

“A Subject Becomes a Heart”:
The Therapeutic Style of the *Heart of Darkness* Novel Tradition

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation applies the concept of a therapeutic emotional style, drawn from the cultural study of the emotions, in a historical and theoretical interpretation of ascendant psychoanalytic discourse in modernist studies. I historicize the ascendance of a “therapeutic style” in modern novels and literary criticism through genealogical analysis of the legacy of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. I approach the novel’s tradition historically, in terms of Eva Illouz’s account of therapy, and theoretically, in terms of Edward Said’s ideology critique of imperial culture. Turning to novelists Graham Greene and Paule Constant, the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud and Karen Horney, and American Vietnam War novels read alongside Robert Jay Lifton’s trauma theory, I establish the basis for understanding why *Heart of Darkness* has been institutionalized as a paradigmatic text for the therapeutic culture of modern and contemporary literature and literary criticism.

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1. Introduction: From Freudian Psychology to the Therapeutic Style: Rethinking Some Basics of Literary Modernism

In modernist studies, most often regarding fiction novels and narrative form, the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud is paradigmatically invoked to account for the interactions between psychology and literature. “When we think of the relation between psychology and literature, most of us think of Freudian psychology,” Judith Ryan writes in *The Vanishing Subject*, a comparative study of the “simultaneous emergence” of modern psychology and literary modernism (1). The readiness-to-hand of Freud’s name in literary criticism has been reinforced both by decades of practical interest among authors, and theoretical mythologization among subsequent critics. For example, consider Harold Bloom’s nomination of Freud, in his *The Western Canon* (1994), to the halls of modernist fame (2), praising “Freud as a writer, and psychoanalysis as literature” (376).

At first glance, this situation represents a special case of consensus in academic theory: it is hardly an exaggeration that everyone knows *Freud*, the proclaimed inventor of psychoanalysis and clinical-psychoanalytic therapy, has been the most beloved psychologist for modern literary authors. Freud’s “preeminence” in the context of literary modernism, as suggested above by Ryan in *The Vanishing Subject* (2), has effectively become self-evident. In this respect, the nearly cliché status of such references to him today calls for a fresh, perhaps defamiliarizing interpretation—one that scrutinizes the connections that are assumed to exist as a matter of course between the two domains of psychology and literature. Specifically, recent critical attention to the “therapeutic emotional style” of late-modern culture (Illouz, *Saving* 12-16) should motivate a new understanding of Freud’s place—and therapeutic psychology’s function more

generally—within the literary-theoretical domain of modernist studies, read as a discourse not only in sync with, but expressing, the historic trends of therapeutic culture. How might we better, or at least differently, understand the connections between psychology and literary modernism, in particular, when they are linked intimately to the important concept of the “therapeutic emotional style,” understood as a cultural construct and historical tradition as is elaborated in Illouz’s critical theory?

In general, it is readily understandable that psychoanalytic-therapeutic ideas have found a home in modern literature and literary criticism. Fundamentally, psychoanalysis and modern literature (such as the novel and lyric) both deal with cultural and scientific practices of introspection (Illouz 5; Ryan 10-22). Additionally, and to be understood as a consequence of an inward turn through introspection (Kahler 5-6), literary theorists such as Lionel Trilling have pointed to the mutual preoccupation of both literature and psychology with the terrain of fantasy and dreams (*Freud and the Crisis of Culture* 21-22)—a point, in fact, underlined by Freud in his own theorization of creative writing in “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” (437). Further amplifying this concern for realms habitually inaccessible to rational consciousness (such as fantasy, instinct, or shock), the Freudian concept of the unconscious has figured prominently in both archetypal, political, and trauma theories of literature.

However, whereas Freud’s name has become relatively commonplace in these discourses, it is not always obvious what his name signifies. On the one hand, like many intellectuals, Freud’s ideas are multiple, and practically too numerous to be unified by a single general concept. On the other hand, in the process of *modernism’s institutionalization*, Freudian ideas have become so diffuse as to perhaps be unmoored

from their original meaning. Psychoanalytic ideas, such as trauma, repression, and identification—whether faithful to their Freudian roots, or not—now proliferate the landscape of literary criticism. When one speaks of Freud in literary studies, does one mean the *pessimistic* Freud, personified in the figure of the maligned artist who antagonizes culture? Or does one mean the *optimistic* Freud, as distilled by neo-Freudian theorists of ego psychology who champion individual adaptation in the therapeutic process? And what about the principally ambivalent Freud of philosophical anthropology, who points to the “love-hate toward the body” developing from necessary but frustrating practices of self-control (Horkheimer and Adorno *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 193)? In existing surveys of literary theory, such as Ryan’s work,¹ such divergent and basically conflicting traditions of Freudian theory are typically conflated; a fact that is surprising, since the fundamental difference between Freud and neo-Freudian theorists has been the object of intense polemics in psychology and cultural studies. (Indeed, Freud had already warned against the colonization of psychoanalysis by ego psychology in his debates with Alfred Adler.²)

Consider the statements of cultural theorist Russell Jacoby, who provides an invaluable overview of these debates in his book *Social Amnesia*. Jacoby writes of how Adler and the “revisionist” neo-Freudians such as Karen Horney achieve victory over Freud by erasing his “critique of the individual,” by which is meant Freud’s fundamental

¹ Ryan renders equivocal Freud’s psychoanalytic theory with literary narrative, while Illouz conceives of literary-therapeutic narrative in popular culture separately, in contradistinction to psychoanalysis proper: “Freudian psychology spoke a language that was itself largely derived from literature, and hence ... was consonant on some level with important cultural traditions. ... Freudian psychology was itself a series of stories, narratives conceived as paradigms of human psychological development” (Ryan 12).

² For a review of this debate between Freud and Adler, see Jacoby 19-23.

view that the ego is incapable of controlling the demands of instinctual biology (22-30). This view is advanced by Freud in the *Ego and the Id* (58) as well in other works that consider the tripartite structure and economics of psychoanalytic metapsychology. As Freud writes, “The act of repression has demonstrated to us the strength of the ego, but it also bears witness at the same time to *the ego’s impotence* and the uninfluencable character of the individual instinctual impulse in the id” (Freud, *The Problem of Anxiety* 25 qtd. in Jacoby 42, emphasis added). In effect, with the rise of neo-Freudianism, this critical edge of Freud’s so-called “biologism” is lost.

Consider how Horney’s neo-Freudian critique of Freud evacuates the space for the biological. In *New Ways of Psychoanalysis* (1939), Horney incessantly argues against the libido concept informing Freud’s instinct theory; that concept, she writes, incorrectly assumes “that man is driven to fulfill certain primary, biologically given needs, and that these are powerful enough to exert a decisive influence on his personality and thus on his life as a whole” (70). Refusing the image of fixed biological instincts, this critique is leveled from the perspective of a cultural-constructivist. Formulaically, Horney stresses that “cultural factors” instead of “biological roots” form the basis of a true psychoanalytic concept of the self (70). Thus, Jacoby writes, summarizing the revisionist position, “what the neo-Freudians reject” is the “instinctual biology [derived] from a past of violence and destruction” (31). As a result, the more pessimistic idea of *conflict* between the ego and an overwhelming id is supplanted by an optimistic idea of the ego’s *adaptation* and conformity to the demands of civilization. Critical theory, beginning with the Frankfurt School, has objected to such revisionist erasure of the instinct by neo-Freudian discourse, but the rise of revisionist-ego psychology was nonetheless the ideological victor in this

debate, encouraged by important social and cultural factors that will be detailed later in this chapter.

In any case, one could assemble a catalog of psychoanalytic moments in academic literary theory that would illustrate the variety of uses to which Freudian notions have been put, whether orthodox (Freudian) or not (neo-Freudian/revisionist). Consider Trilling's classical defense of Freud's "biologism" (placing an individual nature outside culture) in tandem with his canonization of a modern literature curriculum as a professor at Columbia, that set *Heart of Darkness* on the path to becoming "one of the most frequently taught works of modern fiction in English classes from Chicago to Bombay to Johannesburg" (Brantlinger 255). Consistent with Freudian biologism, Trilling's effective definition of the modernist-literary curriculum in a classroom setting throughout the 1940s-50s had championed a tradition of modern writers "who present models of selfhood that resist the pressure culture exerts on the individual" (Nutters 677).

In the essay "On the Modern Element of Modern Literature" (1961),³ Trilling reflects on the tradition and teaching of modern literature in the context of a university, where he specifically was tasked with creating an introductory course on the topic. There, he considers the value of modern literature in reference to authors such as Nietzsche, Freud, and Conrad, whose alleged modernity consists in a recognizably Freudian theme: "the historic sense of our literature has in mind a long excess of civilization to which may be ascribed the bitterness and bloodiness both of the past and of the present and of which the peaceful aspects are to be thought of as mainly contemptible—its order achieved at the cost of extravagant personal repression" (15). Taking civilization's capacity to ruin

³ This essay was republished as "On the Teaching of Modern Literature" in Trilling's *Beyond Culture* (1965).

the individual seriously, modern literary representations of such repression force us to ask “if we are content with ourselves, if we are saved or damned—more than with anything else, *our literature is concerned with salvation*. No literature has ever been so intensely spiritual as ours” (8, emphasis added). (More will be said of this spiritual aspiration for “salvation” later.) Wondering what can be saved of the self under the pressure of civilization, modern literature thus enters into partnership with Freudian psychology. And yet, like Freud, Trilling remains committed to an irreconcilable conflict of the self split between bourgeois culture and basic human biology.

In 1955, before an audience of therapists, Trilling translated his interpretation of modern literature back into the language of psychoanalytic theory. For that year, giving the New York Psychoanalytic Institute and Society’s annual “Freud Anniversary Lecture,” the Freudian image of modern literature was elevated into an ideal representation of quasi-political, quasi-naturalist liberation. In the lecture, titled *Freud and the Crisis of Culture*⁴, Freud’s “paranoid version of the relation of the self to culture” is indeed

quite at one with literature. In its essence literature is concerned with the self; and the particular concern of the literature of the last two centuries has been with the self in its standing quarrel with culture ... express[ing] the bitterness of his discontent with civilization, ... sa[ying] that the [biological] self made greater legitimate demands than any culture could hope to satisfy. (58)

This summary concern of literature, Trilling concludes before his audience of psychoanalysts, “must be thought of as the liberating idea without which our developing ideal of community is bound to defeat itself” (58). In this early moment, Trilling’s biologicistic conception of repression crucially helped to institutionalize a

⁴ This lecture was reprinted, with some apparent alterations, in *Beyond Culture* (1965).

psychoanalytically-motivated ethos of *transgression* in “old” (or what may now be called classical) modernist studies.

