inadvertently 'devoured' by the 'real' and all of the simulated signs of the robbery reduced 'to some reality'. Such a simulated robbery, Baudrillard controversially suggests, would be more dangerous than a 'real' robbery, as the latter simply transgresses the law and thereby endorses the justice system whereas the

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[110] Douglas Kellner, 'Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007): A Critical Overview' in *Baudrillard Now*, ed. Ryan Bishop (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 17-27 (p. 22).
[111] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 203.
[112] Ibid., p. 203.
[113] Ibid., p. 204.
[114] Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', p. 13.
[115] Ibid., p. 39.

simulated robbery exposes the law of simulation itself and reveals the artifice of the hyperreal. What is more, Baudrillard suggests, there are only really 'simulation hold-ups', inscribed with the 'decoding and orchestration rituals of the media, anticipated in their mode of presentation and possible consequences'.[116] Taking the image of the Ouroboros once more, the production, reproduction and simulation of reality has a profound affect and influence upon reality itself. As Mark Poster advances in his analysis of reality-TV, for Baudrillard, 'The simulacrum is also real but of a different order from everyday life […] the hyperreal'.[117] However, as discussed, once the simulacrum of a robbery is performed within a real bank, then the simulation fails as its signs are inextricably bound up with the signs of the real. For the Enactor, therefore, the re-enactment of a bank robbery seems the perfect way to feel real once more, the rules and patterns and signs inherent in a hijack presenting the perfect opportunity for his skewed vision of 'rehearsed authenticity' and for him to re-invoke 'realness'. Hiring an ex-bank-robber-turned-author, Edward Samuels, the Enactor is charmed by his observation that all bank robberies have a 'preset pattern'[118] that allows for a 'chain being set in motion',[119] a comment that has echoes of Derrida's signifying chains. This idea of simulated patterns also links to Baudrillard's theories and promises a return to authenticity and feeling of 'fluency' and realness that the Enactor desires. When asked by his consultant-thief if he wishes to re-enact a particular bank robbery, the Enactor says: '"No, not a particular one. A mix of several ones, real and imaginary. Ones that could happen, ones that have, and ones that might at some time in the future"'.[120] At once, this evokes Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal whilst also communicating the Enactor's post-coma plight. This 'indefinite reproduction'[121] of the bank robbery certainly seems to demonstrate what Baudrillard famously describes in *The Orders of Simulacra*: 'The real is not only what can be reproduced, but *that which is always already reproduced. The hyperreal*' [original emphasis].[122] The Enactor's description of the robbery he wishes to simulate can be also connected to his description, earlier, of the memory he has of the building upon which his first simulation is based:

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[116] Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', p. 41.
[117] Mark Poster, 'Swan's Way: Care of Self in the Hyperreal' in *Baudrillard Now*, ed. Ryan Bishop (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 72-99 (p. 81).
[118] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 231.
[119] Ibid., p. 232.
[120] Ibid., p. 233.
[121] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Orders of Simulacra' in *Simulations*, trans. Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext[e], 1983), p. 112.
[122] Ibid., p. 146.

> I don't think this was a straight memory. It was more complex. Maybe it was various things all rolled together: memories, imaginings, films.[123]

Here, the author suggests that post-coma, the Enactor has been existing within the hyperreal, with all of his attempts to feel real again being merely simulations of the lost real and of his lost self. In other words, the robbery-simulation, alongside his building-simulation, have no reference principle as they already refer to an original that is itself a hybrid simulation of films, imaginings, other people's memories and other robberies. In other words, the Enactor is trapped in this *mise-en-abyme* of the simulacra, of trying to reproduce events and selves: *[selves] that could happen, [selves] that have and [selves] that might at some time in the future*. He has therefore become 'the real without origin of reality'.[124]

This crisis of identity and authenticity becomes clear when the Enactor, under the guidance of Naz and Samuels, hires re-enactors to simulate the robbery with the Enactor 'directing' each move, once more borrowing from the conventions of the film industry to rehearse realness and authenticity. At one point, Robber Five trips on a kink in the carpet, much to everyone's amusement. But the Enactor responds with, 'Do that each time',[125] a moment that is reminiscent of his improvised dialogue with the old 'liver' lady in his building. He even gets Frank to slip a piece of wood under the carpet, so that the kink does not smooth over. Again, the Enactor, in his perception of an absence of 'fluency' in his own movement post-coma, finds great pleasure in the genuinely spontaneous and authentic 'real' events that occur, the original spontaneity of action that is then consumed by his obsession with the simulacra. This 'hypersimulation'[126] leads to his most dangerous simulacrum yet, as he restages the simulation within an actual bank, but without informing the staff (or even his re-enactors). Accordingly, the Enactor, to return to Baudrillard's analogy of the simulated bank robbery, finds himself 'unwittingly' and 'immediately in the real, one of whose functions is precisely to devour every attempt at simulation, to reduce everything to some reality'.[127] This, therefore, seems to be the perfect solution for the Enactor, to feel real again at last, and for his fractured, plastically-altered selfhood to become unitary once more within 'the real'. It would allow him to 'insert' himself 'back into the world' and return his

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[123] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 76.
[124] Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', p. 2.
[125] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 238.
[126] Ibid., p. 38.
[127] Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', p. 39.

'motions' and 'gestures' to 'ground zero and hour zero, to the point at which the re-enactment' would finally merge 'with the event'.[128] In other words, he would finally be able to obliterate the remainder of his former self, allowing him to move out of this 'demarcated zone'[129] of selfhood. The simulation of the bank robbery, therefore, will allow him to inhabit, finally, the real and 'penetrate and live inside the core, be seamless, perfect, real'.[130]

Things do not quite go according to plan, yet despite the fact that this simulated robbery (this 'echo of an echo of an echo'[131]) is, in the Enactor's words, a 'fuck-up', it is also simultaneously 'a very happy day'.[132] Initially, things seem to be going well ('fluently'), the Enactor gaining pleasure from the fact that the re-enactors are looking for 'some kind of boundary' between the simulation and the real, but of course, as Baudrillard explains, no such boundary exists in a simulated hold-up. The Enactor's pleasure comes from the fact that 'there was no edge, that the re-enactment zone was non-existent, or that it was infinite, which amounted in this case to the same thing',[133] once more evoking the image of the Ouroboros. By implication, McCarthy suggests that the Enactor has finally become a part of the whole, has inserted himself back into the system and circuit of realness and authenticity, eliminating, through assimilation, his former self. McCarthy, once more, calls upon Baudrillard's theory of the simulacra when the Enactor refers to the markings on the surface of the road outside of the bank, as the getaway car pulls up: '[They were] perfect reproductions of the ones outside my warehouse'.[134] The Enactor views his simulacrum of the bank as being 'more real than real' (the hyperreal) with the 'real' road markings constituting 'copies' of his simulacrum, again placing under threat the very principle of reality. As the Enactor observes, when discussing the impact of the 'scripted' lines that are now spoken by the re-enactors: 'Now, though, they were more than accurate: they were *true*'.[135] The 'real' therefore begins to 'devour' the simulations.

As the robbery commences, the Enactor begins to feel his (re)immersion into the real: 'I was right inside the pattern, merging, part of it as it changed and, duplicating

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[128] McCarthy, *Remainder*, pp. 244-45.
[129] Ibid., p. 244.
[130] Ibid., p. 245.
[131] Ibid., p. 259.
[132] Ibid., p. 260.
[133] Ibid., p. 260.
[134] Ibid., p. 261.
[135] Ibid., p. 261.

itself yet again, here, now, transformed itself and started to become real'.[136] In this frenzied moment of realization, he is finally becoming at one with the world, wiping out the trace of his former self alongside the memories of the 'false' and 'second-hand' processes of post-coma rehabilitation that caused him to feel inauthentic. However, it is another 'trace' that comes back to haunt the robbery, making it at once a *fuck- up* and *a very happy day*: the kink in the carpet. As Robber Re-enactor Five feels for the kink (the 'ghost-kink', an 'absent-presence' that haunts the 'real' of the bank), he applies the same force, the trip transformed into a full-blooded pratfall that causes him to collide into Re-enactor Two who, in turn, discharges his shotgun into Re-Enactor Four's chest, accidentally killing him. The Enactor, however, rather than being dismayed at such a 'disaster', revels in the confusion and gradual realization of the other re-enactors, finally allowing him to experience and sustain the sensation of feeling 'real' and 'weightless' at the moment when one of the Re-Enactors exclaims: "*It's real!*"'.[137] Indeed, the Enactor is caught within a trance-like, transfiguratory and hallucinogenic reverie, glorying in the spontaneous act of violence, in this confrontation with the real: with *death*. As he and his fellow Re-Enactors flee from the scene of the crime, he is serene in the face of their panic and horror at the fact that this 'had been real and not a re-enactment'. To this, he responds:

> But it was a re-enactment. That's the beauty of it. It became real while it was going on. Thanks to the ghost kink, mainly – the kink the other kink left when we took it away'.[138]

Here, again, McCarthy alludes to both the real devouring the signs of the robbery simulacrum and to the absent-presence of the trace that can never be fully re-created but which, when transposed to this particular context of the 'real' bank, creates a different scenario altogether. The absolute recreation of the trace, therefore, is impossible and like the ghost-kink, the Enactor cannot recover and re-assimilate the trace of his old self, or the trace of his previous life, and so all of his simulations lead to the bank robbery where he finally does feel real again, but only, to return to Baudrillard, 'unwittingly' through the absent-presence of the ghost kink that haunts the simulacrum and becomes 'real'. Ironically, in his pursuit to annihilate the remainder in order to feel real again, the Enactor actually feels real because of the remainder (the ghost-kink).

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[136] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 264.
[137] Ibid., p. 270.
[138] Ibid., p. 273.

The concept of death and the real is also at play in McCarthy's denouement of the novel. In his discussion of Baudrillard's position on death and simulation, Ryan Bishop posits that, 'Death resists modelling, the simulation […] Death is the event without compare and which must be elided at all costs'.[139] For the Enactor, all sense of feeling authentic and real had been damaged by his accident and subsequent coma: his unwitting 'death encounter'. It is this encounter, I suggest, that constitutes a 'failed' simulation of death. Thus, McCarthy implies that his protagonist has been trapped by an 'incomplete' simulacrum – the simulacrum that, Baudrillard argues, resists modelling. Thus, from this point onwards, the Enactor cannot feel real because of the rift that this failed simulation has driven between his pre-coma and post-coma selves. It is significant, therefore, that the Enactor appears to feel real once more when he is witness to a 'complete', non-simulated death that occurs within a simulacrum of his own creation and that becomes real within the context of the real setting of the bank.

McCarthy makes subtle allusions to this realignment and re-assimilation of his pre- and post-coma selves (to the Enactor's 'merging' with the real) by implying that his pre-coma memory is coming back to him. Most significantly, as he takes his seat on his getaway jet, the Enactor muses upon the other jet on which his re-enactors and staff of 'simulators' have been booked and which he and Naz have arranged to be blown up (in order to obliterate the 'remainder' of his simulations constituted by all of those who have been involved in helping to create these simulations). The Enactor wonders if 'their plane [has] already exploded', and says: 'I wondered if it would be over sea or land. If it was land, perhaps a bit of debris might even fall on someone and leave me an heir'.[140] I suggest that at this point, the trace of the Enactor's accident (that he has always explained has been lost) is finally reawakened and brought back into consciousness. By the subtlest of suggestions, the death encounter in the bank has brought him back to the moment when he last felt real, just before a rogue fragment (perhaps a 'remainder' that had broken away from a damaged aeroplane) fell from the sky.

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[139] Ryan Bishop, 'Baudrillard, Death and Cold War Theory' in *Baudrillard Now*, ed. Ryan Bishop (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 47-71 (p. 65).
[140] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 281.

5.5: *The Figures of the Characters Were Moveable*: **The Self – The Trauma –The Model**

Whilst McCarthy clearly adopts various strands of deconstructive and postmodern theory, I would argue that he takes a rather playful approach in order to explore their manifestation in a real-world setting: the trauma that arises from coma and brain injury. This literary agenda seems clear, immediately, in his acknowledgements at the end of the novel, thanking two individuals in particular for 'generously sharing their experiences of (post-) trauma' with him.[141] This interest is also supported in several interviews McCarthy has given, the author citing various cases of brain trauma and their aftermath as profound influences upon the novel. In an interview given for *The White Review*, McCarthy discusses the case of the cricket commentator Henry Blofeld, a promising young practitioner of the sport whose prospects were cut short when, as a teenager, he was knocked off his bike by a double-decker bus, causing him to slip into coma. After emerging from coma, he discovered that his hand-eye co-ordination had been lost. Now, Blofeld, instead of playing the game, comments on it, 'Watching his own past-future that never happened'.[142] In another interview, he refers to the two individuals he thanks in the acknowledgements of the novel, whilst also referring to cases of 'traumatized [Vietnam] veterans' who, likewise, suffered with his protagonist's syndrome – of the constant feeling of 'nothing being real'.[143] He goes on to discuss cases of such post-trauma victims who 'would also reconstruct events', for example one veteran who became a bank-robber, his crimes often recreating the layout of the battlefield on which he'd lost all of his friends. As McCarthy points out, he 'reconstructed and replayed the battle that he could not actually remember'.[144] This obsession with recreation in an attempt to recapture and confront a lost event (or identity) of the past is clearly shared by the fictional Enactor of McCarthy's novel.

It soon becomes apparent that McCarthy is not just interested in the theoretical paradigm of simulation. He is instead fascinated with how the preoccupation with simulation manifests itself within the psyche of the post-coma survivor. It is this obsession with simulation in order to feel real that Pieter Vermeulen might call McCarthy's 'signature logic': the fact that, throughout the novel, 'a residue is generated

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[141] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 285.
[142] Tom McCarthy, 'Interview with Tom McCarthy', conducted by Fred Fernandez Armesto in *The White Review*, (2011) <www.thewhitereview.org/interviews/interview-with-tom-mccarthy-2/> [accessed: 11/01/14], p. 11.
[143] McCarthy, 'What's Left Behind', p. 2.
[144] Ibid., p. 2.

through the friction generated by an attempt to cancel one reality by the imposition of another' through a process of hypersimulation.[145] At its most extreme, this 'residue' is the Enactor's former self over which he tries to superimpose another self. As part of his physical rehabilitation, for example, he has to imagine lifting an invisible, imaginary carrot to his mouth. However, when it comes to lifting a real carrot (the imposition of one reality over another in an attempt to cancel it out), the whole process fails, the real carrot being 'more active' than the imaginary one.[146] Once the 'surplus signals' have been factored in (the sensory signals of touch, for example, that map the multi-dimensional surfaces of the carrot) and the process of 'visualization' repeated, the Enactor picks up the real carrot again until the movement is complete. Another residual/remainder of this is that he 'hates carrots now'.[147] But the ramifications of this carrot exercise run deeper. Not only is the real carrot an imposition over a visualized carrot, but the entire exercise is an imposition over how the Enactor once performed this movement, without even thinking about it: fluently and 'real-ly'. Thus McCarthy's 'signature logic' of post-coma, post- trauma simulation creates a perpetual chain of residue. As Lea explicates, the Enactor's 'attempts to reconstruct unreliable memories and re-enact the coalescence of the sublime moment of individuation all fail in the face of the materiality of matter'.[148] In short, this propensity for production and reproduction of simulacra is not merely a frenzied cultural phenomenon made all the more possible by contemporary mass-media. Instead, as McCarthy implies, there is something about trauma and about the human condition as a whole that leads to a naturally occurring (and re-occurring) obsession with simulation. This is not quite as simple as the Freudian compulsion to repeat and to re-enact trauma, inherent in the traditional psychoanalytical model.

As discussed earlier, according to Malabou, psychological and physical paradigms of trauma are distinct from each other, the latter not allowing for a return to a previous state due to the 'shredded psyche'[149] of the brain injury survivor, rather than the 'wounded' one of the trauma survivor. Significantly, in *Remainder*, despite the fact that the Enactor seems to finally feel real again in the aftermath of the robbery, in the final coda to the novel, the reader learns that he has not really changed after all. As his plane

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[145] Pieter Vermeulen, 'The Critique of Trauma and the Afterlife of the Novel in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*' in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol.58, Number 3 (Chicago: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2012), 549-568 (561).
[146] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 21
[147] Ibid., p. 21.
[148] Lea, 'The Anxieties of Authenticity', p. 467.
[149] Malabou, *The New* Wounded, p. 48.

is recalled back to the terminal, he forces the pilot at shotgun to continue on their flight-path, the plane banking to-and-fro in a figure-of-8 pattern thus granting the Enactor a new pleasure as part of a new systematic 'loop': an illusion of 'infinity' (the Ouroboros) that will eventually be broken one way or another. McCarthy implies, therefore, that his protagonist's psyche will remain shredded, that for him there is no regressive return to a previous state and, moreover, it seems that it is within this shredded psyche, within the form that is born out of the destructive nature of brain plasticity, the compulsion to simulate is generated.

To move from literature and neurobiological perspectives of brain trauma to theories more rooted in psychology, I suggest that this need for simulation is entrenched within the human psyche. In their discussion of the reconstitution of selfhood post-brain injury and coma, Biderman et al cite Erik Erikson's concept of the formation of 'ego-identity', one stage of which is 'identity as imitation'.[150] As they discuss, this first crucial stage is the child's inherent mechanism to imitate others and to 'simulate' the habits and mannerisms of parents and peers. As it reaches adolescence, the child gradually fuses these imitations together and consolidates them into a unitary sense of self or 'ego-identity'. Over time, these imitations/simulations become more subtle, from dress codes to music tastes to political affiliations. Turning once more to neurobiology and its explication of how we 'see' and process the world around us, this capacity and desire for simulation can be seen to be even more deep-rooted. The things that one sees are mapped in neural patterns that are created according to an object's design. As Antonio Damasio concisely posits, 'The images we experience are brain constructions *prompted* by an object, rather than mirror reflections of the object. There is no picture of the object being transferred optically from the retina to the visual cortex'.[151] In this sense, one could argue that everything is simulated. This process of simulation, however, can enter into crisis when the ego-identity's sense of continuity becomes ruptured in some way, either through physical or psychological trauma, leading to what R.D. Laing called 'ontological insecurity'.[152] Within this state, the individual 'may feel more insubstantial than substantial, and unable to assume that the stuff he is made of is genuine, good, valuable'.[153] Developing this psychoanalytical model further, Laing goes on to suggest that, 'If the individual cannot take the realness, aliveness, autonomy, and identity of

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[150] D.Biderman, E.Daniels-Zide, A.Reyes and B.Marks, 'Ego-Identity: Can It Be Reconstructed After a Brain Injury?', *International Journal of Psychology*, 41 (5) (2006), 355-361 (356)
[151] Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, p. 199.
[152] R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 39.
[153] Ibid., p. 42.

himself and others for granted, then he has to become absorbed in contriving ways of trying to be real, of keeping himself or others alive, of preserving his identity'.[154] Whilst Laing is primarily discussing cases in which there are ruptures in psychological identity, the language that he uses can be adopted to further elucidate the Enactor's pursuit of 'realness' in *Remainder*. From Laing's psychoanalytical perspective, the Enactor's increasingly manic 'contrivances' promise the possibility of reinstating a continuity of selfhood and 'substantial' identity post-coma. These contrivances take the form of simulations, futile attempts to get back to and 'preserve' the ego-identity that existed prior to the accident and the subsequent brain injury. Indeed, as Biderman et al discuss in their appraisal of various theories of the rebuilding of ego-identity post-brain injury:

> One of the tasks of rehabilitation should be to assist the brain-injured individual to rebuild his or her sense of identity based on exploring the individual's new possibilities and capacities, rather than focusing on attempts to restore the pre-injury ego-identity of those individuals.[155]

Again, to look at this notion through Thomas Docherty's discussion of Deleuze, this is an approach that favours 'becoming' (a new individual) rather than 'being' (an older individual or lost-original). Certainly, McCarthy clearly depicts the Enactor falling into the trap of the latter approach, of 'ontological insecurity', and therefore caught in a perpetual simulation of the lost real.