Others, however, perhaps straying from Freud’s biologism, put some of his ideas to new use in the study of literary form and technique. Dorrit Cohn, in *Transparent Minds* (1978), calls attention to the ways in which “narrators frequently draw explicit attention to the sub- or unconscious nature of the psychic states they narrate, or to the impossibility of their self-articulation” (48). Such techniques include: stressing the subliminal quality (48); the “He saw ...” device (in visionary-subliminal scenes) (50); the presentation of dreams (51); and emphatically authorial psycho-narration, “meant to elucidate rather than to emulate the figural psyche” (53-55). Cohn’s analysis, further, brings Freud’s concept of the unconscious to bear on one of literary theory’s central concepts, in debate over the definition of “stream of consciousness” in modernist fiction. In her view, critics are erroneous in taking the “stream” of such consciousness to represent the relatively deepest and least conscious psychic stratum, the unconscious.

They forget that the most direct of the ‘stream-of-consciousness techniques,’ interior monologue, is by definition limited to the linguistic activity of the mind, whereas the unconscious is by definition radically devoid of language. ... [A] novelist need not limit himself to symbols of the unconscious that appear in his character’s consciousness as long as he uses his own language rather than his characters. (56)

Cohn concludes that authorial psycho-narration is better suited for representing the subliminal or unconscious, than is direct stream of consciousness (as may be exemplified by the “Penelope” section in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*). The former succeeds especially in being able to construct a “symbolic landscape as a kind of theoretical correlative for a

subliminal stratum that can never emerge on the conscious level or the verbal surface of a figural mind” (55).

In works such as *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1961), René Girard conceptualizes the modern novel by theorizing it through aspects of Freud’s group psychology (see also Meloni). Girard describes a constitutively novelistic form of “triangular desire” that, instead of a straight line between subject and object of desire, consists in the tripartite set of Self, object, and Other (who functions as a mediator) (2-7). For Girard, triangular desire is mimetic in that it is never original: the Self’s desire is always an imitation of the mediating Other’s. Freud’s account of group psychology anticipates the Girardian concept of triangular desire, and the latter may even be seen as foreshadowed in Freud’s theory of sexuality. In fact, in Girard’s view, the Oedipal triangle already illustrates the mimetic situation: the child comes to desire the mother through imitating the desire of the father (Girard 186n1).

In Girard’s framework, so-called “great novels” negotiate the mimetic constitution of triangular desire by narrating the rivalry between Self and Other that forms on the basis of mutual competition for a shared object of desire. Thus great novels reveal Freud’s insight that, regarding the psychology of desire, “someone else is invariably involved, as a model, as an object, as a helper, as an opponent; and so from the very first individual psychology, in this extended but entirely justifiable sense of the words, is at the same time social psychology as well” (Freud, *Group Psychology* 3). As in the case of the narrator Marcel in Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, the novelist must overcome the vanity of the social situation that is structured by the snobbish imitation of the Other’s desire. Typologically, the novelistic overcoming of triangular desire proceeds

through the narration of a moral-spiritual rebirth (a conversion likened to *imitatio Christi*) that reorients desire toward a truly non-competitive good (Girard, “Conversion” 264-271). Summarizing this theory in a generic formula, Girard writes, “triangular desire is the basis of the theory of the *novelistic* novel” (*Deceit* 53); on this basis, the great novelist is in effect an “Oedipus-novelist” (76). This line of psychoanalytic-literary thinking further continues in the literary theory of Nidesh Lawtoo, whose concept of the “mimetic unconscious” extends the concept of triangular desire into a psychological theory of modernist literature.

Finally, as another installment in the translation of Freudian concepts into literary theory, consider the Marxist-Freudian tradition of political-literary theory represented by academics such as Fredric Jameson and Edward Said. Reformatting the Freudian notion of a biologicistic unconscious through a Marxist theory of class relations, Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) elaborates a theory of the “political unconscious” structured by the social and political contradictions between the dominant and laboring classes (69). For Jameson, the literary text, as a cultural object, tries to resolve the political contradictions between classes, and in its scheming secretes the “power of forces ... which the text seeks in vain wholly to control or master” (34). In this theory, conflict is not biological in the Freudian sense, but political and therefore beyond the subject—indeed, it exists at the level of ideology. Jameson describes the ideological dynamic of class-conflict as follows:

the very content of a class ideology is relational, in the sense that its ‘values’ are always actively in situation with respect to the opposing class, and defined against the latter: normally, a ruling class ideology will explore various strategies of the legitimation of its own power position, while an oppositional culture or ideology

will, often in covert and disguised strategies, seek to contest and to undermine the dominant 'value system.' (69)

The text that represents domination (whether by legitimation or contestation) is a mirror for class conflicts: "contradiction here [in the text] appears in the form of the dialogical as the irreconcilable demands and positions of antagonistic classes" (70). On the one hand, at the political level, specifically as an agency or technology for the control of power, narrative effectively acts as a superego on the social. On the other hand, at the historical level, the vital excess of the social and the pathologies of class domination may be read symptomatically. Although class conflict is not in-itself biological in Freud's sense, the political repression of species-being still produces the psychoanalytic unconscious. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), Said praises Jameson's theory of the political unconscious that "shows the novel generally, and narrative in particular, to have a sort of regulatory social presence in West European societies" (73); thus in Said's study of imperialism, as we will see in the next chapter, narrative form remains similarly important for its symptomatic representation of a (political) unconscious. (Within modernist studies, this hermeneutic of the text and its unconscious has also been described as a sort of psychological realism [Felski 25-26]).

Finally, consider the psychoanalytic dimension of "trauma theory" in literary studies commonly associated with the work of Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Feldman (the genealogy of which is detailed in Chapter 5). The terms of this discourse had been circulating within the humanities since post-war debates about the cultural representation of catastrophe (as for instance in the films of Alain Resnais; see Hebard). Caruth's influential study of trauma and narrative in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) encapsulates

and codifies a now widespread therapeutic tendency in narrative/literary theory. In a psychoanalytic model of experience and reference, the witnessing and memory of trauma is entangled with delayed cultural processes of representation and mourning. Narrative, in this model, is therapeutic insofar as it structures the revelation, indeed verbalization, of the repressed content of experience. Emphasizing the psychic mechanisms of repression and identification, such theory underscores trauma's repressive effects on the self as well as the capacity of art to provide an opportunity for working through traumatic loss. Further, the spirit of Caruth's psychoanalytic trauma model takes the form of a comprehensive theory of precarious subjectivity in the work of critical theorists such as Judith Butler (*Bodies That Matter* 14).

Tasked with interpretation of the unconscious, the academic literary critic now sits in the former place of the analyst. According to the trauma theory model of literature, the shock of the traumatic event leaves its trace on the subject in the form of a *textual* (political) unconscious that must be recovered through the labor of critical-theoretical interpretation. Indeed, with the implicit equation of interpretation with therapy, the therapeutic bent of literary studies reveals itself as a systematic radicalization of the aforementioned Jamesonian paradigm. Effectively, narrative is codified in terms of the myth of a psychoanalytic cure (see Hebard 102, on the "psychoanalytic narrative" of the cure). Since the 1980s, these prevalent codifications of psychoanalytic ideas have prevailed within modernist studies, concentrating focus on the aesthetic-representational issues attending the traumas of modernity (Berlant 9-10).

From the epistemological and aesthetic, to the social and political, thus, the legacy of Freud's ideas is varied across these multiple literary-theoretical domains. For the sake

of clarification, nonetheless, one may identify two discrete conceptual series of Freudian-psychoanalytic import: on one hand, the series of biology-civilization-transgression (configured in a primitivist-masculinist dynamic), as exemplified by Trilling; and on the other hand, the series of trauma-subjectification-mourning, (configured in a culturalist-feminist dynamic) as exemplified by Caruth. In the biologicistic theory of Trilling, unconscious forces become transgressive anti-heroes in their antagonism against civilization, and the great moments of literary modernism amount to animalistic revolt. However, with the later rise of trauma theory, the unconscious is never celebrated as an agent of brutal resistance, as the masculinist heroes of Trilling had once modeled. Rather, the unconscious is a site that occasions the verbal process of mourning, and literature is theorized as a space and time for the therapeutic-emotional expression of repressed content, as in the now-widespread concept of melancholic modernism in literary studies.⁵

This dissertation charts the emergence of the therapeutic-emotional stylization of literature through modernism to postmodernism, by way of a series of novels beginning with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). In *Heart of Darkness*, Graham Greene's *A Burnt-Out Case* (1960), Paule Contant's *White Spirit* (1989), and post-Vietnam novels by Philip Caputo (1977), Tim O'Brien (1990), and Karl Marlantes (2009), formal narrative features are connected to psychoanalytic and therapeutic ideas, bearing on

⁵ Despite differences in conceiving of the ethical task of literature, the discourses of Trilling and Caruth share a melancholic structure of feeling that beckons methodical attention to a traumatic origin. In Trilling's psychoanalytic model, civilization effects a traumatic split from primitive nature that must be recovered, whereas in Caruth's revisionist model, symbolic-cultural forms facilitate working-through the traumas of modernity. On the idea of "melancholic modernism," more consistent with Caruth's model, see Madelyn Detloff 1-14; and Seth Moglen 1-25. For a discussion of melancholic modernism in terms that resonate more with Trilling's, see Anne Enderwitz 1-20.

aspects of the psychological-adventure story that descends from Conrad's urtext. Particularly, the rise of psychoanalytic ego-psychology, I contend, impacts the novels' therapeutic-emotional styles and molds the form of psychological adventure by displacing some of the principal (biologistic) contributions of Freud, replacing the latter with a new socio-cultural model of subjectivity based on the problematic of self-realization.

In short, by considering *Heart of Darkness* as an inaugural instance of literary modernism, I conduct an object-oriented analysis of various narratives to demonstrate the interaction of modern psychology with modernist literary writing. Indeed, as a whole this dissertation suggests that Conrad's novel has remained one of the most intensely stylized, theorized, and mimicked "therapeutic" texts of the modernist-novel tradition. The therapeutic stylization of its narrative materializes in the wake of its pessimistic imagination of the conflict between civilization and nature. On this basis, *Heart of Darkness* resonates with Freud's own pessimistic outlook regarding the individual's conflict with society, and remains fascinating for writers and critics intent on problematizing, or salvaging, the prospect of the therapeutic process more generally.

***Heart of Darkness* as Modernist-Novel Canon**

Testimony to the violence of contemporary imperialism, and simultaneously considered a masterpiece of symbolist literature, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has been key to both the history of European literary modernism and the postcolonial theorization of global modernity. In routing together civilization and savagery through a

mapping of global imperial capitalism, the novel helped to further unmask the catastrophic failure of so-called colonial development, as would soon become an international social justice concern in the context of the 1904 “Casement Report” (see Hawkins). Considered one of the first pieces of British fiction to be “critical of imperialism” (Brantlinger 274), its iconic scenes of mechanized violence, racism, and inhumanity contribute to an overall impression of imperial-power-as-fraud—that is, incapable of honoring its cultural ideals, and devastating, even self-destructive, in its technological effects. Conrad’s pessimistic, critical view of empire continues to inspire a vast series of aesthetic and narrative responses to the text that similarly dramatize the existential problems of civilization and modernization.⁶ The crisis of empire is metonymically represented by the disintegration of the distinguished Kurtz.

The critical reception of *Heart of Darkness* has long revolved around the nature of Kurtz’s “unforgettably perverse individuality,” to use Cedric Watts’s phrase (151). Indeed, modernist writers’ initial appropriation of the novel is consistent with this focus. T.S. Eliot alludes to the novel, and Kurtz in particular, in the epigraph of “The Hollow Men” (1925), as well as in the original draft of *The Waste Land* (1922). These allusions are premised on the novel’s staging of a “crisis besetting western civilization”

(McConnell 141). At the academic-institutional level, the importance of the novel is

⁶ Novels that appropriate Conrad’s text include: Virginia Woolf’s *A Voyage Out* (1915), Jean Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), Evelyn Waugh’s *A Handful of Dust* (1934), Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Saul Bellow’s *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), Graham Greene’s *A Burnt-Out Case* (1960), Wilson Harris’s *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* (1966), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), V.S. Naipaul’s *A Bend in the River* (1979), Paule Constant’s *White Spirit* (1989), and Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *Paradise* (1994); and films: Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Nicolas Roeg’s *Heart of Darkness* (1993), Claire Denis’s *Beau Travail* (1999), James Gray’s *Ad Astra* (2019), and Spike Lee’s *Da 5 Bloods* (2020).

cemented by the criticism of modernist literature. Trilling's influential mid-century definition of the modernist canon, summarized in his 1961 essay, "On the Modern Element of Modern Literature,"⁷ monumentalized *Heart of Darkness* as an avatar of modern literature.⁸ Indicting the progressive ideals of modernity in his unrestrained brutality, Kurtz, according to Trilling, embodies the "bitter line of hostility to civilization" that characterizes the "modern element" in modern literature (25). Thus, in Trilling's reading, Kurtz achieves the status of an anti-hero by modeling the transgressive ethos of the modernist literary tradition. Implicit in this evaluation is the supporting theory of Freud's instinctual biology, on the basis of which Trilling could prescribe savage rebellion from civilization to liberate oneself from the "cage" of modernity (Berman 27).

In sum, Trilling inaugurated a trend that theorizes Kurtz according to the logic of Freud's pessimistic understanding of the character of the id. Subsequent interest in the novel follows this early interest in Kurtz, whose descent into brutality during his station in Africa further seems to some critics a symbol for the purportedly transgressive practices of modern(ist) art. In this sense, Trilling's emphasis on Kurtz's liberation from the so-called cage of modernity may be read as a first-pass at the Freudian theorization of the novel. That being said, Trilling's commitments tilt Freud's pessimistic sense of conflict between the individual and society decidedly toward one side of the equation: the individual. Valorizing the individual's biological instinct, Trilling facilitates the reduction

⁷ The publication notes the essay is "an expanded version of a lecture delivered at Vanderbilt University in the spring of 1960 and later in the year at Boston College" (9).

⁸ For a brief discussion of Trilling in the context of mid-century definitions of modernism, see Sean Latham and Gayle Rogers 80-81.

of Freud to a more explicitly Romantic, organicist idea of the *triumph of the primitive*, accomplished by the heroic transgression of civilization.

This use of Freudian ideas in primitivist discourse, in recommending a return to the origin as a kind of solution to the civilizational discontent, departs substantially from Freud's own concept of a deadlock produced by conflict with society. The primitivist nostalgia for origins in the context of modernism suggests following the libido in its "striving back to the original unconscious state of untamed savagery," to borrow a phrase from Jung (324). The tendency in some modernist discourse, of lionizing such a return, introduces an aporia: modernism becomes a rejection of the civilized culture attempting to return to an (idealized) past. In a study of D.H. Lawrence, for instance, Hugh Stevens poses a perceptive question to literary theory: "Can fiction be modernist when it aims to help us to recapture a premodern, or even 'primitive,' relationship with nature and with our own bodies, and dissolve boundaries between the self and the world?" (Stevens 137). Oddly, Trilling's equation of the "modern element" in modern literature with precisely sort of primitivism, highlights this paradox.

The organicist logic of this model, valorized by Trilling, demands further scrutiny. The interpretation of Kurtz's going native, in terms of liberating repressed instincts, rests on a dialectic of repression/liberation that amounts to an instance of the psychoanalytic "repressive hypothesis" as coined by Michel Foucault (*The History of Sexuality* 6-11). The Foucaultian notion of the repressive hypothesis operates clearly in the early interpretations of *Heart of Darkness*. The logic is as follows: since civilization represses the natural instincts, liberation of the instincts requires an escape from civilization, in effect a return to primordial nature. Kurtz models this process of liberation. Constricted

by a repressive civilization that bars gratification of the instincts, Kurtz has taken liberatory flight to the primitive jungles of Africa.

In this line of reading, the ethical/moral solution of going native follows from the Romantic use of the idea of repression to stage a critique of modern culture. Steven Marcus speculates that “Freud is ... one of the last great legatees of the Romantic tradition in European thought” (lii). Yet many turned Freud’s skepticism about the possibility for “harmonious order” (liii) between self and society into motivation to jump the ship of civilization altogether. As John Farrel writes, “For many artists and other devotees of Freud, their awareness of the concept of repression fueled the Rousseauian resentment against culture and gave rise to an ideology of sexual liberation” (325). Of course, Freud’s diagnosis was more conservative in that it simply diagnosed this deadlock: “Civilization had advanced by repressing basic instincts, resulting in modern man being divided from a natural self, continuously frustrated and at odds with oneself” (Lehan 12). As Freud saw interminable conflict, many modernists dreamed of a more univalent solution: a Romantic return to nature that would liberate the self from its frustrations.

This ideal of liberation is common to modernist literature and may be read as one of its primary ethical concerns. Reading Conrad with Rimbaud, for example, one may glean that Kurtz passionately realizes something of the latter’s surrealist dictum: “True life is elsewhere.”⁹ The truth of Kurtz’s desire is lived freely in the “elsewhere” of the jungle; that this desire is also tragic is magnified in critical attention to the text seeking to decode the meaning of “the horror” revealed therein. Though Kurtz’s project ends in exhaustion, his crawl is not far behind the sensibility of the modernist avant-garde,

⁹ On Kurtz as *artiste maudit*, see Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe 115.

equally antipathetic to the self-limiting conventions and institutions of bourgeois modernity.¹⁰ Recognizing a similar antagonism, Trilling calls Kurtz a modern “hero of the spirit” revealing “the essence of the modern belief about the nature of the artist”: that one should prefer “the reality of ... hell to the bland lies of civilization that has overlaid it” (“On the Modern Element” 26). This idea is similarly present in other modernist authors such as D.H. Lawrence, who sees in the transgression of Victorian ideals about sexuality, the potential to regenerate the natural body otherwise oppressed by the “Puritan” taboos of civilization (“A Propos of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*” 339).

Building upon the spirit of these sedimented ideas about modernism and liberation, Charles Taylor provides another synthetic formula to describe the modernist ethos that Kurtz is thought to personify. In going native, Kurtz achieves what Taylor calls the quintessential modernist “liberation of experience,” requiring “that we open ourselves to the flux which moves beyond the scope of control or integration” (462). Kurtz represents this modernist liberation of experience—as the freedom of the libido—in a savage register: nature correlates with what is “beyond the scope of control” the ego. In this context, Kurtz’s demonic nature amounts to an object lesson in the psychological symbolism of modernism.¹¹ Kurtz’s fate may be read as a representative instance of the (modernist) linking of aesthetic expression to subjectivity-in-crisis within bourgeois

¹⁰ Renato Poggioli writes that “antagonism” is “certainly the most noticeable and showy avant-garde posture” (30). Poggioli even connects this antagonism to a therapeutic outlook: “the linguistic obscurity of contemporary poetry should exercise a function at once cathartic and therapeutic in respect to the degeneration afflicting common language through convention and habits” (37). Such antagonism can already be found in literary Decadence: “the decadent spirit sometimes (though not always) shows itself hostile to contemporary civilization” (75). See also Jochen Schulte-Sasse xiv-xv.

¹¹ Srila Nayak hypothesizes, “Marlow’s narrative text functions as Conrad’s critique of modernism” (37).

modernity. In the repressive hypothesis of the literary critics, Kurtz's primitivism is viewed as an antidote to the crisis of civilization.