   This also connects with Steph Grant's short story 'Blue Polystyrene Shoes' (as discussed earlier), in which he describes no longer being able to understand the works of Mill, yet perseveres because 'he looks the part', [156] which in turn links to William James's notion of the individual adopting different 'masks'. Grant's state of 'being' a simulation of someone he used to be only leads to frustration and confusion, however, as the reader sees in Grant's follow-up to 'Blue Polystyrene Shoes', 'Unremembered Memoirs'. In this story, set a number of months after his emergence from coma, Grant writes about his 'disturbing behaviours'.[157] After one particular unremembered, violent incident, Grant's wife observes: '"There's still something wrong with you"',[158] both acknowledging the change in her husband but simultaneously implying that at some

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[154] Laing, *The Divided Self*, p. 42.
[155] Biderman et al, 'Ego-Identity', p. 358.
[156] Steph Grant, 'Blue Polystyrene Shoes' in *Head-lines*, ed. Matthew Colbeck (Blythe Bridge: Waggledance Press, 2011), p. 7.
[157] Steph Grant, 'Unremembered Memoirs' in *Head-lines*, ed. Matthew Colbeck, Issue 2 (Blythe Bridge: Waggledance Press, 2014), p. 4.
[158] Ibid., p. 8.

point in an unknown future this 'wrong' will right itself, allowing Grant to become his 'old' self again, or at least a simulation of this old self. In fact, Grant's second story narrates multiple instances during which he tries to recapture his lost self by simulating the habits and behaviours of that pre-coma self. Moreover, it seems that friends and loved ones are, likewise, keen for Grant to perform such simulations: to get back to 'normal' or, to use McCarthy's language, to go 'through the zero'.[159] However, all of these attempts to simulate the lost self ultimately end in failure, just as the Enactor's simulations end in failure. For Grant, even going to the local pub with his friends Bass and Neil ends in disaster, their trademark larking about ending in an 'eruption of violent behaviour'.[160] The invitation of an old school friend to visit the house ends in Grant chasing him and his family to his car, yelling 'scabs' and 'blacklegs':[161] in an attempt to simulate a friendship of his lost self, all that is remembered (all that 'remains') is the fact that his friend broke the picket line during the miners' strike of the 1980s. This trace is the only remainder in Grant's memory, meaning that the simulation of a *healed* friendship, post-strike, is impossible. There is also an attempt to take Grant to hear one of his heroes, Arthur Scargill, speak at Ollerton Miners Welfare Club:

> Steph can remember having a front seat to hear Arthur speak. He can remember seeing Arthur and hearing him speak – but he also remembers that it was as if Arthur was speaking a completely alien language not one word of which he had been unable to understand. *Not a solitary single word…*[162]

It seems that just as in 'Blue Polystyrene Shoes', Grant is attempting to simulate his former self (is again playing a part) but the simulation fails due to his brain injury and post-coma cognitive confusion that have created a schism between who he is post-coma and who he was prior to his accident. Across this schism is the 'trace' of a former self (the absent- presence of a lost original) and it is the almost mournful simulation of this self in an attempt to re-invoke the real and to reintegrate the remainder that leads to a crisis of identity and authenticity. This autobiographical crisis, above, can also be linked to McCarthy's introduction to his Enactor's predicament who, post-coma, does not 'feel like doing anything' and, indeed, 'wasn't doing anything', passing his days 'in the most

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[159] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 110.
[160] Grant, 'Unremembered Memoirs', p. 4.
[161] Ibid., p. 8.
[162] Ibid., p. 9.

routine of activities' but mostly just sitting in his flat 'doing nothing'.[163] This depiction of a distinct lack of post-coma, post-TBI auto-affection (an apathetic condition caused by a destruction of 'the emotion-triggering region' of the brain[164]) conveys the Enactor's clear attempts to simulate all of the habits and drives that he should be fulfilling ('getting up and washing', 'walking to the shops', 'reading the papers'[165]) should he wish to return to his old self again and feel authentic. These 'trace' habits are clearly set against the knowledge that something has changed, that in order to recover from coma and from the accident, his brain had to be 'rerouted'.[166] However, the superimposition of this rerouted self cannot obliterate the remainder of his 'original' self and so any attempt to simulate this self will fail: *everything must leave some kind of mark*, a mark that seems impossible to erase.

In the case of both Grant and the Enactor, their attempts to simulate the lost real of the pre-coma self constitute, as discussed, an attempt to 'be' rather than to 'become', thus contravening the natural functioning of neural-processing and one of the principles of human development according to current neurobiological theories of brain plasticity alongside Deleuze's model of 'becoming': that to be human is to be 'necessarily always in flux'.[167] Furthermore, Docherty surmises, for Deleuze, ''Being' would equate with death and is negative; 'becoming' is equivalent to living and is affirmative, 'joyful''.[168] In the Enactor's case, the reader sees his simulacra as an attempt to recover a self that no longer exists. In this regard, his slo-mo re-enactments are always vain attempts to re-integrate himself into the whole by reaching a state of total inertia – or even reaching a state of inert matter, in a McCarthian evocation of the Freudian death-drive. It is, in fact, a pursuit that is in stark opposition of much of the neurological praxis for post-brain injury survivors, as reviewed by Bideman et al, that promotes a focus on the future self, not the lost self of the pre-injured past.

The intersection between cultural, neurobiological and psychological theories of simulation can be seen most prominently in Jeff Malmberg's compelling documentary *Marwencol*[169] which explores, in close detail, the simulation compulsion of the post-coma, brain injury survivor. It tells the story of Mark Hogancamp who, after undergoing a brutal attack at the hands of five youths outside his local bar, went into a nine day

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[163] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 7.
[164] Damasio, *Looking For Spinoza*, p. 150
[165] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 7.
[166] Ibid., p. 19.
[167] Docherty, *Confessions*, p. 30.
[168] Ibid., p. 30.
[169] *Marwencol*, dir. Jeff Malmberg, (Kinosmith, Canada, 2010).

coma, after which he had to undergo a rehabilitation programme similar to that of McCarthy's Enactor. This programme, Hogancamp's friend makes clear, involves him 'literally [having] to learn everything over'. Hogancamp, himself, states that, 'When the teenagers kicked my head to pieces […] they wiped everything'. Significantly, in figurative language that chimes with McCarthy's depiction of the return of the Enactor's memory, Hogancamp explains that, 'My memories that I do get, they come back in stills, single shots but no context'. This intersects with McCarthy's imagery of the Enactor's memory coming back as soap-opera episodes, within a context that has changed inexorably. Hogancamp's image of snap-shots, likewise, can be connected to McCarthy's reference to the Enactor's memories being like a wrong set of holiday snaps being brought back from the developer.

What is most pertinent to this analysis of post-TBI trauma and simulacra is that losing his ability to sketch and draw, Hogancamp finds respite from the frustrations of rehabilitation in another artistic hobby – the creation of scaled models. These intricate simulacra, created out of meticulously-realized buildings, action figures and *Barbie* dolls, have given birth to an entire fantasy world, set within the fictional Belgian town of 'Marwencol' during the Second World War. Within this model-town, he has created his own alter-ego, but more than this: he has alter-egos for all of his friends and family, all interacting, all involved in the action of the complex narratives that he invents and plays out within the town. What he creates, therefore, are not just tableaux of simulated scenes but a series of 're-enactments' in which he fully immerses himself, to the point whereby when he discusses 'his life', there is frequently a blurring between his 'real' life and the simulated life in his town. Indeed, when the reader first meets him, he is holding 'his' doll and proclaims: 'This is me, after the attack of course. Always smoking […] I used to carry one revolver. Then General Patton gave me his other revolver, so now I have two'. Initially, the viewer, in this introduction to Hogancamp himself, thinks he is talking about his life in the 'real' world (with his reference to the attack) but it soon transpires that he is talking about his simulacrum. This confusion is heightened when it is revealed that Hogancamp's simulacrum is not just based upon his fantasies, but that he incorporates and translates his own experiences into these simulations, the most notable of which being the trauma of his attack. In this sense, when Hogancamp refers to 'him' after the attack, he is talking about both his 'real' self and his 'simulated' self: blurring the line between the real and the simulacrum. This obfuscation of boundaries is similarly illustrated in fictional terms by the Enactor's

insistence that the 'real' road markings outside the bank are perfect copies of the markings of his bank-simulacrum. This blurring and ultimate loss of the real is voiced when Hogancamp, demonstrating a tiny toy gun belonging to one of his model re-enactors, says, 'Everything's real. The slide on the ·45. The hammer. The clip even comes out. So that adds to my veracity of getting into it, of getting into the story'. Again, Hogancamp's ardour for the simulation of the real has its fictional counterpart in McCarthy's Enactor, with his absolute attention to detail essential in order to recapture and recreate the lost real, for example, of his building.

The loss of the real and the creation of the hyperreal is rendered no more powerfully than in one particular anecdote, regarding Hogancamp's neighbour. Despite his neighbour already being married, Hogancamp reveals to her that she is about to get married to him within his town Marwencol. She clearly balks at this news, saying, 'There comes a time when you just have to *stop*'. This reaction causes Hogancamp to recreate her rejection of the marriage within the simulacrum. The rejection of the marriage (a 'real-world' rejection of a proposed 'simulation' of marriage that has no reference to a 'real' marriage between them) then leads to a second, simulated rejection of marriage within the simulacrum of Marwencol. But it is even more intriguing and complex than this. His neighbour in the real world reacts to the prospect of a simulated marriage as if it were her real marriage to him in the real world. Thus, to return to Baudrillard, the 'simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum'.[170] The simulation of marriage in Marwencol is therefore not simply false but is of the order of the more real than real: it influences the reality that precedes it.

'Anna and I Get Married' by Mark E. Hogancamp.

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[170] Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', p. 11.

Here we see Baudrillard's theoretical paradigm manifesting itself in real-world terms, made possible through severe physical trauma – coma and brain injury. Again, it appears that there is something within the human brain that is inherently drawn to simulation. After all, as discussed in relation to Biderman and Erikson's work on the formation of selfhood, an essential stage of creating 'ego-identity' for the child is imitation and simulation. As humans we are constantly drawn into acts of simulation and we are likewise fascinated by that which is simulated: dolls and doll houses; model vehicles; railways and villages; building blocks; actors and comedy impersonators. Indeed, the proliferation of social networking sites has given rise to another frenzy of simulation, the simulacra of our 'online selves' interacting within the hyperreal of hyperspace.[171]These all generate pleasure and the more exact the simulation is (the more 'real') the more pleasure that is created. This 'more real than real' is seen in Hogancamp's photographic work in which he commits the actions and narratives of his re-enactments to celluloid and is highlighted further by the proclamation of the magazine editor who commissions his work: 'I was astonished by the realism'. He later comments that there is 'no irony' of 'photographing dolls' in the work; instead, Hogancamp is 'in the work […] the work is him […] A very *authentic* feeling' [my emphasis]. Like McCarthy's Enactor, authenticity seems to be recognized and sought in re-enactments, rehearsals and simulations in an attempt to re-capture and re-assimilate the trace of the pre-coma self: the lost real that was lost at the moment of the attack (Hogancamp) or the accident (the Enactor).

Interestingly, just as the Enactor finds comfort in patterns and circuits so, too, does Hogancamp find comfort in routine and in particular in 'patterns'. It is revealed that his reintegration into the work environment involves working at his local bar for a few hours one day a week where he makes meatballs. The camera shot focuses on the repetitious, 'fluent' and precise movement of his fingers and hands (movements that, like the Enactor, he has had to 'relearn') as he instinctively moulds the meat into orbs, laying each one next to each other: near-perfect simulations of each other. In a similar system of repetition, Hogancamp constantly re-enacts the trauma that he experienced

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[171] For further discussion of the simulacra of social networking and online identities (what Ruth Page, in her discussion of Sherry Turkel's work on the blurring of boundaries between 'simulation and human relationships, refers to as 'the performance of identity through online interactions' that can 'become more "real" than offline experiences' – *Stories and Social Media*, p. 166.) see: Mark Poster, 'Postmodern Virtualities' in *Futurenatural: Nature, Science, Culture*, ed. George Robertson (London: Routledge, 1996); Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget* (London: Penguin, 2011); Marie Laure-Ryan, *Avatars of Story* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); and Ruth Page, *Stories and Social Media* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

outside of his local bar within his simulacrum: gradually, his attack is confronted again and again through the re-enactments and simulacra that take the form of violent attacks by 'SS Guards' (re)enacted upon his alter-ego. In one attack, he scars one side of his alter-ego's face, the side that corresponds to his 'real' scarring: the 'remainder' of the attack. In another, even more evocative simulation, five SS Guards kick his alter-ego to a pulp (the visceral nature of the violence made clear in the bloodied doll-simulacrum he creates), at which point Hogancamp closes his eyes, almost re-living his moment of trauma as his five 'real' attackers struck, and utters, 'And then it all comes back to me'.

Even his photographic and artistic praxis seems to reveal the desire to produce and reproduce. When asked by another photographer how he captures perspective and light so perfectly so that the models no longer look like models (a slippage into the domain of the hyperreal), he admits that it is trial and error and that his light meter does not work. He says that if the photographs come back from the commercial developers as over- or under- exposed, he just re-enacts, re-shoots and re-sends them until they come back correct.

Ultimately for Hogancamp, in the face of the withdrawal of post-coma therapy due to financial restrictions (just at the moment when he was starting to show signs of improvement) this obsession with simulacra and re-enactments becomes his 'therapy', in the same way that McCarthy's Enactor sees his re-enactments as a therapeutic way to feel authentic again. However, in both cases, there is always a remainder over which the simulations are superimposed, leaving a certain level of dissatisfaction. In Hogancamp's case, for example, his town is replete with women, who all adore him, yet his real life is devoid of female contact, a condition that has been born out of the trace of the attack. At one point, he talks of remembering his wedding within the simulacrum, but of failing to remember his 'real' wedding. Whilst he remembers having a wife and referring to her as his wife, his lack of auto-affection and fractured memory and selfhood has shattered and re-ordered the context, a phenomenon also portrayed in McCarthy's novel.

All of the people in the documentary view Hogancamp's use of simulacra as a clearly therapeutic praxis: his lawyer comments on how the violence his alter-ego enacts upon his simulated attackers in Marwencol is a positive way to deal with the trauma; his magazine editor sees the simulacra as a way to 'regain something that is lost'; and Mark, himself, sees the model as a 'safe' place, proposing that, 'I created my own therapy'. Now, while his obsession with simulation certainly does not prove as disastrous as the obsession of McCarthy's Enactor, I would query the assertion that

Marwencol is a wholly successful mode of therapy. I would suggest that Hogancamp does not, in fact, 'regain something that is lost' because, ultimately, what is lost is his pre-coma self. Instead, he superimposes what he now is over that lost real and absent-presence, a result which is never fully satisfactory. I also propose that Marwencol is not necessarily 'safe': in the end, the violence of his attack constantly pervades and haunts the model and is persistently beyond the realms of comprehension and assimilation. As Hogancamp himself says, 'I believe that they attacked me because I was a cross-dresser'. His tone is replete with doubt and uncertainty, despite the fact that he has access to the interview tapes of his attackers confessing to this being their motivation to commit violence. In short, I suggest that the rem(a)inder will always be there for Hogancamp and haunt his reformation of selfhood, resulting in a simulacrum that is self-perpetuating. This is exemplified when, in the coda of the film, Mark's alter-ego likewise begins to create simulacra, even smaller, more intricate scaled models, in order to re-enact and simulate the traumatic attacks at the hands of the SS: a copy of a copy of a copy.

Interestingly, this *mise-en-abyme* pattern of simulation is portrayed by McCarthy in *Remainder*, his Enactor not just compelled to create re-enactments in his life-size models (the building, the gangland shooting), but also in scaled-down versions, most notably his model of the building-simulacrum. The scale model that is produced is 'brilliant […] about three feet high and four wide [with] walls and floors [made] from see-through plastic'[172] so that the Enactor can see all of the 'little figures' and details: the 'concierge with her stubby arms and white mask'; the 'miniscule mop and Hoover for her cupboard'; 'the stretches of neutral space […] made white'; 'light switches and doorknobs, the repeating pattern on the floor'.[173] To add to the growing sense of the Enactor as an omnipotent, manipulative supreme-being overseeing this miniaturized simulacrum, 'Sections of wall and roof came off too, so you could reach inside'. Crucially, 'The figures of the characters were moveable', the Enactor picking them up and making them do his bidding – playing the role of a Greek god in an old Harryhausen movie. As the Enactor moves the figures around this model, Naz radios down to the re-enactors in the building, instructing them to replicate, reproduce and simulate the miniaturized movements that the Enactor has performed in the model. In a reversal of Hogancamp's post-coma world, actions are created in the model then played

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[172] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 152.
[173] Ibid., p. 152.

out in the 'real' (albeit already-re-enacted) world. At one point, the Enactor places the model of the pianist on the windowsill at the exact same moment when, a few floors below, the 'real' pianist re-enactor leans out of his window. The Enactor says of this moment, 'I could look down on the model's head poking out at the same time as I looked at the real one. The distance made them both look the same size'.[174] From this distance, then, the blurring between the model and reality (just as in Hogancamp's world) becomes heightened, the 'reality', in this case, itself being a re-enacted fiction: a 1:1 scale model of a (non)memory. In the end, for the Enactor, this model 'is enough'[175] – he does not need to leave his flat, knowing that the action he enacts in the model will be re-enacted in the building.

For the Enactor (and, I propose, for Hogancamp) the simulacra are ultimately ways to recover control that was lost in their respective disasters of their physical traumas, and the trace-echoes of trauma in their new post-coma lives. However, for both, I suggest that the simulations fail because control is always ceded to a feeling of dissatisfaction with the model, leading to endless productions and reproductions. For both, the simulacra, in an attempt to re-assimilate the remainder and to feel whole again, may always be haunted by the irruptions of violence and the trace of trauma.

This being said, for Hogancamp, there is a possibility of escape from the fate that McCarthy bestows upon his protagonist. Against the cycle of simulation and stuttering condition of 'being' is the hope of moving forward and 'becoming'. This comes in the form of his new narratives of self that he is gradually developing. In this process of affirmative self-storying, Hogancamp refers to his 'second life', an image that has undertones of the miraculous and which resonates with imagery of resurrection discussed earlier. At one point, he holds up a photo of his pre-coma self and proclaims, 'I never want to see this guy again'. Hogancamp almost re-codes the trauma of his attack with a positive nucleus. Despite the trauma and violence of the attack, his 'second life' is one free of alcohol, thus constituting a full, irreversible recovery from the addiction that plagued his 'first life', pre-coma. As his friend and boss at the local bar says, 'After he got out of hospital it was like somebody turned a switch. He had no interest in alcohol at all'. This is in line with many clinical studies of the reconstructing of self-narratives in brain injury survivors, with patients often revising, according to Masahiro Nochi, 'their self-narratives by changing the appearance of their past and

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[174] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 153.
[175] Ibid., p. 154.

future'.[176] Indeed, Hogancamp's positive 'spin' on his post-traumatic self could be equated to what Nochi would call the 'grown self'. This manifestation of the reconstruction of post-brain injury identity leads to patients suggesting that TBI had at least one positive outcome for their lives. Significantly, Nochi cites an example of one participant in his research study who stated that, '"When I had my accident, it was kind of a balancing because it stopped my drug use and alcohol use for a while"'.[177] Despite the fact that Nochi goes on to point out that in actuality, his substance abuse was not halted 'immediately after the accident', he does concede that, 'He certainly considered the accident a fundamental step toward abstinence, however'.[178]

For Hogancamp, the traumatic nature of his repetitious simulations of the lost real may potentially give way to more positive and affirmative self-narratives of 'becoming' that will allow him to move beyond the trace of his lost self and continue to 'become' a new self of the future. For McCarthy's Enactor, however, no such respite exists, stuck, as he is, in the simulacrum of a past that may not even be his own, that resist being recoded into the narrative of the 'grown self'.