The Postcolonial Controversy

Consequent to this canonical interpretation of the confrontation between the primitive and modern civilization in modernist aesthetics, *Heart of Darkness* has also played an important role in the postcolonial critique of modernism as an institutional tradition. The novel's status as a document of imperialism that reveals the sins of colonial culture, including the racism of literary tradition, has been intensely debated since Chinua Achebe published his essay "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" (1977). Achebe accuses Conrad of a kind of racism that is symptomatically evident in his novel's dehumanizing representation of African others, and asks whether "a novel which celebrates this dehumanization" could be considered a "great work of art" (788). This question challenges the modernist critics' celebration of the work that is exemplified by Trilling in his glorification of Kurtz, and at its most extreme register reframes the postwar canon of modernism (elaborated by Trilling) into an institution of colonial domination. In his answering "no" to the question of whether Conrad's art is great, Achebe indeed rejects as preposterous the value of the novel's staging of modern subjectivity-in-crisis, which Achebe discounts as merely the "break-up of one petty European mind." Between Trilling and Achebe, critical interest in the novel has remained split between the canonization of the novel on the basis of Kurtz's personification of cultural crisis, and the denunciation of this canonization in view of Conrad's

dehumanizing racism. Achebe's discussion, based largely on biographical and formal criticism, marks a watershed moment in the novel's postcolonial globalization. But actually, this apparent split is more superficial than has been recognized, given that both critics share a basic assumption. Achebe does not substantially depart from Trilling's interpretation, insofar as both critics consider Kurtz, and the primitivist themes he represents, as central to the text. They are content to focus on Kurtz as the embodiment of the "darkness" found in the jungle and as the representative bearer of natural evil.

In this particular genealogy of the text's reception from Trilling to Achebe, the critics descend on the novel's primitivism and reify the latter as an index of an "emotional division" that is more broadly prevalent in modernist art.¹² As Richard Lehan writes in his study of modernist literature, "Modern man, unable to reconcile the dictates of primitivism with the demands of civilization, was thus emotionally divided; the pull in opposite directions frustrated the fulfillment of self" (83). However, literary critics' habitual interest in the text's primitivism means that only one side of this division is properly brought into focus: that is, the primitive. Hence the telltale move to isolate Kurtz's "descent" into brutality. From a psychoanalytic point of view, this fate may be read as an allegory for the primitive forces (of the unconscious) that threaten to overwhelm the civilized ego. In this interpretation, the novel is certainly readable, or intelligible, as an instance of modern literature's spiritual "hostility to civilization." Achebe actually extends this line of thinking by highlighting how Conrad's text maps such hostility onto a racist image of Africa rendered outside civilizational norms. As Achebe underscores, Africa is imagined as a natural zone of unruly corruption, a source

¹² For a contemporary reading of the novel that applies, in reading Conrad, these basic terms as first set by Trilling, see Enderwitz 61-103.

of dangerous evil that must be contained or eliminated by the empire; indigenous Africans are reduced to extensions of nature, shrouded and dehumanized in proximity to the primordial bush; and civilized Europeans, like Kurtz, fall back into depravity in the midst of the jungle (16-18). The image is altogether one of fear; Africa is like a web that pulls the living into its deadly trap. In effect, this image of a dangerous Africa constitutes a racial-ideological hierarchy: it confirms Europe's sense of its power and responsibility to subjugate races imagined to be dangerous. Drawing out this point, Achebe's lecture succeeds in connecting the primitivist problematic, first seized on by Trilling, to its geopolitical basis and ideological machinery.

That being said, what if one were to consider the opposite pole of the narrative's emotional division: instead of primitive nature, modern civilization? How are we to understand the text's vision of modernity as bound to an ideological vision of civilizational tenets? If Kurtz represents a primitivist ideology of *darkness*, might not Marlow represent a modern ideology of the *heart*? The aesthetics of primitivism fascinated the early critics, and continues to draw interest, but attending to the novel's depiction of civilization-as-modernity reveals a new set of concerns. In this context, the story must be read alongside the emerging therapeutic rationality of modern culture, which informs the assumptions that attract the critics. Whereas Kurtz has represented a sort of libidinal primitivism, the storyteller-protagonist, Marlow, who provides the sober secondary narrative of the novel, represents its relative antithesis: the virtues and frustrations of modernity, in this case as concerned with the moral formation of the heart. If critical attention has so far recognized Kurtz as the story's primitive animal, Marlow

may be recognized across the *Heart of Darkness* tradition as—to borrow a term from Foucault—the narrative’s “confessing animal” (*History* 59).

What about the novel’s concern for the ills of modernization, and Marlow’s elaborate confession-narration of *his* story, in front of the listening audience aboard the *Nellie*? Focusing on these aspects instead, I contend that our understanding of the novel will need to shift radically from that underscored by the more conventional readings. Marlow becomes, in this analytic shift, a banner for the therapeutic logic of modern culture and a voice for its ideological compensations. In a formula reiterated in subsequent novelistic adaptations of the text, Marlow’s own retelling of his journey to the Congo with the mysterious Company, and witnessing of the brutal Kurtz, highlights the trauma of imperial capitalism through a confessional narrative and stages the potential of salvation through therapeutic rationality in a modern, globalized world. In my view, this is the feature of the novel that has allowed it to become embedded, almost imperceptibly at times, in the foundations of our contemporary culture.

Ego Psychology’s “Therapeutic Structure of Feeling”

In the context of this study, the therapeutic stylization of modernist fiction—beginning with the trauma of primitive nature—emerges logically through psychoanalytic interest in the topic of the unconscious, the mechanism of repression, and the constitution of the ego. In the literary domain, this path of development also negotiates the scientific and cultural ascendance of psychoanalytic ego psychology—which not only revised aspects of Freudian theory but also popularized a

cultural schema of selfhood that is conveniently folded into an increasingly normalized form of “therapeutic narrative.” In the wake of Conrad’s problematization of colonial psychology, the novels considered in the later chapters underscore the contours of this therapeutic-narrative form by dramatizing aspects of therapeutic selfhood. To begin, a brief history of the rise of therapeutic psychology and an introduction to its core cultural contributions is in order.

In the chapter “Triumphant Suffering” in the study *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help*, Eva Illouz charts the contributions of psychoanalysis—or, more accurately, psychoanalytic ego psychology—to broader cultural discourse about modern selfhood. Therapeutic selfhood, like therapeutic narrative discussed below, flowers within a now-widespread “structure of feeling” in contemporary global capitalism (156). In her application of Raymond William’s general theoretical concept to account for the rise of a therapeutic ethos, Illouz draws out the implicit theoretical opposition between the two terms, *feeling* and *structure*. “[F]eeling points to a kind of experience that is inchoate, that defines who we are without our being able to articulate this ‘who we are.’ Yet the notion of ‘structure’ also suggests that this level of experience has an underlying pattern, that it is systematic rather than haphazard” (156). As a structure of feeling, “therapeutic culture is an informal and almost inchoate aspect of our social experience, yet it is also a deeply internalized cultural schema organizing perception of self and others, autobiography, and interpersonal interaction” (156). To be sure, we are dealing with something more than therapy as a specific kind of clinical practice. Practically, in becoming a therapeutic structure of feeling, “therapy took hold of the self in the form of a powerful narrative, the primary vocation of which is to

manage various disruptions of biography ... , the uncertainties that have become inherent in postmodern lives ... , and problems of ... the ‘size’ of the self, how big or how small one defines oneself (i.e. in the pathology of low self-esteem)” (157). Remixing Weber’s phrase about the Reformation’s repurposing of Christian asceticism, we may note that in this process, the habits of therapeutic psychoanalysis are taken out of the clinic and placed in the service of popular culture.¹³ In the process, the expert discourse of psychoanalysis is transformed. With its promises to *serve* rather than to decry culture, it now functions as a systematically optimistic reworking of Freud’s pessimistic view. In contrast to Freud’s pessimistic view of biological conflict, therapeutic selfhood rests on the model of a resilient (adaptive) ego driven to healthy self-realization, liberated from the misery of the dominating id.

Illouz’s account of the ascendance of therapeutic discourse and its popularization may recall the critique of revisionist psychoanalysis leveled by Adorno, but has a more expansive and detailed focus. Her study spotlights factors in American society and culture that were crucial to the victory of therapeutic ego psychology over Freud. Most fundamentally, according to Illouz, the longstanding tradition of *self-help* discourse in American culture was a major influence in this victory. The groundwork for the reductive (mis-)translation of Freud’s theory had indeed been laid by the established traditions of voluntarist Protestantism as well as the more recent “mind-cure movement,” all of which made “self-help a central aspect of American culture” (*Saving* 157). The ethos of

¹³ Weber’s phrase is “the Reformation took rational Christian asceticism and its methodical habits out of the monasteries and placed them in the service of active life in the world” (*Protestant Ethic* 196n79).

self-help neutralized Freud's theoretical pessimism and, in turn, paradoxically rewrote psychoanalysis into an optimistic and volitionist project instead.

Such a paradoxical (mis-)translation of psychoanalysis into self-help is especially remarkable in retrospect: Freud's original theory, around the turn of the nineteenth century, was set up as a near perfect antithesis to the conventional American discourse of self-help. As Illouz writes,

Contrary to ... [the] self-help ethos, which stipulated that moral strength could determine one's social position and social destiny, Freud held the pessimistic view of the psyche and society that the very capacity to help oneself was conditioned by social class and that, like other aspects of psychic development, such capacity could be damaged. *If psychic development was damaged, it could not be restored through sheer willpower. Only the scientific, painstaking (and costly) work of the analyst could contribute to the improvement of the self.* By making psychoanalysis the only road to psychic salvation, Freud suggested that self-help did not depend upon one's moral endurance, virtue, and volition because the unconscious could take many cunning routes to defeat the decisions of consciousness. If the unconscious could defeat one's determination to help oneself, then this in turn meant that the Freudian outlook, at least initially, was incompatible with what could become the industry of self-help. (*Saving* 153-154, emphasis added)

Notwithstanding Freud's warnings, a new generation of psychologists ultimately succeeded in rendering psychoanalysis not only compatible with, but one of the central influences on, a new style of therapeutic-psychological theory and practice premised on a self-help ethos.

A brief list of the main social and cultural factors contributing to the "triumph" of the therapeutic structure of feeling provides a sense of its substantial weight in contemporary culture.

First, the transformation of Freudian theory into a form of popular therapeutic discourse, as already suggested, involved "*internal changes in psychological theory*"

(*Saving* 157; emphasis added). These changes are represented by the ego-psychological theory of post- and neo-Freudian psychologists, including Alfred Adler, Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, and Albert Ellis, who, “although differing in outlook, all rejected the Freudian determinism of the psyche and preferred a more flexible and open-ended view of the self” (157). Here, the optimistic goal of therapy is to “help one realize one’s own authentic self,” with the implication that “those who did not conform to psychological ideals of self-fulfillment were now sick” —thus effectively making “health and self-realization ... *synonymous*” by “putting self-realization at the very center of models of selfhood” (161). In this, there is an evident pattern: the stress is taken off Freud’s “fatalistic determinism” about the instincts and unconscious trauma (158). Newfound praise is laid on the plasticity of the ego, celebrated in its dynamic capacity for adapting to and even mastering its environment (158-159). These differences “made psychology increasingly compatible with the values of the self-help ethos” such as growth and volition; in particular, “ego psychology constituted a cultural bridge between the science of psychology and the conceptions of selfhood dominant in American culture” (158-159). Ego psychology’s new model of therapeutic selfhood could appeal to the conceptions of the dominant culture based on the model’s updating or simply returning to these core tenets of self-help.

In addition to these internal changes in psychological theory that allowed for the construction of a cultural bridge, the second factor pertains to the *external status of psychological authority*. The therapeutic structure of feeling was presaged by the mid-century functionalization of the “authority of the professional psychologist,” which “became pervasive in the 1960s” (*Saving* 161). Illouz writes, “In the context of the

demise of grand political ideologies and of the increasing legitimacy and cultural visibility of such topics as sexuality and intimate relationships, psychologists were the natural candidates to provide much-needed guidance on topics such as sexuality or intimacy” (162). This guidance was rendered accessible for the ordinary reader through affordable paperback books that allowed psychologists to address consumers as patients, so to speak (162). Internal changes in psychological theory and the new social authority of the expert for the consumer facilitated the dissemination of therapeutic-psychological discourse, in turn birthing a broader therapeutic structure of feeling.

Beyond the domain of psychology and its appeal to the consumer, other important sites helped to enact the therapeutic outlook that was advanced by ego psychologists: *the state, the market, and civil society*. Therapeutic discourse settled in these domains “against the backdrop of the growing social authority of the [psychological] experts” described above (*Saving* 161).

First, the therapeutic outlook was incorporated into the logic of the (American) state: the state has “increasingly relied on the codes, symbolism, and moral discourse of the therapeutic ethos to deploy various rehabilitation programs for such groups as the poor, prison inmates, delinquents, and victims claiming emotional injuries” (*Saving* 163). Therapeutic discourse became an important tool for the state’s (biopolitical) management of populations, extending insight from Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*.

Second, the instrumental-clinical use of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* solved the “need to make the relationship between diagnosis and treatment tighter so that insurance companies (or other payers) could process claims more efficiently,” and incidentally enabled the “extraordinary expansion of psychological

modes of explanation” (*Saving* 164). The *DSM*—in legislating over clinical questions about sexuality, anger, anxiety, and other emotional states (in the interests of not only healthcare but also, increasingly, other third parties such as courts and regulatory agencies)—has “most successfully enabled the market’s appropriation of therapy by providing the classifications and cultural frames that have enabled the radical commodification of therapy” (166).

Finally, in using the psychic to measure social and political problems, civil society has also diffused ego psychology’s therapeutic outlook. Feminist activists, for instance, transformed “psychic injury into a political critique of the family” in the 1980s, mobilizing the “cultural categories of ‘child abuse’ and ‘trauma’ ” to indict patriarchal systems of power (*Saving* 168). Around the same time, Vietnam veterans “used the category of trauma to receive social and cultural benefits” (168). Both movements foreshadowed the American Psychiatric Association’s official recognition of the category of trauma, with the definition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in 1980, which soon “became progressively applied to a wide variety of occurrences, such as rape, terror attacks, crime, and even accidents, thus contributing to the expansion of the category as an illness construct applied to an ever-widening pool of victims”(168). Virtually anyone would be able to make “claims to victimhood and psychic damage in the name of ideals of personhood that intertwined the psychic and the political” (169). In civil society, therapeutic selfhood manifested itself publicly in the shadow of these ideals; yet in addition to these ideals, such claims to victimhood also required a technique: of confessionally speaking about oneself.

The contemporary form of therapeutic narrative is the product of this widely spread technique. To put it simply, *therapeutic narrative is a kind of disease narrative*—about illness and prospective recovery—in which (emotional) trauma is represented as an infectious or evil element that the self must recover or be cured from. In this sense, therapeutic narrative uses the psychoanalytic idea of trauma as a disease-narrative device.

The foundational role that disease plays in this respect leads us to the organizing principle of therapeutic discourse. The cultural prominence of therapeutic narrative has been ensured by the aforementioned network of (scientific, state, market, and civil) actors who share “a strong interest in promoting and expanding a narrative of the self defined by pathology, thereby de facto promoting a *narrative of disease*” (*Saving* 170; emphasis added). This perception of the self as diseased unifies the so-called psy-disciplines as they are channeled throughout society and culture. “The rivalry between various schools of psychology, or even the rivalry between psychology and psychiatry, should not overshadow their ultimate agreement on defining emotional life as something in need of management and control and on regulating it under the incessantly expanding ideal of health channeled by the state and the market” (171). This discursive formation founds and legislates “the emotional and personal dispositions according to which health, maturity, or self-realization is established” (171), therefore exercising great power over the individual subjects who enter its field. However, the substance of the self which is to be healthily realized, so to speak, undoubtedly remains vague. As Illouz notes,

In fact, when one examines the assumption that underlies most texts using therapeutic language, a clear pattern structuring the therapeutic form of thought emerges: the ideal of health or self-realization defines, *a contrario*, dysfunctions

that are produced by the very category of the ‘fully self-realized life.’ That is, the claim that an un-self-realized life needs therapy is analogous to the claim that someone who does not use the full potential of his muscles is sick, with the difference that in the psychological discourse it is not even clear what qualifies as a ‘strong muscle.’ (172)

This pattern of vagueness “structuring the therapeutic form of thought” drives the proliferation of the therapeutic structure of feeling. Vagueness permits therapeutic ideas about health to have an unusual level of flexible mobility, abstracted from any particular specificity and thereby applicable to a dizzying, effectively endless array of biographical situations.

The Conventional Markers of “Therapeutic Narratives”

The therapeutic structure of feeling, although diffuse, has left a recognizable mark on culture in the conventional form of “therapeutic narratives,” in effect a narrative genre that is systematically organized by a few principal features of ego-psychological discourse.

In therapeutic narratives, the above ego-psychological presupposition, that an “un-self-realized life needs therapy,” is taken as a guideline for the construction of biographical accounts across innumerable disparate scenarios—in potentially any case where the self fails to develop itself according to a goal (*Saving* 172-173). Formally, therapeutic narratives organize and render intelligible moments of biography through the hallmark, diametric interaction of trauma and the goal of selfhood (172-173).

Illouz identifies a couple of key features of the therapeutic narrative genre that are rooted in this dynamic of trauma and selfhood: first, the narratives’ *retrospective*

emplotment (informing the identification of past injuries that have led one's present predicament); and second, the narratives' *demonic symbolism*. This symbolism is further associated with the final cause of the therapeutic narrative: (confessional, publicized) purification of so-called "demonic" trauma from the core of oneself. These formal and symbolic aspects are part and parcel of therapeutic selfhood as represented within the generic framework of therapeutic narrative.

By definition, therapeutic narratives are mainly "retrospectively emplotted." Stories about the self are told while looking backwards, in order to select the past events (regarded as injuries or traumas) that have led to one's present predicament: the failure of the self to achieve its current goal (*Saving* 173).

The main characteristic of therapeutic narratives is that the goal of the story dictates the events that are selected to tell the story as well as the ways in which these events, as components of the narrative, are connected. Narrative goals such as 'sexual liberation,' 'self-realization,' 'professional success,' or 'intimacy' dictate the complication that will prevent me from attaining my goal, which will in turn dictate which past events of one's life I will pay attention to and the emotional logic that will bind these events together. (173)

This is to be understood as a narrative consequence of the fact that in therapeutic discourse, "the ideal of health or self-realization defines, *a contrario*, dysfunctions that are produced by the very category of the 'fully self-realized life'" (172). In this sense, therapeutic narratives exemplify how disease appears only in light of ideals about health (as norms): such ideals catalyze or make appear, *a contrario*, the relative existence of the dysfunctions which are to be incorporated into the narrative as obstacles to self-realization.

The *a contrario* construction of therapeutic narratives, premised on ideals of health, results in the narratives' "circular" and "supremely tautological" form (*Saving*

173-174). This aspect of retrospective emplotment in therapeutic narratives illustrates their “extraordinary paradox”: any narrative of therapeutic self-development is fundamentally composed of moments of failure, chapters of suffering *in the past*, so to speak, that are detailed on the basis of their informing one’s present predicament. Illouz continues,

Indeed, the therapeutic narrative functions only by conceiving of life events as the markers of failed or thwarted opportunities for self-development. Thus the narrative of self-help is fundamentally sustained by a narrative of suffering. ... Therapeutic storytelling is inherently circular: to tell a story is to tell a story about a ‘diseased self.’ ... Therapeutic narratives are supremely tautological, for once an emotional state is defined as healthy and desirable, then all behaviors or states that fall short of this ideal point to problematic emotions or unconscious barriers, which in turn must be understood and managed in the framework of the therapeutic narrative. (173)

Consider a hypothetical situation of conflict between romantic partners: whereas the partners may be realistically incompatible, a therapeutic style of narrativizing this incompatibility would seek its causes in an “obstructed” past: “instead of taking ‘incompatibility’ as a cause for discord, incompatibility is taken to be the symptom of deep unconscious fears, the unearthing of which will initiate the narrative of reworking the self. ‘Fear of intimacy’ becomes a narrative peg for intimate relationships, a way of framing, explaining, or transforming them” (174). The ideal of healthy intimacy allows for the retrospective search for, identification, and narration of everything in the past that had caused deficiency or otherwise stood in the way of intimacy. Furthermore, evidencing the influence of psychoanalytic ideas about the ego on the therapeutic narrative form, such deficiencies are typically thought to be caused by or associated with a “repressed or forgotten past” (176).