5.6: *Get More Cats*: **Real – Unreal – Realism**

In examining the human propensity for simulation, Umberto Eco's work on the cultural phenomenon of simulacra and the hyperreal is particularly instructive. In his pseudo-travelogue, 'Travels in Hyperreality', he suggests that, 'The pleasure of imitation, as the ancients knew, is one of the most innate in the human spirit', suggesting that when one takes pleasure in a perfect imitation, one 'also enjoy[s] the conviction that imitation has reached its apex and afterwards reality will always be inferior to it'.[179] Eco is therefore more critical of simulacra than Baudrillard, suggesting that the 'Absolute Fake'[180] is more preferable than the lost original. Rather than seeing the real as being merely supplanted by the simulacrum, Eco proposes that the division between the real and the simulation is no longer recognizable. For McCarthy's Enactor and to some degree for Hogancamp, the hyperreal is preferred to the lost real but because of the haunting trace

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[176] Masahiro Nochi, 'Reconstructing Self-narratives in Coping with Traumatic Brain Injury', *Social Science & Medicine,* 5 (2000), 1795-1804 (p. 1797).
[177] Ibid., p. 1798.
[178] Ibid., p. 1798.
[179] Umberto Eco, 'Travels in Hyperreality' in *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (London: Picador, 1987), p. 46.
[180] Ibid., p. 31.

of their pre-coma selves, full pleasure in the imitation can never quite be achieved. For the Enactor, in particular, his simulations are not simply to create something that is more real than real, but to try and re-make the lost real once more: to become real and authentic again through the precession of simulacra.

Eco's allusion to the innate pleasure of imitation, I would suggest, connects with the theories of the formation of ego-identity that I discussed earlier with humans, from an early age, imitating the mores of the world around them. This need to simulate also seems to be embedded within how the human brain works, as suggested by Damasio's discussion of how the objects one sees are not mirror images, but neuronally-constructed representations or simulations. As examined within this investigation, when trauma strikes, the compulsion to repeat, reproduce and simulate seems to arise. In the two coma texts I have analysed here, the physical trauma of brain injury, leading to the 'feeling of not feeling' real any more against the trace of a former self, awakens a further compulsion to simulate. The fact that both the Enactor and Hogancamp create dioramas in their process of simulation emphasises their need for some kind of reality, as Eco hypothesizes when he writes that 'the diorama aims to establish itself as a substitute for reality, as something even more real'.[181] This seems crucial for the Enactor and Hogancamp, in the face of the disappearance of their 'real' and authentic pre-coma selves.

This notion of post-coma/TBI simulation, I would suggest, is a particular preoccupation with several authors of coma fiction in their attempts to emulate the crisis of authenticity and simulation that occurs in many neurological cases of brain trauma patients. A further example is Richard Powers's 2006 post-coma novel, *The Echo Maker*. It follows the travails of Mark Schluter who, after being involved in a major road-traffic accident, emerges from coma with severe brain damage and a long-lasting neurological condition: Capgras Syndrome. This disorder is concisely described by V.S. Ramachandran in his work on rare neurological conditions – the 'phantoms in the brain'. With Capgras Syndrome, he writes, 'The patient, who is often mentally quite lucid, comes to regard close acquaintances – usually his parents, children, spouse or siblings – as impostors'.[182] In the case of Powers's protagonist, Mark, the impostor is his sister, Karin, much to her great frustration and despair. Whilst there is some debate

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[181] Eco, 'Travels in Hyperreality', p. 8.

[182] V. S. Ramachandran (and Sandra Blakeslee), *Phantoms in the Brain* (London: Fourth Estate, 1998), p. 161.

about whether Capgras Syndrome is a 'syndrome' at all,[183] one cannot deny the fact that a crisis of simulation within the post-coma self manifests itself once more. As John M. Doran posits in his overview of various perspectives on Capgras, 'Through the ages, there has come a wealth of evidence that humanity has been preoccupied with the double as an ideational theme',[184] a statement that evokes Eco's concept of the 'innate' tendency within the human condition to simulate.

In *The Echo Maker*, the crisis of simulation is two-fold. On the one hand, for some reason unknown to all around him, Mark's brain can only see Karin as a simulation: 'Kopy Karin', an 'actress who looked very much like his sister'.[185] On the other hand, for Karin, Mark, too, is a kind of simulation. He is someone who looks like her brother, but is not quite him; a loved one who seems 'almost healed'.[186] As Ramachandran notes when referring to a particular case of Capgras that he worked on, the patient seems 'to all outward appearances' to be back to normal.[187] However, as is so common in coma fiction, there is a clear reference to the trauma of Mark coming 'back from the dead'.[188] Like McCarthy, Powers focuses on his protagonist's post-coma rehabilitation with Mark having to re-learn everything. Powers pays particular attention to the reacquisition of language and the painstaking agony of learning to talk again but, eventually, to all intents and purposes, Mark seems to be, 'One hundred per cent […] Back together'.[189] Nevertheless, from both Mark's subjective perspective (and Karin's external objective perspective) this is not the case. Both of them know that something is not right, a feeling that is generated and exacerbated by the fact that this 'new' Mark and his 'second life' (to quote Hogancamp) is not quite the same as the 'old' Mark, leading to the trauma that stems from superimposing the new self over the trace of the old.

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[183] Early studies of Capgras immediately contested whether it could be classed as a 'syndrome. Research papers by Weinstein and Lyerly (1968) and Davison and Bagley (1970) caution against labelling the 'symptoms' of Capgras Syndrome as a syndrome in its own right, pointing out the fact that similar symptoms occur in patients with severe brain lesions within their temporal lobes, or who are recovering from coma. Confabulations and misidentification of people, they argue, are common symptoms, in general, of brain injury, leading them to suggest that perhaps 'Capgras' is itself merely a symptom of brain injury. For further discussion, see: E. A. Weinstein and O. G. Lyerly, 'Confabulation Following Brain Injury: Its Analogues and Sequela', *Archives of General Psychology*, 18 (1968), 248-254 and K. Davison and C. R. Bagley, 'Schizophrenia-like Psychoses Associated With Organic Disorders of the CNS', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 4 (1970), 113-184; and for a more recent overview of the debate, see: John M. Doran, 'The Capgras Syndrome: Neurological/Neuropsychological Perspectives', *Neuropsychology*, 4 (1990), 29-42

[184] John M. Doran, 'The Capgras Syndrome: Neurological/Neuropsychological Perspectives', *Neuropsychology*, 4 (1990), 29-42 (p. 30).

[185] Richard Powers, *The Echo Maker* (New York: Picador, 2006), p. 86.

[186] Ibid., p. 89.

[187] V. S. Ramachandran (and Sandra Blakeslee), *Phantoms In The Brain*, p. 159.

[188] Powers, *The Echo Maker*, p. 61.

[189] Ibid., p. 41.

I suggest this portrayal of Capgras Syndrome therefore also illustrates both a crisis of simulation and also the haunting and complex nature of the Derridean trace. For Mark, Karin is only a trace of her former self and this trace consistently causes post-coma trauma and unsettlement. Conversely, for Karin, Mark, too, is a trace of his former self. Mark is 'almost healed' and becomes more and 'more like his old self',[190] and yet this delusion he holds onto that she is not his real sister is a constant reminder that he is not-quite-Mark: he is the same-but-different, exhibiting only a trace of his former self. As Mark tries to continue the life he led prior to coma, 'Kopy Karin' prevents a full return to 'normality'. Not only does her presence remind him of the fact that something is not quite right (she looks like his sister but is not her), it also reminds him that Karin is absent and has not even visited him in hospital which would be anathema to his 'real' sister, thus exacerbating his sense of post-coma trauma, alienation and unsettlement. Karin is perhaps the perfect example of the Derridean trace. She is an absent-presence for Mark and is 'both' his sister (physically) and is 'not' her (emotionally). It is the haunting paradox that Kopy Karin represents that causes Mark to enter a crisis of post-coma simulation in order to explain and narrate through this rupture in selfhood that he is experiencing and that he is reminded of every time he sees Karin. In fact, Powers's neuroscientist Gerald Weber (a character loosely based upon the neurologist and narrator of strange neurological case studies, Oliver Sacks) highlights the medical profession's fascination with the syndrome whilst invoking Derrida's philosophical position when, musing upon Mark's case-file, he comments: 'It's the kind of neither-both case that could help arbitrate between two very different paradigms of mind'.[191] Karin both is and is not Mark's sister illustrating the undecidability of post-coma trauma embodied, in this case, by a rare syndrome. Capgras causes Mark to formulate simulations and complex narratives to, in turn, explain and justify these simulations in order to try and resolve this undecidability: to attempt to justify to himself exactly why Karin is not his sister despite being an exact copy of her.[192]

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[190] Powers, *The Echo Maker*, p. 61.

[191] Ibid., p. 105.

[192] Many case-studies of Capgras detail the creation of extremely complex narratives in order to explain the simulations that are created, occasionally leading to disturbing and tragic consequences. The most infamous of these, perhaps, is the case of one patient who believed his father to be a robot and proceeded to decapitate him so that he could locate the batteries and microfilm in his father's head. In other cases, patients have deemed their pets to be doubles, a simulation that also occurs in Powers's novel, Mark failing to recognise his beloved dog and explaining the exuberant affection the dog shows for him by suggesting he has, 'Rabies or something' (p. 86). For further discussion of this, see: J. Arturo Silva, Gregory B. Leong, Robert Weinstock and Catherine L. Boyer, 'Capgras Syndrome and Dangerousness', *Bull Am Acad Psychiatry Law*, 17 (1) (1989), 5-14 and Maria

Ramachandran, in line with other studies, has looked at how Capgras more than likely arises from damage to the limbic system, which is concerned with the generation and processing of emotions. Ultimately, for Ramachandran, the syndrome is caused by a disconnection between the part of the brain that is responsible for facial recognition, and that part that is responsible for emotions, a position supported by John M. Doran: 'The Capgras patient "recognizes" the significant other in every sensory way an organically intact person would, except that the Capgras patient does not recognize him emotionally!'.[193] This theoretical position not only helps to elucidate the brain's potential to enter a crisis of simulation but also the fragility of the mechanisms that keep this crisis at bay. It is precisely this crisis of post-coma simulation and the undecidability that arises from it that are explored within the other texts I have examined within this chapter. For McCarthy's fictional Enactor, and in the real-life cases of Mark Hogancamp and Steph Grant, the undecidability arises from the feeling that they are and are not the same person that they were prior to coma, and it is through simulation that they attempt to work through this, with varying degrees of success.

When discussing his protagonist's position as a hero in the novel (as 'an agent of justice'[194]), McCarthy comments, 'I think what horrifies him is forgetting', concluding that, despite his growing acts of violence, he truly is a hero 'because he refuses to forget'.[195] However, I would argue that it is his feverish pursuit of the Derridean trace through hypersimulation in an attempt not to forget his pre-coma self that is his undoing. As Roger Luckhurst posits in his discussion of the crisis of memory in modernity, 'Memory can tyrannically bind you and impose a determining identity you might wish to resist; active forgetting can be a liberation from the dead weight of memorial history'.[196] In the case of McCarthy's Enactor, it is the trace of a memory of a previous selfhood that becomes the dead weight around his neck, forcing him into a cycle of remembering through simulation, even if the simulations are based upon 'traces' of memory that may be distortions in the first place. In other words, the Enactor, in a bid to regain authenticity, finds comfort in the simulation of authenticity as embodied by the underlying principle of the international chain of *Ripley's Believe It Or*

Pachalska et al, 'A case of "Borrowed Identity Syndrome" After Severe Traumatic Brain Injury', *Med Sci Monit,* 17 (2), (2010), 18-28 (p. 20).
[193] John M. Doran, 'The Capgras Syndrome', p. 37.
[194] Tom McCarthy, *What's Left Behind*, p. 4.
[195] Ibid., p. 4.
[196] Roger Luckhurst, 'Memory Recovered/Recovered Memory' in *Literature and the Contemporary: Fictions and Theories of the Present*, eds. Roger Luckhurst and Peter Marks (Harlow: Longman, 1999), 80-93 (pp. 84-85).

Not museums as described by Eco: 'Everything looks real, and therefore it is real; in any case the fact that it seems real is real, and the thing is real even if […] it never existed'.[197]

In his discussion of the representation of trauma in *Remainder*, Pieter Vermeulen argues that , 'The novel is an attempt to debunk the customary pieties of trauma fiction' by remaining 'conspicuously indifferent to the weighty ethical issues that normally mark our engagement with the extreme violence and the psychological suffering that characterize trauma'.[198] Using an affectless protagonist, with anti-realist plot, lack of psychological depth and 'readerly empathy and sentiment'[199] are a few of McCarthy's techniques Vermeulen picks out in order to demonstrate that, whilst employing the characteristic tropes of repetition and re-enactment, *Remainder* is not a 'typical' trauma novel. Furthermore, going on to discuss how McCarthy's anti-empathic approach leads to a refreshing lack of psychological realism, Vermeulen argues that, 'Trauma, far from registering as a psychological event, is merely mobilized as a structural plot element'.[200] I would argue that in what Vermeulen sees as constituting McCarthy's absolute lack of psychological realism lies the foundation of realism itself. It is exactly McCarthy's first-hand research that connects theories of simulation and the trace with medical theories of the human capacity for simulation, manifested post-coma, that constitutes a nucleus of realism within the novel and which refutes Vermeulen's notion that McCarthy 'merely' uses trauma as a narrative device. What Vermeulen (alongside other critics) might see as a lack of psychological realism (and a general criticism that is often directed at the novel) actually conveys, as discussed, the lack of auto-affection so often present in the survivors of coma and brain trauma. At one point, the Enactor is told that all of the black cats have fallen off the red roofs of the building opposite as they lack the ability to cling onto the incline. When asked what he wants to do about the rate of loss of the cats, he simply replies, '"Get more"',[201] a comment that again emphasises McCarthy's sharply-observed representation of damaged auto-affection, alongside coma and brain injury survival as a whole, not least the detailed depictions of physical rehabilitation.

It is overly simplistic, therefore, to suggest that *Remainder* is an anti-realist novel. Certainly, it may lack the psychological and emotive depth of traditional trauma novels but this is indicative of the specific type of trauma that McCarthy portrays. It is this

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[197] Eco, 'Travels in Hyperreality', p. 16.
[198] Vermeulen, 'Trauma and the Afterlife of the Novel', p. 550.
[199] Ibid., p. 549.
[200] Ibid., p. 551.
[201] McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 146.

trauma, the trauma of coma and brain injury, both psychological and, most importantly, *physical*, that allows the novelist to explore complex literary and cultural theories by looking at how these manifest in real-world situations and crises. In this way, I would argue, McCarthy has created an ethical depiction of coma within fiction. It is one that experiments with theory and a range of imaginative narrative devices yet takes, at its very core, a 'responsible' authorial position through its commitment to representing and revealing to the reader the true plight of the post-coma, post-TBI survivor. In my final chapter, I will continue to explore this notion of an ethics of authorship in relation to coma literature.

6: *It Was Kind of Like the Whole World Went Into Coma*. Coma as Metaphor

> Of course, one cannot think without metaphors. But that does not mean there aren't some metaphors we might well abstain from or try to retire. As, of course, all thinking is interpretation.
>
> But that does not mean it isn't sometimes correct to be 'against' interpretation.
>
> <div align="right">-Susan Sontag, AIDS and Its Metaphors.</div>

6.1: Introduction

During an interview given in 2011 for the BBC documentary *Faulks on Fiction*,[1] the author Martin Amis, whilst discussing whether he would ever consider writing a children's book, said, 'People ask me if I ever thought of writing a children's book. I say, 'If I had a serious brain injury I might well write a children's book' […] I would never write about someone that forced me to write at a lower register than what I write'.[2] What is perhaps most startling about Amis's insult against brain injury survivors is that the majority of the backlash came from those who were offended by a perceived slur against children's fiction and its authors. Indeed, the sub-heading to an article in *The Guardian* reporting on this incident illustrates this rather misdirected outrage: 'Children's authors have expressed anger over 'insult' to their work on BBC programme'.[3] This same article also cites the children's author Lucy Coats who sees Amis's *faux-pas* as 'an implicit insult to those of us who do write children's books', yet she fails to mention how this is an explicit insult against those living with brain injury. Furthermore, the majority of blog-comments from the public that accompany the article either seem to concur with Amis's view on children's fiction and his use of the brain injury metaphor, or object to it on similar grounds to Coats, despite the fact that the article does also cite Jane Stemp's objection to the metaphor (an author with cerebral palsy who felt that Amis 'couldn't have insulted [her] harder').

This is one example of what I will refer to as the 'brain injury metaphor', a negative and pejorative technique that seems to be increasingly employed within socio-political and cultural arenas. Juxtaposed with this is the 'coma metaphor' which, as discussed

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[1] 'The Hero', *Faulks on Fiction*, BBC Two, 5 November 2011.
[2] Benedicte Page, 'Martin Amis: Only Brain Injury Could Make Me Write for Children', *The Guardian* (11 Feb 2011) <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/feb/11/martin-amis-brain-injury-write-children> [accessed: 11/07/14].
[3] Ibid.

throughout this investigation, proliferates the misleading notion that coma is a form of sleep-state from which the patient can emerge quickly in 'light switch' moments of 'awakening' with most of his cognitive and mental faculties immediately intact. The brain injury metaphor, I suggest, is a consequence of the coma metaphor due to the fact that it is rarely depicted accurately, or explored as a condition of post-coma recovery. Baldly, I argue that there are very few accurate and ethical representations of coma and, as a consequence, of brain injury which leads to a proliferation of misinformation and medical 'mythologies' that have, in turn, caused the conditions of coma and brain injury to pass into the realm of metaphorical and figurative language and imagery. As can be seen in the Amis case, this largely negative use of the coma and brain injury metaphors can have a stigmatizing impact upon the survivors of the conditions.

In this final chapter, I will examine the use of coma and brain injury as metaphor within the cultural and socio-political spheres, and discuss the often misinformed or insensitive and discriminative connotations at their core. Drawing on Susan Sontag's critical works on illness as metaphor, I will argue that coma and brain injury have, like the illnesses of tuberculosis and cancer in Sontag's discussions, become embedded deeply as metaphors in culture, though in starkly contrasting ways. Coma has come to symbolise socio-political stasis or inertia, or the mystical possibility of creative rebirth whereas brain injury is frequently used as a derogatory slur against those who are seen to be lacking in some capacity. Returning to Ricoeur's theory of sedimentation and examining medical cases of coma (and other disorders of consciousness), I will explore how literary and media representations feed into one another (continuing to propagate mythologies surrounding these conditions) and examine the potential real-world impact this can have upon the survivors of coma and their loved ones. Lastly, I will further explicate why we have developed this perceived need for these mythologies of 'miracle' recoveries and the 'economies of hope' that they provide, ultimately proposing two ethical models of authorship for the writer of coma fiction.

6.2: *A Triumph Over Illness*: Coma as Metaphor - Brain Injury and Its Metaphors

Martin Amis's use of the brain injury metaphor certainly isn't an isolated example, its use as a cultural slur apparent later in 2011 when, during an edition of BBC2's *The Review Show*, the writer and critic A.L. Kennedy suggested that the writer of the

Channel 4 fantasy-drama *Camelot* must have had a 'brain injury' as an explanation for why it was so badly written.[4] Most recently, during the World Cup qualifying match between Portugal and the USA, football commentator Mark Lawrenson, by way of explaining the erratic ability of the Portuguese player Nani, said: 'A great description of Nani – promising career ruined by a niggling brain injury'.[5] Whilst Lawrenson's use of the metaphor has the same register and effect as Amis and Kennedy's usage (referring to brain injury as a means of describing a perceived creative 'flaw'), I suggest that it has more significant and worrying implications. The fact that Lawrenson refers to a 'niggling' brain injury grossly undermines the gravity of this neurological disability on several levels. It at once describes brain injury as persistent yet simultaneously reduces its severity to a 'nagging' or even 'petty' complaint, something that, whilst persistent, may be intermittent, thus trivializing the condition and glossing over its permanence. Moreover, this brain injury metaphor, Lawrenson maintains, is a 'great' description.

The use of the equally misleading coma metaphor is no less prevalent, not least in the socio-political arena. On accepting the Democratic Party's nomination for Vice President in 1988, Senator Lloyd Bentsen, recalling the Reagan administration, declared that, 'America has just passed through… an eight-year coma'.[6] Over a century prior to Bentsen's speech, in another era of contentious political debate, the suffragist Sarah Emily Davies, during a paper delivered at the annual meeting of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences in 1868, proposed that, 'We have persuaded ourselves that Englishmen of the present day are such a nervously excitable race, that the only chance for their descendants is to keep the mothers in a state of coma'.[7] These examples illustrate how long the coma metaphor has been employed in political rhetoric and in both, it is used to criticise paternalistic and oppressive governance. In the first example, it is used to condemn the political oppression of an entire country; in the second, the oppression of one particular gender within a country is condemned. In both, the word 'coma' becomes synonymous with a state of sleep or stupor, as in so many of the texts I have examined throughout this investigation. In Bentsen's quote, the notion of coma as being a state that can be 'passed through' suggests a lack of permanence, emphasizing the fact that, whilst having a stupefying effect, it can be left behind and overcome, again negating the long-term traumatic effect

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[4] *The Review Show*, BBC 2, 3 June 2011.
[5] *World Cup Qualifier: Portugal Vs USA*, BBC One, 22 June 2014.
[6] Nora Sayer, 'Atlanta', *Grand Street*, 8 (3) (Spring 1989), 207-227 (p. 207).
[7] Sarah Emily Davies, 'Some Account of a Proposed New College for Women' in *Thoughts on Some Questions Relating to Women* (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1910), p. 104.

of medical coma. In the quote by Davies, the notion of 'control' of coma is implied, with those in power having the ability to place women in coma and control this at will.[8] Certainly, within contemporary medicine, the coma can be used as a clinical tool, for example, the induced coma that can be employed to reduce brain swelling or to stem the growth of cancer cells. However, this sense of clinical control is limited, physicians having the power to initiate coma but not always having the capability or 'control' to initiate an immediate return, as discussed earlier in the high-profile case of the racing-driver Michael Schumacher, whose induced coma had been prolonged for over six months, despite the fact that the sedation administered to sustain his coma had started to be withdrawn in January 2014.[9] There are other examples whereby patients have not been able to be brought out of induced comas by the reduction of sedation. In the case of teenager Vicki Alex, medical professionals 'were unable to guarantee that she would regain consciousness'[10] after inducing a coma to help her body fight an infection brought on by acute myeloid leukaemia.

The coma metaphor is similarly present within the literary arena, and beyond the broader 'allegories' of coma (the katabatic journey, for example, or coma as an embodiment of psychoanalytical abreaction) discussed throughout this thesis. In his poem 'And Others, Vaguer Presences', John Ashbery, in typically minimalist and

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[8] Whilst this investigation is chiefly focused upon contemporary representations of coma, this example of the coma metaphor from the Victorian era, I feel, exemplifies the longevity of the metaphor, and the preoccupation with coma and other altered states of consciousness. Indeed, throughout the Victorian era, there was a fascination with somnambulism and death-states, one key exponent of this tradition being Colonel Townsend who could apparently 'die' at will, halting all signs of breathing and stopping his pulse. Similarly, the longest persistent travelling showman, Tom Norman, famously exhibited his 'Man In A Trance' novelty, and throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, 'Sleeping Beauty' sideshows (consisting of seemingly 'comatose' females encased in glass cabinets) were extremely popular. Interestingly, the great pioneer of photographic studies of the moving image from this period, Edweard Muybridge, was an early survivor of coma and brain injury after being thrown from a stagecoach in 1860 during a journey across America. Most of the accounts of this accident, in early examples of the confusion surrounding coma and disorders of consciousness, avoid the designation 'coma'. Indeed, Muybridge, himself, (in his written account of his accident for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6th February1875) only refers to his return to 'consciousness'. However, modern accounts acknowledge the fact that he was in a week-long coma, after which it was discovered he had sustained significant brain damage. However, as an interesting postscript to this aside, the 'double vision' he was left with can be seen as, according to David Horspool, 'a premonition of the multiple image-making that made him famous'. For further discussion of Edweard Muybridge, see: Gordon Hendricks, *Edweard Muybridge: The Father of the Motion Picture* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975) and David Horspool, 'A Pioneer and a Murderer: The Man Who Gave Us Moving Pictures' in *The Times Review* (14 August 2010), pp. 3-4; For further discussion of Colonel Townsend see: E. Littell, *The Living Age*, Vol. 8 (Boston: E. Littell & Company, 1847), pp. 521-522.

[9] It was announced that Schumacher was officially 'out of coma' on June 16th 2014, a full six months after sedation was withdrawn, reflecting the difficulty of full control over this disorder of consciousness.

[10] Andy Dolan, 'Saved…By Sums', *The Daily Mail* (Tues 3 Nov 2009), p. 33.

cryptic style, muses upon the dislocation of the self within a brutalist architectural landscape:

> … To extend one's life
> All day on the dirty stone of some plaza,
> Unaware among the pretty lunging of the wind,
> Light and shade, is like coming out of
> A coma that is a white, interesting country…[11]

Ashbery's reference to coma, here, is evocative of the so-called 'white tunnel' phenomenon of the near-death experience and therefore the portrayal of 'coming out' of coma is ambiguous. The reader wonders whether he is leaving through the exit into life beyond coma, or through the exit into death. Regardless of this, Ashbery's coma metaphor has similar implications to the two examples of the coma metaphor in political rhetoric in that it suggests a certain simplicity and 'ease' of slippage between extreme states of consciousness. Indeed, in all of these references a certain sense of tranquillity is conveyed, either in describing the emergence from coma, the subject still within coma, or the control and maintenance of the coma. The coma metaphor, then, consistently overlooks and undermines the complexities of medical coma and continues to propagate the mythology that the patient moves fluidly and peacefully from either coma to death or coma to consciousness. In Aldous Huxley's 1944 novel *Time Must Have a Stop*, the character Bruno Rontini sardonically suggests that the key to life is to, 'Ignore death up to the last moment; then, when it cannot be ignored any longer, have yourself squirted full of morphia and shuffle off in a coma'.[12] It seems that this overly-simplistic notion of either shuffling into or out of coma is still prevalent in both representations of the condition and in the use of the coma metaphor and furthermore, I suggest that by consistently propagating the image of coma as a form of sleep or even tranquil death-state, the aetiologies of brain injury are obfuscated and frequently ignored. Furthermore, I propose that the aetiologies of coma and other chronic disorders of consciousness (CDCs) are similarly glossed over, resulting in the escalation of medical 'mythologies' that confuse and conflate the CDCs of coma, the persistent vegetative state, the minimally conscious state and stupor.

 Susan Sontag's work on illness as metaphor is germane to this discussion, and I will draw a parallel between her analysis of the two disease metaphors of tuberculosis and

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[11] John Ashbery, 'And Others, Vaguer Presences' in *Houseboat Days* (New York: Penguin, 1978), p. 48.

[12] Aldous Huxley, *Time Must Have a Stop* (London: Triad Grafton Books, 1989), p. 228.

cancer with the metaphors of coma and brain injury. In her seminal work *Illness as Metaphor*, Sontag traces the use of the metaphors of tuberculosis and cancer through the history of literary and socio-political language. She examines how, traditionally, TB was often romanticized, with the dying victim 'pictured as made more beautiful and more soulful', whereas the victim of cancer was often 'portrayed as robbed of all capacities of self-transcendence, humiliated by fear and agony'.[13] She exemplifies this theory by looking at how the metaphors are manifested: the 'spiritualizing of consciousness' of TB juxtaposed with the 'obliterating of consciousness' of cancer.[14] The literary and medico-social language of these two diseases contribute to a sense of metaphorical polarity: TB described in terms of a certain 'vigour' or vitality[15] that it instils in the patient; cancer in terms of invasions of the 'Other', of 'alien' or 'mutant' cells stronger than normal cells',[16] sinister and potentially stigmatizing imagery that is immediately evocative of the science fiction genre. However, despite this 'privileging' of one disease over the other, the gravity of both is undermined because of the metaphorical implications. There is a similar paradigm in the cases of the coma and brain injury metaphor and their uses in contemporary society and literature. As discussed, coma is frequently described as an ethereal, transient dreamscape and a place where transcendent enlightenment and revelatory knowledge of the self and society can be found. Brain injury, on the other hand, is often ignored altogether and so it seems that, as a metaphor, it has accumulated the register of an insult, becoming synonymous with stupidity, or with a sense of existential lack.

Sontag also writes of the 'predilection for psychological explanations of disease' and that such an understanding 'undermines the 'reality' of a disease'.[17] This dynamic similarly arises out of the production of the coma metaphor, depicting coma as a purely psychic disturbance, thus causing it to become detached from reality. As discussed extensively throughout this investigation, recovery from coma is most often depicted as being quick and immediate, with the survivor's cognition being apparently intact. The coma metaphor, therefore, has become a literary device that grants the author extensive creative freedom for fulfilling whatever literary agenda he has set for himself whilst perpetuating mythologies surrounding the condition of coma and disregarding the

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[13] Susan Sontag, 'Illness as Metaphor' in *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 17.
[14] Ibid., p. 68.
[15] Ibid., p. 32.
[16] Ibid., p. 69.
[17] Ibid., p. 56.

'reality' of brain injury.

From a literary perspective, the critic and poet John Hollander discusses how these misleading metaphors of consciousness are created. He examines how even the process of writing about altered states of consciousness becomes 'immensely complicated by the impulses to use language to represent them'.[18] He notes that 'the rhetoric of such representations will liken a direct experience of such a state, or an imagined one, to that of another such condition'.[19] As discussed, the authors of coma fiction consistently appropriate other altered states of consciousness to describe the state of coma in order to try and narrate the intangible 'nothingness' of the coma consciousness. This 'likening' of one state of consciousness to this unconscious state within the literary arena can be examined further through Sontag's notion that such psychologizing and figuring of illness leads to 'the promise of a triumph over illness',[20] therefore creating a feeling of hope. Certainly, in many of the works discussed in this thesis, by psychologizing the state of coma with 'unacknowledged interpretive construction',[21] to return to Hollander's discussions, the coma is depicted as a condition that can be conquered and brain injury a condition that can be 'cured' (if not denied altogether).

This privileging of coma over brain injury, and the consequences this has for the utility of each metaphor, is exacerbated further by the constant misrepresentations within popular culture. Danny Boyle's 2013 film *Trance*[22] depicts how someone with amnesia arising from a traumatic brain injury (caused by the stereotypical 'blow to the head') undergoes hypnotherapy to recover his memories. This again illustrates the confusion of physical and psychological brain trauma (of brain plasticity and elasticity), the archetype of the amnesic hero offering infinitesimal potentials for dramatic conflict. Consequently, Boyle's film, through its characterization and narrative development, once more serves to propagate medical mythologies, implying the possibility of a 'cure' for brain injury.

The role of the coma metaphor in the development of narrative devices is likewise seen in another of Boyle's films, *28 Days Later*.[23] In the opening minutes of the film, the central protagonist, Jim (Cillian Murphy) emerges from a month-long coma, both

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[18] John Hollander, 'The Rhetoric of Consciousness', *Social Research*, 68 (3) (Fall 2001), 589-608 (p. 589).
[19] Ibid., p. 589.
[20] Sontag, 'Illness as Metaphor', p. 57.
[21] John Hollander, 'The Rhetoric of Consciousness', p. 589.
[22] *Trance*, dir. Danny Boyle (Fox Searchlight, UK and France, 2013).
[23] *28 Days Later*, dir. Danny Boyle (20th Century Fox, UK, 2002).

with cognition fully and immediately intact, but also with unimpaired motor functions. In almost a mirror-image of this initiating dramatic event, in the first book of Robert Kirkman and Tony Moore's zombie-apocalypse comic-book series *The Walking Dead*, the central protagonist Rick Grimes likewise emerges from a month-long coma with cognition intact. In this text, though, slightly more attention is paid to the degradation of muscle strength and motor functioning, as evident in the frames below:
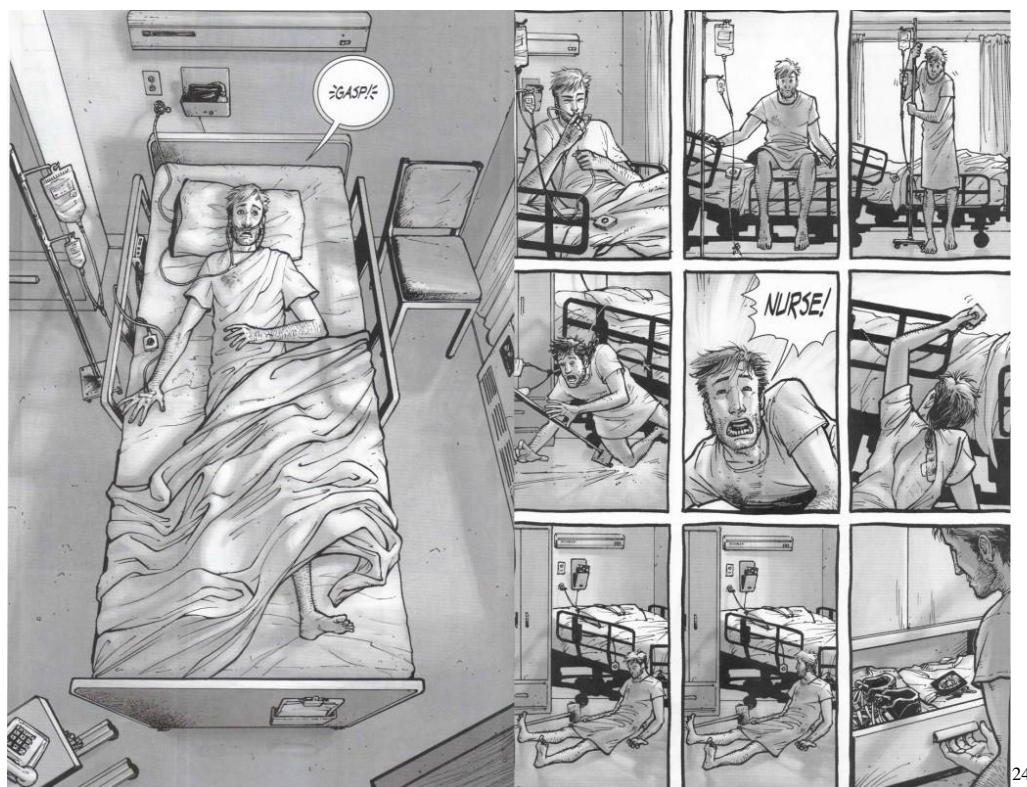

This being said, there seems to be the smallest of temporal lapses (between the penultimate and final frame in the above sequence, denoted by the same division of white-space used between each frame of action) before Rick is up on his feet again, rummaging through drawers for his belongings.

In both *28 Days Later* and *The Walking Dead: Days Gone Bye*, the coma is used purely as a narrative device which allows the writers to collapse time and quickly move beyond the narrative timeframe during which the rage virus spreads (*28 Days Later*) and the dead start to reanimate (*The Walking Dead*). In fact, the second text is most effective in the use of the coma device, depicting Rick being shot within the first six frames of the comic, and then having him emerge from coma in the seventh frame. In Boyle's

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[24] Robert Kirkman and Tony Moore, *The Walking Dead: Volume 1: Days Gone Bye* (Berkeley: Image Comics, 2013), pp. 10-11.

film, there is a version of a 'pre-credit' sequence during which the audience sees the moment of break-out of the virus, an expository device that is absent in *The Walking Dead* comic and first season of the TV adaptation.[25] In this use of the coma metaphor in *The Walking Dead*, Rick is also metaphorically represented as 'awakening' from 'death' only to encounter those who have similarly 'awoken', only in a much more literal sense, and this immediacy of injury/coma 'awakening' allows the audience to be also awoken in the midst of this apocalyptic scenario. However, what is most noticeable is the depiction of an immediate recovery from a month- long coma in both texts, the 'light switch' moment of the return from the unconsciousness of coma.

Sontag's hypothesis that 'part of the denial of death in this culture is a vast expansion of the category of illness'[26] is pertinent to this discussion. Through the coma metaphor, and literary licence that is taken by authors, the 'category' of coma is 'expanded' into other categories of consciousness and states of being (sleep and dream, for example) from which the patient 'awakes', seemingly with no long-term effects. This intersection of categories of consciousness may best be illustrated by the diagram below:

Sleep   Coma   Death
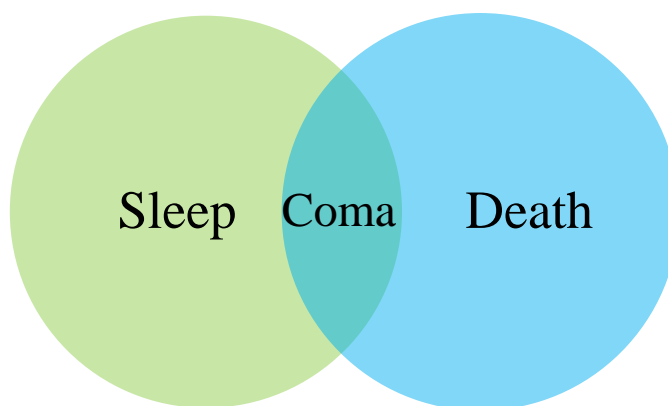
Sontag's 'denial of death' resonates with Arthur Frank's work on patient and illness narratives as discussed in chapter four, most notably his assertion that the metaphorical restitution narrative of recovery from sickness allows one to 'deny' and therefore 'conquer' death. In this way, I suggest that the use of the coma metaphor contributes to what Zygmunt Bauman refers to as 'deconstructed mortality',[27] a concept that Arthur Frank explores in analysing the various narrative archetypes employed in stories of illness. Examining, from a sociological and philosophical perspective, death and dying

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[25] 'Days Gone Bye', *The Walking Dead*, dir. Frank Darabont (AMC, USA, 2010).
[26] Sontag, 'Illness as Metaphor', p. 57.
[27] Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 131.

and how modern societies deal with these 'taboo' subjects, Bauman argues that such a process of deconstruction 'does not abolish death' per se, but instead allows death to be 'stripped of significance' in the light of medico-social rhetoric and promises of hope of survival. As Frank explicates in his discussion of Bauman, modernity 'exorcises the fear of mortality by breaking down threats, among which illness is paradigmatic, into smaller and smaller units'.[28] This, on the surface, appears to contradict Sontag's notion of the 'expansion' of illness, but I propose that these two theories can exist alongside each other. As coma is 'expanded' into other 'categories' through the use of metaphor, coma itself starts to become demystified and broken down into smaller, more manageable associations and meanings. For example, coma is 'expanded' into the category of the archetypal restitution narrative which, as Frank posits in further developing Bauman's concept of deconstructing mortality, is the 'culturally preferred narrative' whether it is told by 'television commercials, sociology, or medicine'.[29] This narrative type is preferred precisely because it offers hope of conquering death and in the case of coma, it allows the incomprehensible notion of a void in consciousness to be broken down into the 'smaller units' of either a 'restitution' or 'quest' narrative. In short, it translates the unintelligible experience of coma into the various comprehensible stages of a journey into the unconscious that the protagonist must complete in order to reach an almost inevitable point of return, allowing audiences to defeat superficially the fears over their mortality.

For a neurological disability like brain injury that lacks the aura of mystery and ethereality of coma, it has inevitably acquired darker and more pejorative connotations. Writing about the punitive notions of disease inherent in the cancer metaphor, Sontag explicates this development of the negative medical metaphor. She discusses how traditionally in debates about cancer, the illness itself is seen as the enemy, but that conversely, 'It is also the cancer patient who is made culpable'. Moreover, the onus of responsibility both for becoming ill and for getting well falls upon the cancer patient, thus the illness is imbued with a moralistic meaning.[30] This 'blame culture' arising from the illness metaphor is embodied in the current trend of brain injury metaphor, attributing the condition to the person who is being insulted, before using the condition as an excuse to blame that person for an inexcusable shortcoming, thus creating both

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[28] Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 84.
[29] Ibid., p. 191.
[30] Sontag, 'Illness as Metaphor', p. 59.

victim and culprit.