Thus the stylistic marker of retrospective narration in therapeutic narrative is informed by a key concept in the psychoanalytic ego-psychological theory of the ego, namely, repression. At the level of abstraction from any particular ideal, the formula of retrospective narration of *a contrario* dysfunction (rooted in a repressed past) is the first main characteristic of the therapeutic narrative genre. This characteristic further enables the therapeutic narrative to become integrated into the culture industry. Illouz writes, “The symbolic structure of therapeutic narratives is highly compatible with the culture industry because narrative pegs can be easily changed, thus making the psychological profession susceptible to renewable consumption of ‘narratives’ and ‘narrative fashions’” (*Saving* 174). We see thus that “the therapeutic [narrative] structure is a generic structure that lacks specific content and is therefore highly mobile and flexible” (183). The unique flexibility of therapeutic ideals and the resulting composability with the culture industry is the first key feature of therapeutic narrative.

Second, the symbolic dimension of therapeutic narratives typically rests on the tradition of “demonic narrative” that (according to Illouz) is rooted in Judeo-Christian ideas about redemption and salvation. In the context of the modern therapeutic narrative, the demonic haunts the “wide variety of un-self-realized and therefore sick people” who must purify themselves of psychic-emotional disease to attain salvation (*Saving* 176). Illouz extensively defines the correspondences between religiously-oriented demonic narrative and its therapeutic renovation:

a demonic narrative situates the source of suffering in an evil principle that is outside the subject, whether Satan or a traumatic event. This form of evil is characterized by its ability to insidiously get inside the person. Evil is inside a person and is basically hidden from observers and even from the subject’s own view. In the same way that the devil can take control of a person without his or

her knowledge, trauma can leave its destructive marks without the person's awareness. Moreover, in the demonic narrative, the identity of the person is taken over and transformed by the evil principle, which has insidiously entered his or her soul and body. Similarly, in the therapeutic narrative a trauma forges a new identity. Another characteristic of the demonic narrative is that only an outside person can correctly decipher the signs of psychic contamination. This is why confession is central to the purification process, which must follow the identification of the demonic possession. (177)

The demonic narrative, as renovated in the therapeutic narrative genre, stitches together a number of important elements in a symbolic series of religious and therapeutic significance. There is, first, spatial symbolism. The self or ego is liable to transformative invasion by an "evil" external force (trauma, the id, etc.). This invasion, which can happen without the subject's knowledge, may involve a delayed traumatic reaction (as theorized in Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*). And finally, the evil's invasion requires a ritual of purification, either enacted publicly (as a performance) or clinically (by an expert). This symbolic continuity of demonic symbolism with therapeutic narrative—from the logic of invasion to salvific purification—constitutes the second main stylistic feature of the genre.

The symbolic series comprehensively restages the "cultural template of the Judeo-Christian narrative," combining demonic symbolism with prospective redemption through purification, and ultimately works as an "efficient tool to establish coherence and continuity of the self," as a guiding logic from sin to salvation (*Saving* 184). In this sense, the symbolism of the therapeutic narrative may also be read as a popular instance of the "medicalization of confession" as elaborated by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*.

There, Foucault writes:

The obtaining of the confession and its effects were recodified as therapeutic operations ... under the rule of the normal and the pathological (which, for that

matter, were the transposition of the former categories [of sin and salvation]) Spoken in time, to the proper party, and by the person who was both the bearer of it and the one responsible for it, the truth [of confession] healed. (67)

Illouz's account of the therapeutic narrative extends such ideas about the secular legacy of confession, identifying the foothold of confession in the contemporary style of therapeutic narrative, sustained by and sustaining a structure of feeling that derives from these complex interactions between psychology and culture.

Ultimately, through its success, the therapeutic emotional style has, according to Illouz, transformed selfhood and brought about a transformation of "the cultural definition of power" (*Saving* 84). Departing from the traditionally masculinist conception of power as force—or, in Foucault's model, as the sovereign power to take life (represented by the sword)—the therapeutic emotional style correlates power instead with the ability to restrain oneself from immediate action, to reflect on and verbalize emotions, and to empathize with the feelings others. The therapeutic definition of power not only remakes "models of sociability" predicated on this communicative model, but also "redraw[s] the cognitive and practical emotional boundaries regulating gender differences" (82) by generally reclaiming, in a new way, powers traditionally considered to be feminine.

To put it simply, social interaction is redesigned through the "feminization of emotional culture" (*Saving* 124). In Illouz's words, "the [therapeutic] ideal of self-control [which facilitates communication] mark[s] a clear departure from traditional definitions of hegemonic masculinity, understood as a model prescribing men to be self-reliant, aggressive, competitive, oriented to mastery and dominance, emotionless, and, when necessary, ruthless" (80). By *pathologizing* the ideals of hegemonic masculinity against a

new emotional style of cooperative communication, therapeutic discourse encourages the coming of a “new form of masculinity more compatible with ‘feminine’ models of selfhood ... viewed by the reigning therapeutic ethos as the only healthy form of masculinity” (231). As part of the therapeutic emotional style, these social transformations may be read as the rational outcome of the value of verbalization that characterizes the therapeutic process. In sum, such transformations may be read as signs of a new “therapeutic ideology” of communication based on the various needs of the ruling class in postmodern capitalism (205-216). In this sense, the genealogy of verbal confession, in its becoming therapeutic narrative, is linked directly to the “language ideology of therapy” (245) and the contemporary value systems of global capitalism.

Throughout my dissertation, I highlight the emergence of this therapeutic ethos of communication, that many within the *Heart of Darkness* novel tradition have located in Marlow’s own attempts at storytelling. The ideal type of the heartfelt storyteller-as-confessor is present in some fashion throughout the novels that I examine as part of this tradition: in the “case” of Query in *A Burnt-Out Case*, whose amorous deeds are to be analyzed like a psychiatric document, and thus judged according to the values of the therapeutic persuasion (Chapter 3); in the women of *White Spirit*, who labor to perform Hollywood-style dramas to entertain men lacking in therapeutic virtue (Chapter 4); and in the haunting memories of combat experience that are woven into confessional novels written by Vietnam veterans (Chapter 5).

The Entanglement of Literary Modernism and the Therapeutic Style

In summary, this dissertation explores the rise and form of the therapeutic style in literary modernism, understood as an embattled cultural site for the negotiation of the therapeutic ethos—and, particularly, the form of the therapeutic narrative—that has been thriving with the epochal success of psychoanalytic ego psychology in culture.

The interactions between literature and psychology, more closely detailed in the subsequent chapters, may be introduced here in the following terms. The rise of the therapeutic style of modern literature, insofar as it coalesces in the novelistic tradition around *Heart of Darkness*, takes shape by remapping the primitivist and antagonistic themes presented by Conrad around the new key of emerging therapeutic ego psychology. I argue that this pattern is fully realized in the therapeutically-oriented text of *A Burnt-Out Case*, in which a narrative of therapeutic-ascetic conversion is imagined through psychoanalytic-religious cultural symbols. The therapeutic stylization of modernist literature further informs *White Spirit*, a contemporary work that critically depicts the therapeutic emotional style against the sociological backdrop of late-modern emotional capitalism. Theoretically, as is suggested in the later chapters, the passage of literary modernism into a developed therapeutic stylization in the fiction of Greene and Constant rests on an image of therapeutic selfhood aligned with the ego psychology of Karen Horney. Her theory of psychoanalysis, involving, on the one hand, a (revisionist) critique of Freud's biological instinct theory, and, on the other, an optimistic reclamation of the therapeutic process, offers a newly progressive image of subjectivity based on a socio-culturally embedded drive to "self-realization." This series of concerns traces the history of the therapeutic style in literature and theory in an effort to reconnect current literary-theoretical concepts to their basis in therapeutic psychological discourse.

In the theory of modernist fiction, the psychoanalytic model of trauma theory continues to inform the imagination of what novels can and should do, without however appreciating the imprint of ego psychology in the postpsychoanalytic turn to therapeutic concepts and praxis. Actually, what holds the discursive formation together is literary-psychological investment in the category of things *unknown*, understood as the experience of “desymbolization” produced by traumatic stress, as derived from Robert Jay Lifton’s theory (“The Survivor as Creator” 245n1). Harping on the idea of so-called desymbolization as a kind of unknowing that evidences psychic injury, Caruth writes, “This truth [of trauma or injury] in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains *unknown* in our very actions and our language” [emphasis added]” (*Unclaimed Experience* 4). In the 2016 “Afterword,” Caruth hones this point: “the theory of trauma ... articulates a kind of not-knowing at the heart of catastrophic experience, ... an intimate bond between knowing and not-knowing that ... closely ties the language of trauma ... to the language of literature” (117).

Perhaps *Heart of Darkness* owes its success as a text of the therapeutic style to its characteristic insistence on the category of the unknown or the opaque, which invites speculation about what may yet to be confessed; for in this way of thinking, the unknown is also the repressed. Deploying such a therapeutic framework in his essay on *Heart of Darkness*, Michael Sayeau (2006) writes, “Marlow the storyteller consciously performs the role of consciousness as an agent of repression” (351); Marlow’s secondary narration

may then be understood as an attempt at retrospective analysis of the traumatic unknown, as the confessional enunciation of repressed experience.¹⁴

Thematically similar but approaching from the opposite direction, contemporary academic theory of modernist fiction sees the unknown in terms of a verb or process: in an ethical *unknowing* recorded in narrative. Such unknowing traces a kind of creative destruction, in which loss facilitates moral rebirth. Philip Weinstein, for instance, in the essay “Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction” (2011), codifies modernist fiction as “an art of crisis” whose “key term is *unknowing*” (165). And in the essay “Disorientation: Conrad and the Imperial Origins of Modernist Aesthetics” (2007), Michael Moses further amplifies the putatively subversive impact of the modernist novel in calling *Heart of Darkness* “the Ur-text of what will become a generic, even obligatory modernist scene” of existential vertigo, whereby the “imperial encounter” is a scene of “disorientation” or unknowing (45). In a paradoxical sort of reversal, the repressed (unknown) trauma of the narrative is *championed* by modernist studies’ through the valorization of unknowing produced by crisis. Stretched between mourning loss and actively desiring it, modernist studies’ use of trauma theory remains caught between these two poles of mourning and fascination with crisis.¹⁵

In its recent selection by Anglophone theorists as a defining characteristic of modernist fiction, unknowing may also be understood as an artifact of the therapeutic emotional style that modernist critics have allowed to inform their aesthetic judgements of the period. In my view, attention to the cultural schema of therapeutic selfhood—and

¹⁴ See also Beth Ash.

¹⁵ Indeed, in these instances, the critics’ masculinist insistence on valorizing traumatic unknowing may be understood as a return of Trilling’s model of transgression.

its forms of asceticism or self-transformation—may help us to better understand the prevalence of the unknown/unknowing conceit in what is implicitly the modernist critics' handling of therapeutic narrative. In this respect, I hypothesize that therapeutic selfhood may be folded into what Henry Michael Gott has called the tradition of “ascetic modernism” (2016). In reviving a form of asceticism, therapeutic selfhood appropriates the purification technique of confession as well as the spiritual tradition's demonic symbolism. In *Heart of Darkness*, the association of therapeutic selfhood with asceticism demarcates the formal and symbolic terrain where salvation hopefully appears.

Determining Factors in *Heart of Darkness*'s Therapeutic Stylization

Before concluding this chapter, it may be helpful to outline the various historic and aesthetic determinants that informed Conrad's experience of disease and hence sowed the ground for therapeutic interest in the text. As Martin Dempsey writes in “The Symptoms of a *Heart of Darkness*,” “In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad appears to construct a *symptomatic* narrative [T]here is a strong historical context of physiological symptoms associated with colonialism which were, at the time of the writing of *Heart of Darkness*, poorly understood and referred to (even within the medical community) using the language of symbolism” (327). The colonial experience, especially at sea (as we will see below), presented many reasons for Conrad to experiment with a narrative of disease.

Overall, a couple of important determining factors motivate the therapeutic style of *Heart of Darkness* and continue to reverberate wherever traces of the novel may be found in the modern narrative. These factors may be considered: first, in terms of the

historic conditions of imperial capitalism, and second, in terms of the symbolic dimensions of the text. In my view, these factors—which, to repeat, converge around the problem of disease—not only introduce the crisis of illness, but also telegraph the novel’s therapeutic stylization of recovery and health.

First, with regards to the historic conditions: the environmental transformations and destructions of imperial capitalism disturbed ecological balances that had inhibited disease spread, laying the groundwork for a long century of international epidemiological concern. This concern and its historic basis in the environmental devastation of imperial capitalism continue to be felt in the colonial situations of Greene’s *A Burnt-Out Case* and Constant’s *White Spirit*. Specifically, a therapeutic outlook in culture—once something of a background element in Conrad’s original—becomes a principal aspect of the later novels’ form and critique.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, as European imperial powers expanded their colonial territories in Africa, disturbance of ecological balances in complex natural environments (such as rain forests) unleashed and amplified disease in the form of epidemics. Infected with sleeping-sickness during his journey into new colonial territory, in-the-field laborers like Conrad, himself like Marlow and many other anonymous conscripts, directly confronted this historic transformation. As Dempsey writes, “During the late nineteenth century the ‘colonial’s disease’, or ‘sleeping sickness’ (known from the 1900s onwards as *Congo trypanosomiasis*) changed from an illness which mostly infected small pockets of individuals to an epidemic effecting [sic] the length of the Congo” (327). McNeil details further:

In central and eastern Africa, events in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries connected with ill-conceived efforts by European colonial administrators to alter traditional patterns of herding and cultivation also illustrate the unexpected side effects that sometimes arise from agricultural expansions into new regions. These efforts, in fact, precipitated veritable epidemics of sleeping sickness in parts of Uganda, the Belgian Congo, Tanganyika, Rhodesia, and Nigeria; and the end result, as colonial regimes came to an end, was a land more thickly infested with death-dealing tsetse flies (66)

In addition to the historic rise of epidemic disease caused by imperial-capitalist intervention in formerly undisturbed territories, Conrad's own standpoint as a laborer for the British merchant navy must have informed the main conceit of the novel, as critics have repeatedly stressed: the laborer's dangerous steamboat journey through an unknown land.

Through his service at sea, Conrad would have become acquainted with some of the most important immunological practices in human history, including quarantine, which had been a ubiquitous concern in the maritime context. Quarantine policy had originated in the Christian ports of early modern Europe, off the back of the religious taboo against touching the body of a leper. According to McNeil, "[Q]uarantine regulations became institutionalized" at the ports of Ragusa and Venice in the 15th century, with "[t]he requirement that any ship arriving from a port suspected of plague had to anchor in a secluded place and remain for forty days without communication with the land" (181). Additionally, and more proximate to Conrad's own experience, the British navy was the primary beneficiary of numerous epistemological breakthroughs in the latter half of the nineteenth century (270-274). By the time of Conrad's entry into the maritime labor force, the navy's adoption of such groundbreaking immunological techniques would have minimized disease risks, but also made obvious the dependence of

successful navigation upon the science of immunity. Such developments contributed to the sense of the sea journey as an immunologically-dense experience beset by a precarious balance between the individual and nature. Thus, Marlow's descriptions of the futility of humankind against a so-called evil nature often settle on this single problem: the danger of the living body exposed to infection.

Through the narrativization of illness and recovery, Conrad's witnessing of colonial disease in *Heart of Darkness* is transformed into a sandbox for the therapeutic imagination. As Illouz has noted, therapeutic discourse functions as a disease discourse: it conducts the self to remember suffering in terms of ideals of health (*Saving* 171). The steamboat delineates not only a space of physical disease, but also a symbolic space for introspective confession. The experience of the journey functions as a symbolic peg, so to speak, that informs the "confessional increment" (Cohn 15) of Marlow's retrospective narration. In other words, the experience of the steamboat journey informs not only what Marlow records in his confessional narrative but also how and why he does so.

Numerous aspects of the physical vessel encourage the abstraction and metaphorization of the self/steamboat relationship. First, Marlow's responsibility as pilot of the steamboat is to protect it from shipwreck: the hull, in this respect, may become a metaphor for the body as a protective enclosure or barrier against the "outside," in the immunological sense (Esposito 88). Along the journey, the body, like the exterior of the hull, must be preserved (saved) from destruction by foreign elements. In *Heart of Darkness*, the image of the self/ship is immunological: liable to sink under water unless given sufficient "rivets" (as Marlow reminds us), its hull symbolizes the disjunction between Self and a dangerous Other that lurks outside relatively hidden. In archetypal

interpretation, the steamboat, which trudges through the groves of the id, becomes a general symbol for the ego in its acting as a “frontier-creature” (Freud, *Ego* 58). Political criticism also stresses Marlow’s apparent yearning for a protective enclosure from the frontier. Edward Said, teasing out the immunological dimension of the frontier-relation, constructs a theory of imperial selfhood represented by the character-type of the “imperial personality” (*Culture*, 110). In narratives of empire, as exemplified by Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, this personality of “solitary imperiousness” tends to repress the conflicts of colonial power, creating a protective enclosure from the traumatic contaminants of a world outside imperial control (Said 163; discussed in Chapter 2).

Second, turning our attention to internal processes of the psyche rather than its frontiering, the steamboat engine may be read as a symbolic correlate to the hydraulics of the Freudian psyche. As Patrick Colm Hogan writes of the psychoanalytic model of emotions, “[T]he psychoanalytic tradition relies heavily on force dynamics, particularly hydraulics” (24). Anson Rabinbach describes Freud’s energetics model,¹⁶ “profoundly shaped by the energy model of conservation and discharge,” as follows: “The ‘work’ of the mental apparatus is directed toward reducing internal and external tension and excitement” (63). The so-called hydraulic model that supposes a relation of forces between ego and id finds natural metaphorical expression in the figure of the steam engine. Like the engine, the ego in Freudian theory is tasked with the proper government of thermodynamic energy—in the psychoanalytic instance, that is, the energy of the instincts whose psychical-libidinal energy is subject to secondary organization by the

¹⁶ See also Jessica Tran The et al.

ego. In this model, to recall Rabinbach's title, the ego is imagined through the analogy of the "human motor" that in this case works with psychical energy (Rabinbach 52).

Third and finally, the steamboat journey may be interpreted as an archetypal symbol of the therapeutic process, as for example famously theorized by Albert Guerard (1958). Reading Guerard with his Jungian sources, Conrad's narrative clearly resembles the epic myth of passage and rebirth through the underworld that composes part of the mythical-symbolic prehistory of the therapeutic process (Jung 173). Similarly, Greene, in the relatively contemporaneous (to Guerard) psychological adventure, *A Burnt-Out Case*, imagines the steamboat as a vehicle that explores psychic depths and hidden causes, as the main symbol of one of Querry's dreams:

in his [Querry's] dream the boat took the contrary direction to that of Luc. It went on down the narrowing river into the denser forest ... It surprised him to think that he had been so misled as to believe that the boat had reached the furthest point of its journey into the interior when it reached the leproserie. Now he was in motion again, going deeper. (168)

Whether by staging the immunological problem of Self/Other, reflecting (thermo)dynamics of the Freudian psyche, or staging the therapeutic process, the metaphorization of the self-as-steamboat invites the therapeutic stylization of Marlow's initial adventure.

As Illouz notes, therapeutic discourse, functioning as a disease discourse, conducts subjects to narrate self-development through the categories of illness and recovery. In staging the therapeutic process between these two poles of disease narrative, *Heart of Darkness* offers all the components for the sustained therapeutic stylization of the text in subsequent criticism and fiction; not only does therapeutic discourse reverberate throughout novelistic interpretation of Conrad's text, but the aforementioned

ascent and diffusion of psychoanalytic ego psychology warps literary interpretation to negotiate the emerging culture of the therapeutic emotional style. The institutionalization of psychoanalysis extends to the structure of a romantic psychological adventure in *A Burnt-Out Case*, while the cultural diffusion of the therapeutic style provides inspiration for a socio-political critique of emotional labor in *White Spirit*. Thus, in contrast to the primitivist moral investments of classical modernist studies (based somewhat on an invented tradition of modern literature), postmodernization seized the novel tradition by introducing the moral notion of an ascetic psychology. In the chapters examining Greene and Constant, this basically self-help ideology of the therapeutic emotional style is read in conversation with the contemporaneously emerging psychoanalytic ego psychology of the influential theorist and clinician Karen Horney.