Sontag lucidly describes the process an illness has to go through in making its transition into metaphor. The first stage, she explains, invokes the identification with the disease of negative associations, 'subjects of deepest dread'. It is at this point that the disease has become a metaphor, but in order for it to be sustainable, it has to enter the secondary 'adjectival' stage, during which the disease and all of its horrific associations are imposed upon other targets. As Sontag concludes, 'Something is said to be disease-like, meaning that it is disgusting or ugly'.[31] I argue that brain injury has passed into this adjectival stage of metaphor, loaded with such ugly connotations and associations, as seen in the three examples of the imposition of the brain injury metaphor cited earlier, each one implying that to be brain injured is to lack creative skills and artistic discernment. Whilst the coma metaphor seems to have evaded this overtly negative adjectival stage, maintaining its status as a 'poetic' illness (akin to TB a century ago), it has nevertheless completed its metaphorical conversion, its effects and implications being, I argue, no less damaging to the public perception and conception of the condition. In her famous polemic 'Against Interpretation', Sontag proposes that, 'To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world in order to set up a shadow world of "meanings". It is to turn *the* world into *this* world'.[32] To interpret something causes that thing to pass into the realm of metaphor, to load it with alternative meanings and connotations, thus resulting in the original thing no longer being synonymous with its original meaning: it becomes an imprint within the 'shadow world' that Sontag refers to. The interpretation of coma and brain injury, therefore, has similarly caused the medical conditions to enter the process of metaphorical conversion, creating interpretive imprints (shadows) of these and loading them with connotations which are consequently handed down to and circulated amongst the public audience or readership, instigating and perpetuating the medical mythologies surrounding the conditions.

I will examine this 'shadow world of meanings' in more detail at the end of this investigation where I will discuss the potential real-world impact (and damage) this may have, but before I do that, I would first like to examine, in closer detail, two contrasting uses of coma as both narrative device and metaphor in two notable works of fiction from the twentieth century: Robin Cook's medical conspiracy thriller *Coma* and Douglas Coupland's postmodern, apocalyptic satire *Girlfriend in a Coma*.

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[31] Sontag, 'Illness as Metaphor', p. 60.
[32] Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation' in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1966), 3-14 (p. 7).

6.3: *You See, They're Not Really Alive…* Coma, Metaphor and the Neomort

Robin Cook's 1977 novel, *Coma*, follows the investigations of a medical student, Susan Wheeler, as she tries to uncover the mysteries surrounding a number of patients who have inexplicably fallen into coma following otherwise routine operations within Boston Memorial Hospital. Throughout the novel, Cook employs the level of medical detail that one would expect from a writer who, himself, is a trained medical doctor, but this leads to an unusual fictional hybrid: a mainstream, high-concept bestseller that also depicts the minutiae of medical procedure. The novel, therefore, provides a fascinating and largely accurate insight into 'deep' coma as a medical condition, against which previous fictional representations and their uses of the coma metaphor can be critiqued.

Central to the novel is the deconstruction of the image of the coma patient as 'sleeping beauty' (to refer back to the Wijdicks's study), and consequently, of the notion of coma-as-sleep. This is evidenced in the descriptions of Nancy Greenly, the young coma victim who instigates Susan's investigations. Focalizing the confrontation with the comatose patient through Susan, Cook depicts the steady, almost immediate degradation and corruption of Nancy's body and, moreover, of her humanity. Susan, along with her fellow students, notices that there is 'no sign of life save for the rhythmical hiss of the breathing machine'.[33] Here, the organic body has become mechanized and this dehumanizing of the patient is not just a physical process. Nancy is also dehumanized through the attitudes shared by the experienced physicians as they cease to recognise her humanity. Dr. Bellows views Nancy purely in terms of medical process, needing to keep 'the ions at the right level', 'the urine output up', 'the bacteria at bay', the absence of the personal pronoun 'her' in Cook's writing indicative of Bellows's determination to obliterate 'the human element' for which he simply doesn't 'have time for'.[34] Later, another physician, Stark, sees the 'comatose patient' as being, ultimately, enormously 'rewarding' due largely to the fact that 'the teaching aspect alone is priceless'.[35] This process of depersonalizing and dehumanizing the comatose patient is best summed up by Susan who, reflecting upon this dilemma of the body and of personhood, concludes that, 'Nancy Greenly had become a technical challenge, a game to be played'.[36]

In his physical description of Nancy, Cook initially seems to be falling into the

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[33] Robin Cook, *Coma* (London: Pan Books, 2008), p. 51.
[34] Ibid., p. 53.
[35] Ibid., p. 75.
[36] Ibid., p. 92.

common trap of the 'sleeping beauty' metaphor, describing Nancy's face as 'marble white' in direct correlation with the beautifying of Louis Drax in Liz Jensen's novel. As Cook proceeds to depict the beauty of Nancy's 'sable brown' hair, this process of glorification of the body of the comatose patient seems to be heightening, reflecting the 'elegance' of Lauren's post-accident corporeality in Levy's *If Only It Were True*. However, almost as soon as this beautified image of the sleeping beauty is created, Cook begins to depict the degradation of the body of the comatose patient. He describes her 'dried and cracked' lips, her 'mouth held open with a plastic mouthpiece' and the 'brownish material' that has 'crusted and hardened on her front teeth'.[37] Cook then goes on to employ beautifying, figurative language, as Susan holds one of Nancy's hands 'as if reaching for a delicate piece of porcelain'.[38] Notably, though, this is focalized through Susan herself, conveying her increasingly horrified attitude at the dehumanizing of the coma patient, something to which she is already succumbing in viewing Nancy as a piece of 'porcelain': inanimate and breakable. It is an attitude that is stressed, a short time later, when Bellows declares, in relation to Nancy's prognosis, 'If her squash is gone, I mean wiped out, then we might as well get the kidneys for someone else'.[39] This lack of emotional investment in and objectification of the comatose patient (comparing the brain to a vegetable: 'squash') provides a stark contrast to Susan's humane and somewhat naïve attitude, whilst at the same time serving as a narrative hook for the novel, foreshadowing the events to come and the object of Susan's investigations. Gradually, she begins to uncover a hospital conspiracy whereby patients are deliberately forced into irreversible coma on the operating table, following which they are housed in the sinister Jefferson Institute where their lives are sustained until the last moment when their bodies are 'harvested' for organ donations.

Cook's novel explores debates surrounding medical ethics and black market organ donation, focusing on the comatose patient as a paradigm of what has been termed the *neomort*: the 'new dead'. The term was coined by the psychiatrist and bioethicist Willard Gaylin in 1974 in his controversial article for *Harper's*, 'Harvesting the Dead'. In this think-piece, Gaylin addresses the issue of the increasing number of brain-dead comatose patients whose lives are being sustained in hospitals and care-facilities consuming valuable space. He proposes that such neomorts can be housed in vast '*bioemporia*' or 'farms of cadavers' where they can be 'harvested' for organ

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[37] Cook, *Coma*, p. 54.
[38] Ibid., p. 54.
[39] Ibid., p. 56.

transplantation, drug studies, and medical teaching and education.[40] Cook's novel, therefore, seems to come directly out of such a vision of future medical praxis, although despite including an 'Author's Note' at the end of the novel that contains his own reflections on the inspiration for *Coma*, there is actually no reference to Gaylin's article. Nevertheless, Cook's Jefferson Institute is the archetypal embodiment of a Gaylinian *bioemporium*, with swathes of comatose patients suspended in mid-air by cables within vast hangars or 'barns' (to extend Gaylin's metaphor of farming), their vitals constantly monitored and adjusted, as required, by cyber-technology. Even before Susan realises that these neomorts have been deliberately forced into coma, she finds it difficult, ethically, to accept this situation, struggling to see the comatose patient as anything other than 'a sleeping human being' and not simply 'a brainless shell'.[41] In this, perhaps, Susan voices the opinions and misconceptions of the wider, lay population: that coma is little more than a deep sleep. As her initial investigations lead to a tour of the institute, she gets the 'impression of grotesque, horizontal, sleeping marionettes',[42] hanging above her. Cook again uses dehumanizing imagery to convey Susan's dilemma over exactly what state of consciousness and existence the comatose patient occupies, at one point his protagonist saying, '"It's like some science fiction setting. A machine taking care of a host of mindless people. It's almost as if these patients aren't people"'.[43] However, Michelle, the Head of Operations and 'tour-guide' of the Institute, is under no illusion as to where on the spectrum of consciousness and, moreover, of humanity these neomorts lie, responding to Susan's outburst with the impassive observation that, '"They aren't people […] They *were* people; now they're brain stem preparations"', before extolling the virtues the bioemporium has in a 'cost-effectiveness crisis'.[44] This reference to the economic 'value' of the comatose patient reflects Gaylin's own discussion of the 'cost-benefit analysis' of the bioemporium,[45] a financial dimension of the neomort that is further exemplified in Michael Crichton's 1978 film adaptation of the novel, with a scene in the Jefferson Institute in which a virtual auction-room is established, with individuals bidding on the sale of organs.[46]

In the most recent American TV mini-series adaptation, Michelle's unwavering perception of the neomort is complicated further through her equivalent character Mrs

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[40] Willard Gaylin, 'Harvesting the Dead', *Harper's*, Vol.249 (1492) (1974), 23-38 (p. 26).
[41] Cook, *Coma*, p. 109.
[42] Ibid., p. 287.
[43] Ibid., p. 289.
[44] Cook, *Coma*, p. 289.
[45] Gaylin, 'Harvesting the Dead', p. 28.
[46] *Coma*, dir. Michael Crichton (United Artists, USA, 1978).

Emerson (Ellen Burstyn), who, when prompted by Susan, describes the comatose patients thus: "'You see, they're not really alive. But they're not dead either'".[47] In fact, exploring the preoccupations and concerns of the current climate, this adaptation sees the neomort as the perfect subject for the advancement of the Human Genome Programme. By triggering coma in those patients pre-disposed to certain medical conditions (Alzheimer's Disease being of particular concern to this adaptation), the key players at Peach Tree Memorial Hospital, alongside the Jefferson Institute, can use the neomorts for experimentation and research in the pursuit of finding a cure for such genetic disorders. The bodies are also, as is revealed in one particularly graphic sequence, harvested for organs and even, it is suggested, used as receptacles for surrogate babies, whilst providing valuable 'stem cells from umbilical cords'. As Susan's nemesis, erstwhile mentor and brains behind the Jefferson Institute, Professor Hillside declares: "'The herd must be culled and we must perfect mankind'", once more conveying Gaylin's use of agricultural metaphor in relation to his cadaver farms. This most recent adaptation develops the concept of cyber-phobia (at which Cook hinted in the original source material), with a vast computer-driven bioemporium transporting bodies to 'visiting chambers' where the neomorts, meticulously arranged and groomed, are deposited into beds, ready for their families to visit. Here, unlike Cook's novel, the comatose patient is represented as the archetypal sleeping beauty figure, although this creative choice is justified by the fact that the neomort's aesthetic appearance must be maintained to prevent any undue distress for visiting relatives. However, the exact nature of the mechanisms that are in place to save the patients from muscle atrophy and other bodily wastage is rather brushed over by the vague expository umbrella term 'breakthrough technology'.

Coma, and its various adaptations, raises some important questions surrounding the identity of the comatose patient. Cook's novel, in particular, tries to address some of the misrepresentations and mythologies surrounding this chronic disorder of consciousness, deconstructing the sleeping beauty metaphor, for example, or presenting the long-term physical effects. It also explores, ethically and philosophically, how the comatose patient can be viewed: neither fully alive, nor not quite dead which, by implication, means that they occupy both of these polar existential states. Similarly, it examines the prognosis of long-term coma, and raises difficult ethical questions, building on Gaylin's work, with regard to how the neomort might be utilized.

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[47] *Coma*, dir. Mikael Salomon (Original broadcast: A&E, 2012; UK premiere: Channel 5, 2013).

However, I suggest that its representation of coma is hampered exactly because of these 'big questions' it addresses – that over the course of the novel, the image of the coma and of the comatose patient fades into the background due to the privileging of central thematic and ethical concerns of the novel that arise from its high-concept twist: the sale of black market organs harvested from the coma patients. After reading the 'Author's Note' at the end of the novel, the reader is left under no illusion that it was Cook's encounters with articles concerning such a scandal that inspired him to write the novel, rather than an obligation to explore the dilemma of the comatose patient. The coma of the novel, therefore, becomes a device through which other hierarchically-privileged themes can be explored, and not merely that of black market organs, but also cyber and techno-phobia, patient depersonalisation, sexual politics in the workplace (Susan's authority as a physician persistently undermined by her gender), and medical ethics. In the era of post-Watergate conspiracy dramas, Cook's novel (and film adaptation) seems to have perfectly transplanted (no pun intended) the culture of fear and paranoia into the medical thriller, using coma as the perfect springboard for wider narrative and thematic development.

A more problematic example of the use of coma as a narrative device, and one which will help to exemplify the complexities and controversies of the use of the coma metaphor, is Douglas Coupland's 1998 novel, *Girlfriend in a Coma*. This work of coma fiction is centred upon the fate of Karen McNeil who, after consuming a dangerous concoction of alcohol and a small amount of her mother's downers one night at a party, subsequently collapses into coma. Much of the narrative thereafter traces the lives of Karen's friends and loved ones, most notably her boyfriend, Richard, who, struggling to cope with the 'loss' of his lover in coma, descends into alcoholism and, along with her other friends, begins to inhabit a somewhat vapid existence.

In his descriptions of Karen, Coupland, similar to Cook or Richard Powers in his novel *The Echo Maker*, focuses upon the degradation of the body. Coupland describes Karen's 'ever-shrinking hands reduced to talons',[48] her eyes like those of 'a *photo* of an aquarium fish' (not even a *real* fish), her stomach bulging 'like a goiter on a crone's neck'.[49] The ethical dilemma over the existential state of the neomort is also addressed with Karen's mother immediately asking, '"Is she *alive*? Is she dead?"'.[50] And later, over ten years after Karen entered coma, Richard muses, 'And what of Karen? Neither

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[48] Douglas Coupland, *Girlfriend in a Coma* (London: Harper Collins, 1998), p. 25.
[49] Ibid., p. 46.
[50] Ibid., p. 26.

alive nor dead after all these years, ever dimming from the world's mind – rasping, blinded, and pretzeled in a wheelchair',[51] a description that also highlights Karen's gradual physical wastage, her muscle atrophy causing her limbs to desiccate and curl in on themselves.

The novel reinterprets the 'sleeping beauty' metaphor present in previous examples of coma fiction, representing Richard's unending love for Karen, regardless of her physical decline: she does not need to be physically beautiful for Richard to have feelings for her still. However, despite addressing the ethical and philosophical considerations surrounding the state of existence the comatose patient inhabits, Coupland's novel presents deeply problematic issues, most notable of which is the fact that Karen is not in a coma. This is implied very early on in the novel when her physician explains to her parents that, 'Karen will have sleep and wake cycles and may even *dream*'.[52] However, in coma, there is no sleep-wake cycle, with patients lacking 'both wakefulness and awareness'[53] and a 'complete failure of the arousal system with no spontaneous eye opening'.[54] Later in the novel, Richard describes Karen thus: 'She moves her head, her eyes flicker, and for three seconds she sees the sky and the clouds'.[55] Far from being in a coma, then, Karen is actually within a persistent vegetative state (PVS), a disorder of consciousness 'characterized by the complete absence of behavioural evidence for self or environmental awareness', yet with the 'preserved capacity for spontaneous or stimulus-induced arousal, evidenced by sleep-wake cycles'.[56] In fact, Coupland is quite overt about the chronic disorder of consciousness into which his heroine slips, with the character Dr. Menger announcing to her friends, '"It doesn't give me any pleasure to tell you, kids, but your friend, Karen, is in what's known as a persistent vegetative state"'.[57] Coupland, in a literary move that seems to lift information directly from the medical literature on PVS, develops this announcement with Menger asserting that Karen 'is completely unaware of either herself or her environment', despite having 'sleep cycles and awake cycles', lacking any 'high brain function'.[58] At the heart of this novel lies a puzzling dilemma whereby

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[51] Coupland, *Girlfriend in a Coma*, p. 74.
[52] Ibid., p. 26.
[53] The Multi-Society Task Force on PVS, 'Medical Aspects of the Persistent Vegetative State', *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 330 (21) (1994), 1499-1508 (p. 1501).
[54] J.T. Giacino et al, 'The Minimally Conscious State: Definition and Diagnostic Criteria', *Neurology*, 58 (2002), 349-353 (p. 349).
[55] Coupland, *Girlfriend in a Coma*, p. 74.
[56] Giacino et al, 'The Minimally Conscious State', p. 349.
[57] Coupland, *Girlfriend in a Coma*, p. 41.
[58] Ibid., p. 41.

Coupland knowingly conflates coma with the persistent vegetative state. 'Girlfriend In A Persistent Vegetative State', perhaps, did not have the same appeal for the author as a title for the novel, or at least, did not offer the opportunity to incorporate a trademark reference to popular culture. What occurs in the novel, therefore, is the passage of coma into the realm of metaphor, encouraging the reader to interpret coma as the persistent vegetative state: to conflate these two markedly different chronic disorders of consciousness. Furthermore, throughout the novel and beyond this confusion, Coupland exploits the coma metaphor to fulfil his wider literary agenda, moving progressively away from what might be termed the 'ethically responsible' representation of the reality of CDCs present in the earlier stages of the novel.

Coupland's primary use of the coma metaphor lies within his characterization of Karen herself, and the narrative function she performs. Prior to becoming comatose, she warns Richard of a dream she had, a 'dark…Future' where 'everybody looks so old',[59] 'meaningless' and '*electronic*'.[60] Insisting this is not just a dream but a prophetic vision, she speaks of Richard's (and her friends') future selves, all seeming normal but with 'eyes… without souls'.[61] She also predicts her own departure, and even her return from 'wherever it is' she has gone.[62]

As predicted, Karen emerges from her persistent vegetative state to find that the world has changed, dominated by new technologies, greed and social dysfunction – the dystopia of postmodernity. Richard, her once-teenage lover, is an alcoholic; her friends, Pam and Hamilton, are successful yet vacuous, hooked on heroin, which they treat as a recreational drug of the middle classes; and Linus remains unchanged from high school but stagnating, unable to translate the intellectual promise he exhibited as a teenager into a career that is worthy of his talents. Coupland, therefore, uses the coma metaphor as a springboard for critiquing (post)modern society and existence, a contemporary satire in the vein of Washington Irving's *The Tale of Rip Van Winkle* which itself, nearly two-hundred years before *Girlfriend in a Coma*, used the 'deep sleep' motif to satirise the hardships of the American Revolution through which Rip had the good fortune to sleep.[63] In Coupland's novel, Karen, in a reluctant post-'coma' interview with a cable news channel that is desperate to report on her 'miracle' recovery, is asked by a

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[59] Coupland*, Girlfriend in a Coma*, p. 28.
[60] Ibid., p. 10.
[61] Ibid., p. 11.
[62] Ibid., p. 28.
[63] Washington Irving, *The Tale of Rip Van Winkle and Other Stories* (Ware, Herts: Wordsworth, 2009).

reporter: "'How does it *feel* to be a modern Rip Van Winkle?'".[64] It is a motif that is similarly utilized in Wolfgang Becher's tragi-comedy *Good Bye, Lenin!*[65] in which a German woman, Christiane, suffers a near-fatal heart attack and falls into coma during an anti-government demonstration in East Berlin prior to German reunification. When she emerges from coma, the Berlin Wall has already fallen and the world has changed, though her son, fearing a confrontation with such political upheaval might bring on another heart attack, sets about maintaining the illusion that reunification has never occurred. A similar conceit is used in Ma Jian's *Beijing Coma*. Jian's neomort, Dai Wei, is trapped in coma after being shot in the head during the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, and escapes into his memories as his loved ones (in the 'overworld' outside coma) tell him stories of the political and cultural changes occurring in China.[66]

Interestingly, this version of the coma metaphor (the deep sleep akin to that of Rip Van Winkle) used to satirise socio-political upheaval has emerged in the reportage of a real-life modern 'Rip Van Winkle', Jan Grzebski, who emerged, in 2006, from a 19-year coma to find that Poland was no longer under the rule of the Soviet Union or a communist president, that the Berlin Wall had fallen, and that the world had become a slave to unrecognizable technologies and consumer culture, dominated by mobile phones and ipods.[67]

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[64] Coupland, *Girlfriend in a Coma*, p. 166.

[65] *Good Bye, Lenin!*, dir. Wolfgang Becker (X Verleih AG and Sony Pictures Classics, Germany, 2003).

[66] Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, trans. Flora Drew (London: Vintage, 2008).

[67] See: Tom Parfitt, 'Fairytale Awakening After 19 Years Leaves Man Astonished at Post-communist Life', *The Guardian, (*9 June 2007) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jun/09/tomparfitt.international> [accessed 15/11/2014]; 'Pole Wakes Up from 19-year Coma', *BBC News* (2 June 2007) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/6715313.stm> [accessed: 18/07/14] and Mike Leidig, '"The 19-year Coma" Story Rubbished', *Media* Guardian, (5 June 2007) <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2007/jun/05/pressandpublishing.broadcasting> [accessed: 18/07/14]. Interestingly, shortly after the report of Grzebski's 'miraculous' and 'fairytale' recovery, it was revealed that the first time Grzebski, himself, had heard about his likening to Rip Van Winkle was when he read it in the local Polish newspaper that originally broke the story. In truth, he revealed that he was only in a coma for four years, after which he was confined to a wheelchair. However, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper defended their story, contending that, '"There are different kinds of coma. There is a kind of coma where people are unconscious and others where they wake up from time to time, and then fall back into coma"' (Mike Leidig, '"The 19-year Coma" Story Rubbished', *Media Guardian*). Such a description seems to reflect the state of 'coma vigil' or 'akinetic mutism' in which there are prolonged 'wakeful periods' during which the patient presents 'silent, alert-appearing immobility… in which sleep-wake cycles have returned, but externally obtainable evidence for mental activity remains almost entirely absent and spontaneous motor activity is lacking' (Plum and Posner, *The Diagnosis of Stupor and Coma*, p.7). However, both Grzebski's physician and wife maintained that he '"was not in a coma"' for all that time, only being comatose for '"the first four years"' (Mike Leidig, ''The 19-year coma' story rubbished', *Media Guardian*). Again, this discrepancy in the perception and reportage of Grzebski's chronic disorder of consciousness lies in the slippage of language used to describe such disorders, a slippage wilfully

In Coupland's novel, Karen, as a Rip Van Winkle figure, provides the perfect device to explore the changed world on the brink of the millennium. Coupland further deploys the coma metaphor in the creation of Karen as a living, breathing time capsule, her body 'retain[ing] memories long after [her] mind'[68] has forgotten them: an organic, corporeal databank. And Coupland draws attention to this image, writing, 'Karen is a time capsule – a creature from another era reborn'.[69] It is these reborn memories, this yearning, nostalgic invocation of the 1970s that makes Karen the perfect subject through which her friends (and the reader) can view the world with a fresh pair of eyes: the eyes of the resurrected neomort.

In describing Karen's 'miracle' emergence from PVS, Coupland works against the realistic representations of her condition itself. Like many of the works of fiction discussed earlier, Karen emerges from her seventeen year coma with cognition immediately and fully intact, language and speech fluent and unimpaired. Whilst Coupland still depicts Karen's long-term muscle atrophy and physical wastage, there is still a perpetuation of coma mythology with the coma metaphor becoming intensified when Karen's post-coma prophetic predictions of an apocalypse turn out to be not just satirical representations of postmodern society, but of a literal, global apocalypse. The world's population (with the exception of Karen and her friends) succumbs to a sleeping sickness pandemic which causes the victim to drift into a somnolent state, shortly after which they die. This cataclysmic event is described, significantly, as the 'whole world

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employed by Coupland in his novel. Certainly, Plum and Posner seem wholly aware of the confusions that occur through the interchangeability of different CDCs when they write: 'Terminologic differences surround descriptions of these chronic states of wakeful responsiveness, variously called vegetative states, akinetic mutism, coma vigil, or the apallic syndrome' (Plum and Posner, *The Diagnosis of Stupor and Coma*, p. 7). Thus, what the editor-in-chief of Grzebski's local newspaper denotes as being a 'coma' was, more than likely, a PVS state, a confusion that, I contend, is propagated by many works of coma fiction, Coupland's novel not excluded. Grzebski's recovery, therefore, was not a 'miracle' or an immediate 'awakening' from coma and effortless transition back to pre-coma personhood, but a painful and protracted transition between traumatic CDCs: from coma to the persistent vegetative state to the minimally conscious state to consciousness, and extensive rehabilitation thereafter. As an interesting coda to this case, in the BBC's initial reporting of Grzebski, their news website contains a paragraph (a supposedly factual 'pull-out' defining coma) that is particularly informative for this discussion: 'Although those in coma do not respond to stimuli in a meaningful way,   contrary to popular belief they do not always lie quiet and still – in some cases they can move, open their eyes and even talk' ('Pole Wakes Up from 19-year Coma', *BBC News)*. Certainly, the comatose patient may respond to pain stimuli, for example, the testing of motor functions being one criterion for determining the depth of coma and an eventuality that is rendered in Cook's novel *Coma*, as Susan pinches Nancy's thigh. Susan '[recoils] in horror' as Nancy's body stiffens in a 'painful contraction', her jaw performing a 'side-to-side chewing motion' (Cook, *Coma*, p. 110). However, it is explained that Nancy has had 'a seizure of some kind', which is in stark contrast to what the BBC report purports, a description that conveys the aetiology of the persistent vegetative state rather than coma.

[68] Coupland, *Girlfriend in a Coma*, p. 135.

[69] Ibid., p. 137.

[going] into coma',[70] Coupland simultaneously using the coma-as-sleep and coma-as-death versions of the wider coma metaphor with similar undertones of the socio-political metaphor employed by Senator Lloyd Bentsen discussed earlier.

Despite this apocalypse, Karen's friends still fail to change their selfish and materialistic lives, and it is within the final denouement of the novel that Coupland's use of the coma metaphor is amplified. The novel takes a fantastical direction, with Karen, together with the ghost of a former high-school friend, Jared (through whom this last section of the novel is focalized) proclaiming to her friends that it is within their power to restore the world to its former pre-apocalyptic state. All they have to do is to alter their shallow existence and promise to do everything in their power to change the ways of the world by forever challenging the iniquities and vagaries of modern society: by 'boiling the carcass of the old order'.[71] There is, of course, one big catch. In order for this to happen, the ultimate sacrifice has to be made: Karen has to return to her comatose state. In this way, Coupland's coma metaphor reaches completion, with Karen granted the messianic status of the post-coma hero, like Johnny Smith before her.

Ultimately, what starts out as being an insightful, accurate and realistic portrayal of a young woman who is suddenly and dramatically consumed by a chronic disorder of consciousness, alongside an examination of the trauma felt by her loved ones, quickly collapses into a perpetuation of the coma metaphor. This is not to say that the novel does not raise some important and ethical issues, most notably its examination of the use of the terms 'vegetative' and 'vegetable' in descriptions of the PVS patient, terms that are, I suggest, somewhat pejorative and insensitive. Coined by Jennet and Plum in 1972 (though only accepted by the President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioural Research in 1983), the designation 'vegetative' was used to focus on 'the contrast between the severe mental loss and the subject's preserved autonomic or vegetative functions'.[72] Citing the Oxford English Dictionary to justify their choice of terminology, they posited that '"to vegetate is to live a merely physical life devoid of intellectual activity or social intercourse"' with the adjective 'vegetative' referring to '"an organic body capable of growth and development but devoid of sensation and thought"'.[73] They postulate that this is the

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[70] Coupland, *Girlfriend in a Coma*, p. 229.
[71] Ibid., p. 271.
[72] Fred Plum and Jerome B. Posner, *The Diagnosis of Stupor and Coma* (Philadelphia: F.A.Davis Company, 1980), p. 6.
[73] Nicola Latronico, Ottavia Manenti et al, 'Quality Reporting on the Vegetative State in Italian Newspapers. The Case of Eluana Englaro', *PLoS ONE,* 6 (4), e18706 (2011), 1-8 (pp. 3-4).

perfect linguistic framework as both physicians and laymen can immediately understand the connotations and it has greater dignity 'than many of the terms sometimes applied vulgarly to the hopelessly brain damaged'.[74] However, Coupland implicitly questions this summation, focalizing the debate through Richard and Karen's 'miracle' daughter, born whilst Karen was still in her 'coma'. Coupland writes of Megan being bullied at school by 'vicious little oiks [who] told Megan… that her mother was a "vegetable"'.[75] Megan's torment becomes acute, with such insults as 'lettuce', 'corn', 'green beans' and 'carrot' constantly directed at her mother.[76] Here, Coupland queries the use of commonly accepted medical metaphor and its impact upon those victims who are affected, directly or indirectly, by whichever condition it figuratively describes. Coupland therefore carefully unpacks the traumatic emotive undertones that such metaphors potentially have upon children, for example, exploring the impact of the pejorative 'vegetable' upon a little girl of six years-old. However, what might be deemed to be an ethical examination of metaphor is somewhat nullified by the author's own liberal use of the coma metaphor, not least in the title of the novel which immediately 'markets' it as a genuine depiction of coma, thus again contributing to the perpetuation of the coma mythology in the public sphere.

6.4: *…But They're Not Dead Either*: Metaphor and Hope

To briefly summarise, I propose that the proliferation of the coma metaphor has had a profound effect upon the public perception and understanding of this chronic disorder of consciousness. Fictional representations, I suggest, seems partly responsible for this, frequently denying the gravity of coma by equating it to a deep sleep or temporary state of stasis or inertia, after which the patient returns to the 'normality' of the overworld with little permanent damage. Furthermore, the conflation of coma with other chronic disorders of consciousness only serves to exacerbate this confused collective (mis)understanding of coma and other CDCs, further propagating misleading mythologies. Coma also constitutes a useful narrative device, a springboard from which authors can explore other thematic concerns and whilst the representation of coma, itself, may be accurately depicted in certain texts (Robin Cook's *Coma*, for example) it

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[74] Plum and Posner, *The Diagnosis of Stupor and Coma*, p. 6.
[75] Coupland, *Girlfriend in a Coma*, p. 65.
[76] Ibid., p. 65.

is often compromised by the privileging of more sensationalized and spectacular narrative strands or themes. We can again return to the Alex Garland interview in *The Guardian* in which he revealed his motivation for writing *The Coma*: to write about 'dreams' in a 'less naff' way. But we can also turn to the Canadian novelist Robert Wiersema and an article he wrote in 2007 in which he discussed his own coma novel, *Before I Wake*, a fantasy text that exploits the motif of the coma patient as a 'miraculous' being (in this case a three year-old girl who, still in coma, has the power to cure the illnesses of those who come in contact with her).[77] In his article 'Wake Up, Wake Up, You Sleepyhead', Wiersema, writing of the inevitable comparison of Jan Grzebski's recovery to the Rip Van Winkle archetype, asserts that, 'Characters in comas don't lend themselves well to dramatic conflict […] a comatose character perhaps isn't the best vehicle for narrative tension. Awakening from a coma, however, is another matter entirely'.[78] Again, Wiersema seems to confirm the fact that the coma provides the writer of fiction with the perfect narrative device that will allow him creative freedom, whilst also implicitly explaining why authors of interior coma texts appropriate other states of consciousness in order to narrate the experience of coma and thereby generate 'dramatic conflict'. Not only are mythologies of coma propagated within the public arena, then, but also the mythologies surrounding brain injury are circulated, thus contributing to the notion that brain injury is 'curable' (a temporary psychological condition, for example, that can be abreacted), ultimately, I suggest, stigmatizing the brain injury survivor in society.

    To conclude this investigation, I will explicate this idea of stigmatization of the brain injury survivor that arises from a lack of representation of post-TBI/ABI injury and post-coma rehabilitation: stigmatization through normalization. I will examine the role of the media and news coverage, as well as, most surprisingly, the literature and publicity of popular science. Alongside this, I will argue that by romanticizing coma, and the post-coma condition, such misrepresentations across the spectrum contribute to the creation of what Mary-Jo Delvecchio Good has termed a 'political economy of hope',[79] which has a profound effect upon the genuine victims of CDCs, their loved ones and even upon clinical decisions. But before I move onto this, I will return to

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[77] Robert Wiersema, *Before I Wake* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2006).

[78] Robert Wiersema, 'Wake Up, Wake Up, You Sleepyhead', *The Globe and* Mail (23 June 2007) <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/wake-up-wake-up-you-sleepyhead/article723881/> [accessed 18/07/14].

[79] Mary-Jo Delvecchio Good, Byron J. Good et al, 'American Oncology and the Discourse on Hope', *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 14 (1990), 59-79 (p. 60).

Girlfriend in a Coma and examine a statement made by Coupland concerning the novel which proves to be a useful introduction to the ethical debate surrounding the misrepresentation of coma and the prevalence of the coma metaphor.

In an article for the Toronto *Globe and Mail* from 1998, Coupland, discussing his inspiration for the novel, told interviewer Stephen Smith that, '"Comas really are more modern than plastics or TV. I like the notion that comas can allow a person to radically reinvent themselves upon awakening. I think we all want to do that – radically reinvent ourselves – I think it's our deepest need"'.[80] This comment is deeply problematic on several levels. Regardless of the language of sleep that Coupland employs ('awakening' from coma), what is most contentious is that he continues to refer to Karen's CDC as a 'coma', despite overtly acknowledging it to be a persistent vegetative state within the pages of the novel. The tone and subtext of the comment is likewise controversial, implying that the coma is a fantastic 'opportunity' for the redevelopment of a new self, as though the medical condition offers a *choice* for the coma survivor. Just as Welsh and Garland represent a sense of control *within* coma, Coupland speaks of a sense of control *outside* of coma – a freedom that is presented to the reborn and resurrected neomort. In these words, the potential for brain trauma and long-term neurological conditions is brushed over once more, again reflecting Robert Wiersema's implication that the dramatic device of coma has to be manipulated and exploited in some way if an engaging, commercial fiction is to be created. But what is most problematic about Coupland's comment comes to light when considering the real inspiration for the novel: the high-profile case of Karen Quinlan.

In 1975, Karen Ann Quinlan, after accidentally ingesting a combination of alcohol and sedatives, suffered a heart attack which caused massive brain damage, leaving her in a 'permanent' vegetative state (the adjective 'permanent' referring to her lack of positive prognosis for recovery, usually defined after the patient has been in a PVS for one year). In 1976, her father's application to remove his daughter's ventilator was granted by the New Jersey Supreme Court. However, once removed, Quinlan survived for another nine years in a vegetative state, therefore drawing to the attention of the public the fact that 'VS patients breathe spontaneously'.[81]

The parallels between this case and Coupland's novel are immediately clear: both victim and fictional counterpart enter coma after ingesting a lethal cocktail of drink and

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[80] Stephen Smith, 'Dictators and Comas', *The Globe and* Mail (14 March 1998).
[81] Latronico et al, 'Quality of Reporting on the Vegetative State in Italian Newspapers', p. 6.

sedatives; both enter a persistent vegetative state, maintaining and sustaining autonomous aspiration; the full name of Coupland's character is Karen Ann McNeil, the fictional equivalent of Karen Ann Quinlan. However, it is here that the similarities end, and it is this that emphasises the difficulty both of Coupland's reflection upon the novel and of the novel itself. Clearly aware of the Quinlan case, Coupland still creates a hugely misleading representation of coma/CDCs and, moreover, he openly discusses the potential 'coma' has to offer for the reformation and reshaping of identity whilst fully aware that Quinlan had no choice over a reshaping of selfhood, and whilst still using the inaccurate designation 'coma'. As Fins posits when analysing the ethical and policy implications of late recovery from the minimally conscious state, 'The conflation of these brain states is understandable but never excusable'.[82]

Such misrepresentations, I argue, have a palpable impact not only upon the public understanding of coma and other CDCs, generating widespread confusion and misinformation, but also upon the public's recognition of and empathy with brain injury and, moreover, its survivors. If the public receive representations of coma that largely belie the possibility of brain injury, or even (in the case of a film like *Trance*) representations of brain injury that propagate the belief that the neurological condition is 'curable', then the public are poorly equipped with the accurate knowledge that would allow them to recognise survivors of brain injury in the world at large. This, I suggest, results in stigmatization of the brain injury survivor. Frequently, those survivors I have worked with during the course of my research have spoken of experiences which speak of their stigmatization in a society where misinformation about brain injury is abound. Both Steph Grant and Caroline Waugh have discussed how, on numerous occasions, they have been mistaken for 'drunks' because of slurred speech or impaired motor functions. Caroline even spoke of one occasion when, phoning for an ambulance for her sick son, the emergency operator refused to help, again mistaking Caroline's slurred speech (a consequence of her TBI) for alcohol-impairment.

John McClure writes extensively on this topic, examining the role of causal attributions in the public misconceptions about brain injury. Because, largely speaking, 'brain injury is invisible',[83] the general public, when confronted with the behaviours of a brain injury survivor (uninhibited or aggressive behaviour, for example), will

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[82] Joseph J. Fins, Nicholas D. Schiff and Kathleen M. Foley, 'Late Recovery from the Minimally Conscious State', *Neurology*, 68 (2007), 304-307 (p.305).

[83] John McClure, 'The Role of Causal Attributions in Public Misconceptions About Brain Injury', *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 56 (2) (2011), 85-93 (p. 85).

'misattribute' these as being facets of the individual's inherent personality or nature. In line with my discussions of the perception of brain injury being curable, McClure posits that, 'Many of the public believe that… a person with even severe brain injury may completely recover apart from some problems with memory',[84] reflecting the preoccupation with memory and amnesia that is common within fictional representations of coma and brain trauma. Thus, McClure concludes, 'With invisible conditions such as brain injury, people tend to discount the severity of the injury and suggest that the person will fully recover all their normal abilities'.[85] This medical perspective, I suggest, reflects Sontag's critique of contemporary culture and, in particular, her notion, discussed earlier, that when a disease becomes a metaphor, the victim of the disease becomes both a victim and a culprit. In the case of the brain injury survivor, the public extend their sympathy, yet then lose this when the survivor does not fully recover: when the survivor is perceived to be 'not trying hard enough' to recover. This 'invisibility' that McClure speaks of is perpetuated by the wealth of misleading coma fictions that are in the public domain, highlighting the central findings of the Wijdicks's study of the misrepresentations of coma in motion pictures, and the potential impact and influence that these had, they discovered, on medically-trained and lay populations alike.

However, where McClure postulates that because of an absence of 'a [physical] marker of injury', the brain injury survivor 'does not suffer automatic stigmatization',[86] I contend that it is precisely this invisibility of injury that does lead to stigmatization: what I would call a stigmatization through normalization. McClure does concede that the 'appearance of normality and wellbeing leads people who do not understand brain injury to overlook any disability', suggesting that these 'misconceptions can lead to accusations of malingering and may impede survivors' re-integration into society and fuel discriminatory practices'.[87] However, he does not necessarily see this as stigma as the brain injury, itself, isn't being stigmatized unlike, perhaps, the physical, detectable 'signifiers' of others who are physically disabled. However I would contest this postulation. In fact, to use McClure's language register, I suggest that the brain injury survivor is stigmatized precisely for the misattribution of alternative stigmatizing 'labels' circulating in society ('drunk' or 'benefits cheat', for example, or McClure's

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[84] McClure, 'The Role of Causal Attributions, p. 86.
[85] Ibid., p. 87.
[86] Ibid., p. 88.
[87] Ibid., p. 88.

own label, 'malingerer'), as well as the broader medico-social misattributions of 'mental illness' or 'learning disability'.

In the work of coma and brain injury survivors I have published, much of the writing focuses upon the trauma, hardship and permanence of post-brain injury living. Laurence Cox, a TBI survivor of a motorcycle accident, writes of his 'fear of seeing the world permanently broken into shards, with people wildly out of focus',[88] evoking the cognitive confusion that he still has many years after the accident and his emergence from coma, alongside the panic that is so often triggered, for him, in crowded social situations. Crucially, also, he overtly makes reference to the 'permanence' of his neurological disability which leads to fluctuations in energy, concentration and mood. In communicating these sporadic subjective experiences, Cox employs sparsely-punctuated streams of consciousness, his need to be 'energised exercised worked'[89] often hampered by an apathy and lack of auto-affection, symptoms of his brain injury and condition that often make him feel as though he is physically 'ill'.[90]

Similarly, in his story 'Unremembered Memoirs', Steph Grant, as discussed, recounts his post-coma 'fugue-states'. In trying to communicate the cognitive rupture during which he violently assaults his two best friends, Grant exploits *mise-en-page*, physically jolting the reader and inviting them into the fearful jumble of snapshot memories that, like those of McCarthy's Enactor in *Remainder*, gradually come back to him, fragmented and out of synch, and that are '*in some sense… not real*' [original emphasis]:[91]

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[88] Laurence Cox, 'Going Out and Hating Myself', in *Head-lines*, ed. Matthew Colbeck, Issue 2 (Blythe Bridge: Waggledance Press, 2014), p. 35.
[89] Ibid., p. 34.
[90] Ibid., p. 34.
[91] Grant, 'Unremembered Memoirs', in *Head-lines*, Issue 2, p. 9.

[...]

THUMPING BASS HARDER AND MORE
FREQUENTLY THAN BASS WAS ABLE TO RETURN

Crossing the footbridge across the dyke and over
the style into the bull's field

sitting
on a
kerbside
Catching Neil   with
And   Rozanne.
HITTING
Him
repeatedly

Rolling over and over with Bass
in the field
trading punches

runningacrosstherailwaylevelcrossingthat
separatedsouthfromnorthlevertoninpursuitofneil

vOiCeS in ALARM trying to ARREST steph's
BEHAVIOUR

(Neil furious with fear)

sCrEaMs
of
distress from Rozanne
and Bass

[...]
92

These behaviours that both Grant and Cox describe might be confusing and difficult to comprehend for a general public whose misconceptions of brain injury are constantly sustained by fictional misrepresentations of the condition. Grant's sporadic violence would possibly demonise him as an individual in the eyes of the public because of the invisibility of his injury and the misinformation they are fed. Interestingly, in McClure's research and social experimentations, when the public were presented with a set of such behaviours and given a photograph of the 'perpetrator' sporting a physical scar or

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[92] Ibid., in *Head-lines*, Issue 2, facsimile of p. 7.

injury, the public were much more forgiving and understanding and more likely to put this behaviour down to some form of perceived brain injury. However, it is important to reiterate that the prevalence of the coma metaphor alongside the misleading conflation of CDCs (that have led to this crisis of misunderstanding of brain injury in society) have not arisen from fiction alone. As touched upon, there are frequently slippages of language and examples of misreporting in media coverage when attempting to describe coma and other CDCs, as I will now further illustrate.

In 1984, an Arkansas teenager, Terry Wallis, went into a coma after a serious car crash. Nineteen years later, he emerged from coma (apparently with cognition and speech functions largely and quickly intact) to find himself a middle-aged man with a teenage daughter. In the *Mail Online's* reportage, the 'miracle recovery' dimension is exploited, describing how the first word he uttered was 'Mom', exploiting the emotive weight of the story.[93] The article refers to the 'experts' who point out that 'cases like Wallis's, where the patient is able to talk freely after a long period of unconsciousness, are extremely rare'. However, *The Guardian Online* presents an entirely different picture. Here it is revealed that 'a few years' before his dramatic 'calling out for his mother', Wallis had 'begun responding to questions by blinking his eyes'.[94] It becomes clear that far from this being a 'miracle', Terry Wallis has taken the slow, painful, frustrating and traumatic road to recovery, moving between coma to permanent vegetative state to persistent vegetative state to minimally conscious state and finally, to consciousness. Despite the more accurate (and less emotively-charged) reporting of *The Guardian*, however, the headline still reads: 'Crash Victim Wakes Up After 20 Years In Coma'. This appears to be a 'short-cut' utilized to fulfil a news agenda that not only conflates and confuses the CDCs but also draws upon the coma-as-sleep metaphor.

The case of Terry Wallis becomes even more complex when the finer details are examined more closely. Slipping into coma in 1984, eighteen years before the minimally conscious state (MCS) was recognized in 2002, the protestations of Wallis's family that he could '[follow] a command or purposefully [track] an object in his visual field' fell on deaf ears, the physicians putting these observations down to 'wishful thinking rather than useful clinical evidence'.[95] This exemplifies the confusions that

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[93] Rosalind Ryan, 'Coma Man Wakes After 19 Years', *Mail Online* (2003). <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-187920/Coma-man-wakes-19-years.html> [accessed: 19/07/14].
[94] Suzanne Goldenberg, 'Crash Victim Wakes Up After 20 Years', *The Guardian* (9 July 2003) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jul/09/usa.suzannegoldenberg> [accessed: 19/07/14].
[95] Suzanne Goldenberg, 'Crash Victim Wakes Up After 20 Years'.

occur with CDCs, even within the medical profession. As Derick Wade points out in his discussion of the ever-changing boundaries of what constitutes death in the light of the rise of the neomort and CDCs, 'There is no absolute boundary, and as medical practice and capabilities advance, so once clear boundaries become increasingly ill-defined, especially so for death'.[96] This ambiguity surrounding states of consciousness is similarly explored through ideas more rooted in philosophy, most notably in Giorgio Agamben's notion of the multiple 'thresholds' between life and death. Reflecting upon the ethical and existential positioning of the comatose patient, Agamben posits, 'The concept "death", far from having become more exact, now oscillates from one pole to the other with the greatest indeterminacy',[97] an uncertainty that has stemmed, in line with Wade's argument, from increasing discoveries of complex and barely-delineated levels and divisions of consciousness. It is also a sentiment that was addressed, a quarter of a century earlier, by Robin Cook in *Coma*, communicated at the point at which Susan begins her research into coma: 'The more she read about coma, the less she felt she knew… it was not known what determined consciousness, other than saying that the individual was not unconscious… In fact, being fully conscious and being totally unconscious (coma) *seemed to represent opposite ends of a continuous spectrum*' [emphasis added].[98] Again, this conveys Wade's medical stance on this subject and Agamben's philosophical perspective, with Wade explicating that, 'The vegetative state is simply one end of a spectrum of awareness, and there is no obvious cut-off between the vegetative state and the low-awareness state'.[99]

The Wallis case is just one example of many that illustrates how the degree of media misreporting is rife. In Latronico's study of the quality of reporting on the vegetative state of the Italian woman Eluana Englaro, it was found that 'the majority of articles (88%) [of 967 articles] were dedicated to non-medical aspects of VS' with the inadequacy of the reporting being 'mostly the result of missing information'.[100] This study also draws attention to the case of Theresa (Terri) Schiavo and the US media coverage of her VS, revealing that 'only 1.4% of articles [of 1,141 studied] provided an explanation of VS, with a high number of incorrect or equivocal descriptions'.[101]

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[96] Derick Wade, 'The Dis-integration of Death', *The Lancet*, Vol.360 (2002), 425-426 (p. 425).
[97] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 93.
[98] Cook, *Coma*, p. 125.
[99] Derick Wade, 'Ethical Issues in Diagnosis and Management of Patients in the Permanent Vegetative State', *BMJ,* Vol.322 (2001), 352-354 (p. 353).
[100] Latronico et al, 'Quality of Reporting on the Vegetative State', p. 3.
[101] Ibid., p. 3.

Latronico exemplifies the dangers of such misrepresentations and the effect these can have upon the public understanding of these conditions:

> [A] videotape showing that Ms Schiavo was able to open and move her eyes ignited the public skepticism [sic] over her diagnosis of VS because most viewers had no idea that VS patients can have periods of [sleep-wake] periods in which eyes are open and may move about.[102]

Furthermore, in Eric Racine's analysis of the media coverage of the Schiavo case to which Latronico also refers, it is observed that, 'The most frequently used terms to describe Schiavo's neurological condition and diagnosis were "persistent vegetative state", "brain damage", "vegetative state", "severe brain damage", and "coma"'.[103] This once more evidences the conflation of terminology and CDCs, leading to escalating public misinformation and confusion. In this instance, this confusion had a profound impact, most notably, upon Schiavo's 'right to die' decision due to the fact that the press, through misreporting of the persistent vegetative state, suggested that Schiavo's instinctive behaviours represented deeper cognitive functioning, thus influencing a huge public and moral backlash against the Schiavo family's case to withdraw Artificial Nutrition and Hydration (ANH) to allow their daughter to die.

Gabrielle Samuel and Jenny Kitzinger's extensive analysis of reporting consciousness in coma explores these case studies, whilst also examining the rush to report so-called 'miracle recovery'[104] stories, as in the case of Terry Wallis. These do occasionally occur, as Samuel and Kitzinger acknowledge, although they are enormously rare, but what they are primarily concerned with is how even the more routine recoveries (like that of Wallis) are reported in terms of the miraculous event, sometimes 'presenting scientific inaccuracies and confusing use of terminology'.[105] This can be seen, for example, in the article cited earlier of the young girl, Vicki Allen, who failed to come out of her induced coma which was administered in order to stem leukaemia cell-production. The headline 'SAVED… BY SUMS' carries all of the emotive weight of a miracle recovery story, with an almost redemptive undertone, as the

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[102] Latronico et al, 'Quality of Reporting on the Vegetative State', p. 1.

[103] E. Racine, R. Amaram et al, 'Media Coverage of the Persistent Vegetative State and End-of-Life Decision Making', *Neurology*, Vol.71 (2008), 1027-1037 (p. 1029).

[104] Gabrielle Samuel and Jenny Kitzinger, 'Reporting Consciousness in Coma', *JOMEC Journal* (2013) <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/jomec/jomecjournal/3-june2013/Kitzinger_Samuel_coma.pdf> [accessed: 01/06/14].

[105] Gabrielle Samuel and Jenny Kitzinger, 'Reporting Consciousness in Coma', p. 2.

article focuses on how she was brought out of coma by her father posing arithmetical puzzles to her, maths being her 'favourite subject'.[106] The privileged pull-out quote is a soundbite from her father: 'It was magical', thus reflecting the obsession the media has with miraculous recoveries from coma. This is further supported by Eelco Wijdicks and Marilou Wijdicks's study into the coverage of 'coma' in the headlines of American newspapers from 2001 to 2005. They note that the most popular reporting on coma was constituted by so-called 'miracle awakenings' that were covered by multiple newspapers.[107] They go on to discuss how, from the details of recovery described in the reports (all involving 'emergence of speech after no communication for decades', as in the Wallis case), 'none of these patients appeared in a persistent vegetative state, and patients were far more likely to be in a minimally conscious state or other severely disabled neurological state'.[108] Furthermore, 'Persistent vegetative state was rarely a subject of interest',[109] again contributing to the wealth of misinformation in circulation.

Press inaccuracies are clear to see, therefore, but what is interesting about Samuel and Kitzinger's study is that it also examines the role of scientific reporting in creating confusion and misinformation surrounding CDCs. Focusing on the 'breakthrough' discovery that fMRI scanning supposedly revealed that patients in a persistent vegetative state responded positively to verbal stimuli (patients' brains 'lighting up' when asked to, for example, imagine they were playing tennis[110]), Samuel and Kitzinger explore the level of 'hope' that both scientific and media reportage generates. They point towards how 'two senior figures' within the field of medicine 'made public statements' that suggested that the initial fMRI studies revealed the patient's 'rich' or

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[106] Dolan, 'Saved…By Sums'.

[107] Eelco F.M. Wijdicks and Marilou F. Wijdicks, 'Coverage of Coma in Headlines of US Newspapers From 2001 Through 2005, *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, 81 (10) (2006), 1332-1336 (p. 1335).

[108] Ibid., p. 1334.

[109] Ibid., p. 1335.

[110] This was a study involving the neuroscientist Adrian Owen. It used Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging to generate images of sections of the brain 'lighting up' to determine levels of cognition and consciousness in PVS patients. Each patient was scanned, whilst being asked to imagine performing different tasks, to determine whether such patients could 'wilfully modulate their brain activity'. The hope arising from the study was that such a technique could be used to communicate with PVS patients, using this focalization of performative actions, for example, to generate 'yes/no' communication. For further discussion of this see: Samuel and Kitzinger (2013); Martin Monti, Audrey Vanhaudenhuyse et al, 'Wilful Modulation of Brain Activity in Disorders of Consciousness', *New England Journal of Medicine,* Vol.362 (7) (2010), 579-589; Adrian M. Owen, Martin R. Coleman et al, 'Detecting Awareness in the Vegetative State', *Science*, New Series, Vol.313 (5792) (2006), p. 1402; Judy Illes, Matthew P. Kirschen and John D.E. Gabrieli, 'From Neuroimaging to Neuroethics', *Nature Neuroscience*, Vol.6 (3) (2003), p.205; and Lynne Turner-Stokes, Jenny Kitzinger et al, 'fMRI for Vegetative and Minimally Conscious States: A More Balanced Perspective', *BMJ*, Vol.345, e8045 (2012).

'complex' inner mental life.[111] These comments were naturally seized upon by the mainstream press. However, as Samuel and Kitzinger assert, 'Reports rarely mentioned that only a minority of the patients had responded to the fMRI task and did not discuss the implications for 'non-responders' and their families'.[112] Referring to the literature of the original study, this limited success is clear with only 5 subjects out of 54 tested being able to 'wilfully modulate their brain activity', and all 5 of them having a *traumatic* brain injury.[113] However, as Samuel and Kitzinger reveal, much of the press reportage and the subsequent scientific papers 'presented no caveats about the level of cognitive function such patients might possess',[114] citing the use of such hyperbole as 'Astonishing Breakthrough Medical Miracle' (*The Sun*, 4 February, 2010) and the *Sunday's Times'* less hysterical yet nevertheless fantastical: 'Telepathic Leap' (7 February, 2010).[115] This latter example of media embellishment, in its science-fiction infused reference to 'telepathy', has its counterpart in fiction itself, most notably in Tarsem Singh's coma film *The Cell*[116] and, most recently, in Kristina Buožytė's psycho-erotic coma film *Vanishing Waves*,[117] both texts depicting the central protagonist being projected into the psyche of a victim of a particular chronic disorder of consciousness: the neomort as virtual-reality pod. In a reversal of this narrative model of the 'external' protagonist 'inserting' themselves into the telepathic mind of the coma patient, the 1978 film *Patrick* sees the murderous eponymous anti-hero, whilst in coma, telekinetically controlling the overworld to defend himself against those who wish to do him harm,[118] once more representing the fictional 'telepathic leap' of the coma protagonist.

In the conclusion to their study, Samuel and Kitzinger assert that such scientific and media misrepresentations and 'hype' contribute to what has been termed the 'political economy of hope'. Coined by Mary-Jo Delvecchio Good in her examination of the discourse of hope in American oncology, the 'political economy of hope', Good posits,

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[111] Samuel and Kitzinger, 'Reporting Consciousness', p. 2.

[112] Ibid., p. 2.

[113] Martin Monti, Audrey Vanhaudenhuyse et al, 'Wilful Modulation of Brain Activity in Disorders of Consciousness', *New England Journal of Medicine,* Vol.362 (7) (2010), 579-589 (p. 583).

[114] Samuel and Kitzinger, 'Reporting Consciousness', p. 3.

[115] Ibid., p. 7.

[116] *The Cell*, dir. Tarsem Singh (New Line Cinema, USA, 2000).

[117] *Vanishing Waves*, dir. Kristina Buožytė (Autonomy Pictures, Lithuania, France, Belgium, 2012).

[118] *Patrick*, dir. Richard Franklin (Filmways, Australia, 1978). A 'reboot' of *Patrick* (*Patrick: Evil Awakens*) was released in 2013, directed by Mark Hartley. In the original, the scene in which Patrick 'spits' on one of the orderlies was recreated in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill*, both illustrating the inaccuracy of the representation of coma, and also the constant intertextual proliferation of these inaccuracies.

sustains 'specialist-research oncology' through maintaining the belief that cancer is 'curable'. This allows 'society's cultural interpretation of "hope" to be perpetuated' and as Good asserts, 'The funding of cancer research both depends on and promotes' the hope that cancer can be cured.[119] This constant drive to sustain hope, a 'dynamics of expectations' to refer to Nik Brown's exploration of this topic,[120] inevitably leads to 'hype': a magnification of the potential of new technologies and scientific developments designed both to sustain hope and to ensure medical funding will continue. Brown is fully aware of the dangers of such build-up of hope through hype, particularly through the over-reporting of new technologies (as in the fMRI study). He proposes that as 'once distant futures advance towards the present, comparisons are made between past promises and present realities'.[121] Of course, there is nothing more damaging than a scientific breakthrough that is suddenly found to be a failure, yet conversely, in order for the breakthrough to be funded and advanced, the language of scientific reportage has to overly 'hype' the breakthrough in order to continue to interest the public and maintain funding and investment – in order to preserve 'hope'.

I propose that this political economy of hope is at work within literary and fictional representations of coma and the use of the coma metaphor. Returning to my discussion in chapter four, I suggest that the coma metaphor allows authors to confront fears over this chronic disorder of consciousness and what it can be seen to represent: the void in consciousness that may come with death. In this sense, then, the prevalence of the coma metaphor not only helps to sustain this political economy of hope, but also perhaps reveals the need for a personal and cultural economy of hope. As Zygmunt Bauman further discusses in his analysis of the deconstruction of mortality by modern societies, there is a constant 'drive to mastery' over death which, he argues, is a 'mode of being shot through with hope'.[122] Moreover, Bauman argues, 'The very act of thinking death is already its denial', proposing that 'our thoughts of death, to be at all thinkable, must already be processed, artificed, tinkered with'.[123] The proliferation of the coma metaphor and metaphorical representations of coma within literature and media reportage alike can be seen as a manifestation of the human desire to 'process' death, therefore contributing to a 'mode of hope' and to an overall ethical dilemma. We only

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[119] Delvecchio Good, 'American Oncology and the Discourse on Hope', p. 60.
[120] Nik Brown, 'Hope Against Hype – Accountability in Biopasts, Presents and Futures', *Science Studies*, Vol.16 (2) (2003), 3-21 (p. 6)
[121] Brown, 'Hope Against Hype', p. 9.
[122] Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality & Other Life Strategies*, p. 132.
[123] Ibid., p. 15.

need to return to the examples of misleading and confusing reporting on Michael Schumacher's condition, discussed at the beginning of this investigation, to see this mode in operation. All of the overly 'hopeful' reporting conveys the very real need not to conceive of this 'giant' of motor-sport as anything other than 'heroic' and flawless, thus consistently failing to address the possibility of long-term neurological damage. This 'hope culture' and the mythologizing of difficult and traumatic experiences can be further explicated by returning to Ricoeur and his concepts of sedimentation and 'narrative identity'.

In his discussions concerning our 'demand' for narrative and story-telling, Ricoeur explores how the self begins to 'know itself' through the 'cultural signs' and 'symbolic mediations' which constitute 'the narratives of everyday life'.[124] Furthermore, he argues, 'Human lives become more regularly intelligible when they are interpreted in the light of the stories that people tell about them', going on to suggest that these 'life stories' are even more 'intelligible' when 'narrative models' or 'plots' from 'history or fiction' are applied to them.[125] Ricoeur therefore suggests that humans consistently use and 'innovate' the sediment of historical and fictional narratives in order to try and understand and explicate their own lives, thereby meaning that we 'never cease to reinterpret the narrative identity that constitutes us, in the light of the narratives proposed to us by our culture'.[126] In considering Ricoeur's theoretical position, I argue that society has developed the coma metaphor by innovating elements of the mythological and fictional sediment (including, for example, archetypal tales of katabasis and the interrelationship of sleep and death) in order to explain and demystify this otherwise incomprehensible disorder of consciousness – in other words to make it more 'intelligible', to use Ricoeur's language, and therefore to contribute to an overall personal, cultural and political economy of hope that spans across all modes of writing and story-telling, from fiction to the media. As Ricoeur posits, 'It is therefore by means of the imaginative variations of our own ego that we attempt to obtain a narrative understanding of ourselves'.[127] In this way, then, we perhaps need these stories – and the hope that they promise us – in order to understand ourselves and the world we live in, even if this 'understanding' may be somewhat illusory. Indeed, writing of the

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[124] Paul Ricoeur, 'Narrative Identity' in *On Paul Ricoeur*, trans. and ed. David Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 188-199 (p. 198).
[125] Ibid., p. 188.
[126] Paul Ricoeur 'Life In Quest of Narrative' in *On Paul Ricoeur*, ed. Paul Ricoeur (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 20-33 (p. 37).
[127] Ibid., p. 33.

function of fiction in 'shaping' reality, Ricoeur proposes that, '[M]imesis is not simply reduplication but creative reconstruction by means of the mediation of fiction'.[128] However, I argue that this 'creative reconstruction' can be dangerous and that our 'imaginative variations', rather than allowing us a 'narrative understanding of ourselves', can often lead to more confusion and crisis of identity, as seen in the development of the coma metaphor. Not only does this metaphor dilute the gravity of coma as medical condition, but it also masks the potential for permanent brain damage, once more contributing to a personal and political economy of hope. These 'creative reconstructions', then, intersect with the 'hype' and circulation of misinformation by the media and mainstream scientific reportage, the 'sediment' of coma and CDC mythologies therefore being constantly appropriated and innovated. Between fiction and the misinformation circulated by so-called 'factual' reporting, I argue, there is a very human cost to the economies of hope that are being generated and sustained.

To illustrate this human cost, Nik Brown explains that whilst there are advantages of the circulation of overly positive sickness narratives and of medical reportage (for example, in the advancement of 'research space, attractive investment and [justification of] morally challenging research') there is also often a negative impact upon the patients and loved ones at the centre of such narratives. Stories such as the skewed, overly optimistic reportage of Wallis, Grzebski and Schiavo, alongside the fMRI studies, have 'enormous potency because they tell of the precarious futures of individuals who are desperate for treatment'.[129] In these coma cases, the desperation for a 'miracle recovery' so common in fiction or media reportage is shared by the loved ones of the patient, leading to the 'costs of inflated promise', an overly-'hyped' assurance that is further communicated and perpetuated in the press. Samuel and Kitzinger, for example, examine the impact that such reporting of the fMRI studies had on the loved ones of PVS patients. What promised to be a 'telepathic leap' (again a description that is evocative of some of the sensationalized premises of coma fiction referred to earlier) had profoundly negative effects upon loved ones who found themselves suddenly caught in a double-bind. On the one hand, it built hope that they could now communicate to their loved ones (if they did not already have that hope and belief), but on the other hand, with this 'proof' that they could communicate, they now did not know how they could translate hope into a practical means that could help their loved

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[128] Paul Ricoeur, 'The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality' in *A Ricoeur Reader*, trans. David Pellauer, ed. Mario J. Valdés (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 117-136 (p. 134).

[129] Brown, 'Hope Against Hype', p. 8.

ones to recover. In fact, for some, knowing that their loved one did have autonomous awareness of his or her self and surroundings made the situation even more painful. Samuel and Kitzinger also describe, for example, how one particular family member of a patient in PVS was 'bitterly disappointed' when she discovered that 'it would be difficult to access fMRI because – contrary to the expectations raised in her by media reporting – the imaging was only available as part of scientific studies'.[130] When looking closer at *The Sun's* reporting of the study, the economy of hope is once more stressed, and overtly so, as Samuel and Kitzinger reveal, with the newspaper using a 'sleeping beauty' image of a comatose patient along with the caption 'Hope…brain study'.[131]

This hope economy is certainly not straightforward in this field of chronic disorders of consciousness, and continues to be complicated by fictional misrepresentations which feed into the public's confused conception of coma and other CDCs. I further suggest that it complicates the ethical positioning of the neomort's status of existence, and it does this by, paradoxically, over-simplifying this status by a feverish use of the coma metaphor and innovation of the sediment: coma as a deep sleep, the interiority of which is akin to dream; coma as death-state, the interiority of which is akin to katabatic and topographical descent; coma as a hypno-analytical process of abreaction, during which there is a confrontation with the darkest desires and secrets of the unconscious; emergence from coma as resurrection and transfiguration. It is perhaps because coma is none of these things, yet appears as though it could be all of them, that has motivated the writers of coma fiction to perpetuate the coma metaphor. Indeed, the figure of the neomort can be seen to represent one of the most unintelligible conditions of human existence, viewed as neither fully alive, nor fully dead, to refer to Gaylin's bioethical paradigm whilst simultaneously adopting the language of Derridean analysis. Most recently, the existential nature of the neomort has been complicated further, with a study by Gray et al discovering that the neomort is also seen, puzzlingly, to be 'more dead than dead'. In this study, research participants were found to perceive persons in the persistent vegetative state as 'having reduced mental capacity relative to the disembodied *dead* person'.[132] This study seems to corroborate therefore Jennett's assertion that many people regard the permanent vegetative state 'as a fate worse than

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[130] Samuel and Kitzinger, 'Reporting Consciousness', p. 6.
[131] Ibid., p. 4.
[132] Kurt Gray, T. Anne Knickman and Daniel M. Wegner, 'More Dead Than Dead: Perceptions of Persons in the Persistent Vegetative State', *Cognition*, Vol.121 (2) (2011), 275-80 (p. 278).

death',[133] whilst emphasizing Wade's claim that there could be 'extensive arguments about whether continued existence in a low awareness state is worse than being dead'.[134]

What these observations and findings further reveal is the confusion and fear that surrounds the figure of the neomort and the range of CDCs that he can potentially inhabit. But it is precisely this confusion and fear, I suggest, that has led to the rise and longevity of the coma metaphor which not only serves to dilute this confusion over coma and other CDCs, but also dilute the fear over brain injury by disregarding its permanence, or refuting its possibility. However, paradoxically, in the attempt to conquer this fear and confusion and to maintain an economy of hope through the use of the coma metaphor (Bauman's 'drive to mastery' over death), authors have only given rise to more fear and confusion for those who have been truly affected by coma and brain injury and their loved ones. In short, the real-life experiences and encounters with these medical conditions do not embody those that are depicted across literature and the media, leading to the proliferation of misinformation, the rise of the pejorative brain injury metaphor and the stigmatization of the brain injury survivor and of the neomort.

Susan Sontag, at the end of *Illness As Metaphor*, suggests that it is 'likely that the language about cancer will evolve in the coming years'.[135] The fact that, ten years later, her focus moved from the cancer metaphor to the proliferation of the AIDS metaphor testifies to her prediction coming true. However, in the constant proliferation of over-simplified fictions of coma, it is difficult to see whether such a change in language will occur with this condition or, indeed, with the long-term neurological condition of brain injury. As Caspermeyer concludes in his study of stigmatizing language and medical inconsistencies in neurology coverage by American newspapers, 'Public perceptions and attitudes are the foundation of the stigmatizing process'.[136] I suggest that fictional representations form part of the bedrock (the 'sediment', to return once more to Ricoeur and in extension of his geological metaphor) of such perceptions and attitudes. This makes it all the more imperative to represent and circulate more accurate and ethically 'responsible' representations of coma before public misunderstanding spirals out of control, leading to even greater impact upon the victims of CDCs, alongside their loved

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[133] B. Jennett, 'The Vegetative State', *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry*, Vol.73 (2002), 355- 357 (p. 356).

[134] Wade, 'Ethical Issues', p. 353.

[135] Sontag, 'Illness As Metaphor', p. 86.

[136] Joseph J. Caspermeyer, Edward J. Sylvester et al, 'Evaluation of Stigmatizing Language and Medical Errors in Neurology Coverage by US Newspapers', *Mayo Clinical Proceedings*, Vol.81 (3) (2006), 300-306 (p. 306).

ones. And so in closing this investigation, I would like to propose (in adapting Zadie Smith's phrase) 'two paths' for the future coma novel: two potential models which might aid the creation of ethically responsible representations of illness (coma/brain injury) whilst simultaneously allowing for creative freedom and autonomy.

6.5: Conclusion: *Two Paths for the Novel* – A Proposition.

The first path can be seen in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*. A post-trauma, post-coma novel, this accurately presents the hardships of rehabilitation, and the long-term impact that brain injury has upon the unnamed narrator. Whilst not delving into what actually occurred within the coma (the void; the *no-space*), it does depict certain 'islands' of consciousness during the 'lightening' of coma, as written about, for example, by James Cracknell. These islands haunt the mind of McCarthy's Enactor and may or may not be real, just as Steph Grant calls into the question the validity of memories that he confronts in his two autobiographical short stories. Throughout the novel, also, there are subtle allusions to the Enactor's aphasia. Often struggling to find words or their meanings, the Enactor frequently tasks Naz's 'people' to find them for him. Indeed his mantra 'like something that's come out of something' repeatedly conveys his aphasic condition. McCarthy also depicts the Enactor's violent emotional outbursts (typical of frontal lobe damage) and implies that he may have *parosmia*, an olfactory dysfunction which causes the brain to identify improperly an odour's 'natural' smell (the 'liver', for example, smells 'a bit like cordite'). There is the insistence of the Enactor's friends that 'he looks the same', and must therefore be the same (McCarthy tapping into the notion of brain injury largely being an 'invisible' injury); and then there are the detailed descriptions of physical rehabilitation which have struck a chord with brain injury survivors and their carers when I have shared these passages of the text at numerous brain injury conferences. Yet McCarthy's novel never feels compromised by ethical responsibility, nor by the need to present 'the facts'. Indeed, its increasingly surreal and frenzied plot development spirals out of control, and, one might say, out of reality, yet seems to be simultaneously born out of a very real situation: the struggle for identity of a traumatic brain injury survivor who is desperate to become again the person whom he used to be.

The second path for the novel, I propose, can be seen in Richard Powers's *The Echo*

Maker, discussed in chapter five. Like McCarthy, Powers is meticulous in his depiction of the traumas of post-coma rehabilitation (most notably the re-acquisition of language) but also, unlike McCarthy, attempts to describe the interiority of the coma itself. Writing about the degradation and dehumanization of Mark Schluter's body from his sister's perspective, Powers gradually deconstructs the 'sleeping beauty' metaphor that is common in coma fiction and which is also privileged in media reportage. Powers's description of Capgras syndrome is likewise painstakingly researched and represents many of the discoveries reported within medical literature, but this does not mean that the author does not amplify the uniqueness of the condition itself as part of his fictional agenda. Describing Mark's condition, Powers, through the narrative focalization of the psychiatrist Weber remarks that, 'True Capgras resulting from closed-head trauma: the odds against it were unimaginable'.[137] Weber goes on to maintain that the majority of Capgras cases arise in patients with psychosis. Yet when referring to the medical literature, it becomes clear that, 'Although frequently seen in psychotic states, over a third of the documented cases of Capgras syndrome have occurred in conjunction with traumatic brain lesions, suggesting that the syndrome has an organic basis'.[138] Powers, then, magnifies the mystery and intrigue of the condition for narrative impact, yet without undermining the gravity of the condition itself, or without compromising his accuracy of depicting it. However, it is in the initial representations of Mark's coma unconscious where the greatest examples of artistic licence are seen, yet these, I argue, constitute the perfect paradigm for future representations of the interiority of coma.

Throughout the first section of the novel, whilst Mark is still in coma, Powers frequently shifts from third-person focalization to first person, depicting Mark's comatose consciousness. But unlike so many of the fantasy-narratives and the use of mythological metaphors and archetypes of sleep and dream, Powers's depiction focuses on Mark's struggle to regain his identity and, chiefly, his reacquisition of language, speech and mental lucidity:

> He has to work some, with time come back. Up and attic, there and bath
> again. Have him living in a boxcar now. Old train with others orphaned like
> him. He's lived in worse. Not easy to say just where he is. So he says
> nothing. Some things say him. What's on his mind hops off. Thoughts come

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[137] Richard Powers, *The Echo Maker* (New York: Picador, 2006), p. 102.

[138] William Hirsten and V.S. Ramachandran, 'Capgras Syndrome: a Novel Probe for Understanding the Neural Representation of the Identity and Familiarity of Persons', *Proceedings: Biological Sciences*, Vol.264 (1380) (1997), 437-444 (p. 437).

out, not thoughts he knew he had. No one always knows what he means. This can't bother him. He doesn't really, either.[139]

In this extract, and subsequent sequences, Powers creates approximations of the coma consciousness as Mark moves through this towards other disorders of consciousness in order to achieve 'full' consciousness in the 'overworld'. Powers describes a vague awareness of Mark's physical entrapment that collapse into distant, fractured memories of the past. Intrusions of the comings-and-goings of the hospital around him similarly impinge on his consciousness (later referencing a 'girl' who 'comes by' whom 'he'd like to do') and are also assimilated into the fragmented non-sequiturs of his traumatized brain. The disjunctions between half-completed or broken phrases conveys Steph Grant's rendering of his own post-coma cognitive confusion examined earlier, Powers's technique beginning to depict a transition into the 'lightening' stage of coma. It is also a technique similarly employed by Alex Garland at the point whereby, as discussed, Carl reaches the nadir of his coma consciousness, the broken signifying chains of language eventually flooding his consciousness as his brain 'reboots'. In Powers's novel, Mark's linguistic slips and trips metaphorically represent the impact of his brain injury upon his personhood, memory and language skills, although not in a sensationalist way. Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, in their analysis of Powers's 'effort to imagine the basic level of Mark's consciousness',[140] refer to 'the narrator's fabulating presence' that constitutes 'a shining illustration of poetic illusion'.[141] At the moment at which he begins to gain full consciousness, he sees himself as a beached whale rotting on the beach with his 'skin' peeling off 'in sheets of blubber'. Whilst this is clearly a metaphor of 'rebirth' or 'metamorphosis' through death (common motifs in coma fiction), it is not overly exploited or developed into a complex mythological 'grand narrative'. Instead, he navigates through the void in consciousness of coma and examines this interiority by representing the traumatic symptoms of Mark's brain injury, most notably his aphasia and memory gaps. These staccato and disjointed imaginings of the cognitive process during which Mark's 'parts come back to him, so slowly'[142] creatively embody the painstaking and traumatic return to consciousness and reacquisition of mental faculties. It is a process that is similarly depicted by McCarthy

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[139] Powers, *The Echo Maker*, p. 49.
[140] Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, 'Capturing Capgras: *The Echo Maker* by Richard Powers', *Style*, Vol.43 (3) (2009), 407-428, (p. 422).
[141] Ibid., p. 427.
[142] Powers, *The Echo Maker*, p. 42.

in writing of the gradual return and re-ordering of memories of his Enactor, or even perhaps by Redgrove, when writing of his induced comas, describing the sensation of the 'pieces' of his selfhood being 'taken away like a stage-set being dismantled',[143] pieces ('parts', to refer again to Powers's novel) that were gradually reassembled post-coma.

Whilst Herman and Vervaeck contend that such representations of the interiority of coma 'for some readers run counter to the rather elementary brain activity of which Mark gives proof elsewhere in the early depictions of consciousness',[144] I argue that it is such a representation that constitutes this second path for the coma novel, creating an approximation of the lightening of coma (akin to Hollyman's 'surfacing' in *Keeping Britain Tidy*) as the survivor struggles with the impact of brain injury, whilst simultaneously conveying the chaos of cognitive impairment and confusion that will continue throughout post-coma rehabilitation. Despite the metaphorical and figurative nature of this particular work of fiction, it is precisely this lack of cohesion and disjointed imagery that combines to create an ethical representation of the coma consciousness, indicating, as Herman and Vervaeck lucidly posit, 'the narrator's guiding light in the relative darkness of Mark's psyche'.[145]

I will close by referring, once again, to the tragic case of the PVS patient Terri Schiavo. As reported upon extensively within medical literature, Schiavo's 'right to die' case was hugely complicated by misrepresentation and misreporting of her condition, with 'many print and media outlets [choosing] to sensationalize the dispute'[146] between her family and the Florida legislature in her family's desperation to withdraw Terri's treatment. Eric Racine's report on the media coverage of the case found extensive scientifically inaccurate, inconsistent or incorrect prognoses, erratic diagnostic terminology (as referred to earlier, with the conflation of different CDCs), and highly emotively and politically charged language designed to mislead audiences in their conception of Schiavo's end-of-life care. Descriptions of the withdrawal of life support were abound, including references to 'murder' or 'death by starvation', and 'explanations of the basic concept of PVS and other CDCs were rare'.[147] Crucially, it was found that, 'Statements conveying *false hopes for recovery* were disseminated in a

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[143] .Peter Redgrove, 'Lazarus and the Visionary Truth' in *The Colour of Radio*, ed. Neil Roberts (Devoran: Stride, 2006), 142-162 (p. 154)

[144] Herman and Vervaeck, p. 427.

[145] Ibid., p. 427.

[146] James L. Bernat, 'Theresa Schiavo's Tragedy and Ours, Too', *Neurology*, Vol.71 (2008), 964-965 (p. 964).

[147] Racine et al, 'Media Coverage of the Persistent Vegetative State', p. 1030.

general absence of adequate critical examination and background information about PVS and CDCs' [my emphasis].[148] This misinformation was reflected in the backlash against the family of Terri Schiavo, resulting in multiple repeals of the decision to withdraw treatment which only served to prolong and exacerbate the trauma felt by all parties closely involved. It is such cases, I suggest, that emphasise the negative impact of the economies of hope that are generated and sustained, in part, by fictional and media misrepresentations of coma and other CDCs. The Schiavo case, in which the decision to withdraw treatment was repeatedly granted and overturned, is a clear real-world example of how confusions, obfuscations and fictions of complex medical conditions have a fundamental impact upon both the victims of CDCs and their loved ones. And whilst one can never prescribe what an author should or should not write, I concur with the conclusions made by the Racine study. That as long as misrepresentations of coma, CDCs and brain injury continue (and as long as the coma metaphor is replicated), then the more likely we are to encounter increasing ethical and diagnostic challenges to how society perceives the victims of such conditions, and their struggle for identity within a misinformed public arena.

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[148] Racine et al, 'Media Coverage of the Persistent Vegetative State', p. 1032.

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'Days Gone Bye', *The Walking Dead*, dir. Frank Darabont (AMC, USA, 2010)

Driver: San Francisco, dirs. Martin Edmondson and Craig Lawson (Ubisoft, UK, 2011)

EastEnders, BBC One, 5 August – 6 August 2013

Good Bye, Lenin!, dir. Wolfgang Becker (X Verleih AG and Sony Pictures Classics, Germany, 2003)

'The Hero', *Faulks on Fiction*, BBC Two, 5 November 2011

Just Like Heaven, dir. Mark Waters (DreamWorks, USA, 2005)

Kill Bill Volume 1, dir. Quentin Tarantino (Miramax, USA, 2003)

The Last Temptation of Christ, dir. Martin Scorsese (Universal, USA and Canada, 1988)

Life On Mars, dir. Various, BBC One, 2006-7

Marwencol, dir. Jeff Malmberg (Kinosmith, Canada, 2010)

'Mayham', *The Sopranos*, dir. Jack Bender (HBO, USA, 2006)

Patrick, dir. Richard Franklin (Filmways, Australia, 1978)

Patrick: Evil Awakens, dir. Mark Hartley (Umbrella Entertainment, Australia, 2013)

The Review Show, BBC Two, 3 June 2011

Talk To Her, dir. Pedro Almodóvar (Sony Pictures Classics, Spain, 2002)

Trance, dir. Danny Boyle (Fox Searchlight, UK and France, 2013)

Vanishing Waves, dir. Kristina Buožytė (Autonomy Pictures, Lithuania, France, Belgium, 2012)

While You Were Sleeping, dir. Jon Turtletaub (Buena Vista Pictures, USA, 1995)

World Cup Qualifier: Portugal Vs USA, BBC One, 22 June 2014