With their interest in the moral outlook of psychoanalysis, these novels construct a therapeutic stylization of *Heart of Darkness*. They experimentally rework the latter's basic therapeutic narrative traits: retrospective narration and demonic symbolism, while remaining organized by the suggestive form of the steamboat journey. These traits ultimately lead us to the interrelated importance of confessional rituals and charismatic heroes. From *Heart of Darkness* to *White Spirit*, the novels incessantly allude to the practice of "ascetic"¹⁷ conversion, or more particularly, therapeutic self-change, to dramatize the therapeutic emotional style and stage the process of salvation against the backdrop of an ethos of communication. The imperial situation of colonizing a foreign land, with all of the risks that includes and fears that are conjured, is evidently prepared

¹⁷ That is, in the "very general" sense of the term used by Foucault: "an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being" ("The Ethics of The Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom" 282).

for much mythologizing. On the part of the ascetic characters, strict renunciations and exhausting self-transformations enact a distance or separation tied to belief in a myth of purification, but irony within the novels calls attention to the now rebounding hazards of the global therapeutic ideology of confession. This dynamic illustrates the relevance of the concept of therapeutic narrative for understanding the now conventional view of literary modernism that has often overlooked the complex cultural history of psychoanalytic thinking. Attention to the patterns of the therapeutic style should bring us to wonder whether it is really the germ of Freud that has motivated the therapeutic style in literature, or whether a different kind of revision to psychoanalytic thinking is currently ongoing through literary theory.

Much like the experience of disease, myths—including myths of purification or healing—were ripe for exchange in the symbolic economies of imperial capitalism. As Lehan writes, “Imperial activity kept the primitive sense of a mythic community alive,” as territorial expansion into new land facilitated encounters with supposedly primitive or natural cultures (78). It is in this context that, as Trilling had recognized, myth provides the symbolic grammar for modernism as part of its characteristic staging of its reigning concern, salvation.

Consider the anthropological ideas about purification as described by Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (1890). There, Frazer describes a mythic-agrarian cycle of elemental nature—polarized by seasons of corruption and purification—that forms a pagan bedrock in European Christianity. As Jason A. Josephson-Storm writes,

The main thrust of *The Golden Bough* is that Christ, especially as figured in the passion narrative, is just the latest incarnation of a primitive Aryan god or King of the Wood. Christianity (or at least, Catholicism), is really paganism in Semitic

guise ... [and] contemporary Europe has preserved classical paganism more than it wants to admit. (*The Myth of Disenchantment* 133).

In that classic work, myth is symbolically about “fertility in nature” and is formally structured by some “essential elements” of plot, such as: an initial violation; a redeeming (heroic) savior; and the ultimate removal of an “evil impediment” to restore an “original order” (Lehan 75-77). In the *Heart of Darkness* tradition analyzed over the following chapters, the ritual act of confession motivates the retrospective form of narration and illuminates the terrain of experience to be purified of evil. The generic formal/configuration informs the charismatic figure of the revolutionary ascetic, who wishes to save him- or herself through confession. This interdependent articulation of narrative and character, already well-apparent in Conrad’s original novel, indeed demonstrates what Illouz considers as the important continuity of religious (mythical) symbolism with the secular cultural practice of the therapeutic style.

Considered as a prototypical therapeutic narrative, *Heart of Darkness* carries the myth of purification into modernity as an essential symbol for salvation. But what are we to make of this wasteland’s repair, after all? As addressed in the following chapter, Marlow’s romantic quest to rescue and eliminate Kurtz stages a purifying process, but nonetheless fails to complete it. On the one hand, Marlow’s ascetic self-control introduces a seemingly redemptive mechanism with a purifying effect, as if it were part of a therapeutic operation that could eliminate the evil Kurtz. On the other hand, the suspended temporality of the primary narrative, as well as Marlow’s pessimistic final reflections, doubtlessly leaves the reader with an indeterminate, even nihilistic conclusion that mythic purification has failed. As Ian Watt writes of the relatively helpless situation,

Marlow's view of the "spiritual role of work for the individual," based on the Victorian ideals of ascetic renunciation and faithful duty, "constitute[s] virtually the whole of the meagre moral armament with which Marlow confronts Africa and Kurtz" (151).

The story is, after all, a product of Conrad's infamous "astrophysical pessimism" (Watt 154).¹⁸ Watt interprets Conrad's pessimistic outlook, based on the laws of thermodynamics, as a "standard feature of late Victorian thought": "Our earth had probably originated as an incidental by-product of cooling gases from the sun; and the formulation of the second law of thermodynamics by Lord Kelvin in 1851 seemed to mean that, like all else, the earth would end in cold and drought through the diffusion of heat-energy" (152). In the wake of the religious "traditional view of man's flattering eminence in the history, as well as design of the cosmos," thermodynamics emboldened "negative moral and political lessons from the newly-revealed vulnerability of man's situation in the temporal and spatial order" (154). Conrad's own astrophysical pessimism represents the universe as essentially cold and uninhabitable, a cosmological system in decay; little room is accorded to the real prospect of progressive repair, which seems out of bounds in the nineteenth century model.

The astrophysical pessimism of Conrad certainly makes more nihilistic use of thermodynamic ideas than Freud's energetics model. In the former, it is not just a matter of therapeutic pessimism about interminable biological conflict; there is rather an ontological pessimism about the imminent annihilation of life in general. *Destructive forces haunt the self like a shipwreck*. In *Heart of Darkness*, as Watt writes, "the threatening instability and darkness of the new cosmology becomes an immediate

¹⁸ For another description of Conrad's pessimism, see Hunt 76-79.

presence in the [secondary] narrative” of the steamboat journey (154). The association of energy with heat-death, neatly symbolized by the explosive steam engine, suggests the ultimate remainder of a demonic principle in the universe, irreducible beyond any purification. And yet, as we will see in Greene’s *A Burnt-Out Case*, the cultural logic of self-help therapy, romanticizing voluntarist purification, leaves its mark on the text through a moral-optimistic reform. Thus, by the mid-century, the new reign of ego psychological discourse redirects literary interest toward a post-Freudian, forward-looking therapeutic style. *In the twentieth century*, the *Heart of Darkness* tradition is unmoored from its astrophysical pessimism and, more importantly, records the triumph of *Homo communicans*, suggesting the new terrain of therapeutic selfhood.¹⁹

The rise of the therapeutic outlook, translated into a therapeutic narrative within the *Heart-of-Darkness*-tradition, results in a number of important formal changes. The monologic style of Conrad’s text had suggested the demonic suspension of salvific communication and therefore the incomplete elimination of evil. By contrast, in Greene’s *A Burnt-Out Case*, the obsolescence of religious hierarchies motivates a renewal of dialogic form, and elimination of the demonic is achieved through the purification of the therapeutic self. Greene’s novel translates Conrad’s political adventure into a therapeutic romance. The tropes of the therapeutic-emotional style are satirized in Constant’s *White Spirit*—amounting to a critique of the therapeutic ideology that has accompanied postmodernization. Through a pastiche of therapeutic tropes such as retrospection, expert authority, and self-help practice, Constant’s novel exposes the trauma of emotional labor and, in particular, the gendered determination of postcolonial subjectivity in

¹⁹ I borrow the idea of *Homo communicans* from Illouz, *Saving* 58.

contemporary emotional capitalism. In the dissertation's final chapter, I detail the links between the therapeutic stylization of the *Heart of Darkness* tradition and post-Vietnam psychology through analysis of novels by Vietnam veterans. The emergence of the clinical concept of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) encouraged empathy for the veterans' experience and laid the foundations for the confessional interpretation of Marlow's storytelling, thus concretizing the idea of Marlow's narrative speech as representative of a therapeutic process.

Illouz's underscoring of the significance of salvation for therapeutic culture should challenge us to rethink the canonization of modernism on the basis of Freudian psychology. Trilling also had, in some sense very similarly, understood that modern culture, and especially modern literature, fundamentally was concerned with salvation. However, he preferred the transgressive Kurtz to the ascetic Marlow, and thereby cemented a limited but still-prevailing view of the novel's emotional division, twisting its narrative into a controversial celebration of antinomian primitivism.

My study of *Heart of Darkness* as formative of therapeutic-literary tradition suggests how the text's immanent concern for the soul's salvation is rehabilitated in subsequent fiction *and* criticism by a therapeutic style emerging in Anglo-American culture. In *A Burnt-Out Case* and *White Spirit*, the adventure narrative is increasingly stylized away from a primitivist nostalgia for origins and toward the opposite pole: the progressive modernity of therapeutic selfhood. Similarly, the novels of the post-Vietnam tradition are embedded in the institutional and cultural history of therapeutic narrative and the genealogy of trauma. In modernism and beyond, the salvation of the modern soul has rested with the virtues of the therapeutic emotional style.

2: “Going at it Blind”: Imperialism and Marlow’s Narrative Psychology in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*

Perhaps it doesn’t matter what we say about
Conrad; it is enough that he is discussed.

—V.S. Naipaul, “Conrad’s Darkness”

“The approach to this Kurtz grubbing for ivory in the wretched bush was beset by as many dangers as though he had been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle,” Marlow notes (42), revealing in just this short remark the importance of the myth of romance for Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Literary critics have regarded the romance plot, or quest format, as a springboard for theorizing about the novel’s symbolic structure, instructive for understanding how the text has functioned as a switchboard for literary modernism and the discourse of psychology.

Drawing on tropes of the romance genre, the novel invites psychoanalytic speculation about desire following the psychological theory of romance as outlined by Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). As Frye defines the myth of romance, “[t]he essential element of plot in romance is adventure,” first and foremost in the form of a quest, the “major adventure” in the romance plot (186-187). In Frye’s view, the quest of the traditional romance plot seeks an object that would satisfy a “wish-fulfillment dream”: an object of desire capable of providing fantastic or idealized fulfillment (186). For Frye and other critics, who draw on the Freudian idea of wish-fulfillment, the romance plot is bound to an organization of desire that gives form to the adventure: “Translated into dream terms, the quest-romance is the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfillment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain

that reality” (193). “It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream” (27), in fact Marlow reminds us, seemingly resonant with such critical attention to the quest-romance’s translation by Frye into “dream terms.” Yet, Marlow’s adventure is not dreamlike in a straightforward sense. It is more accurately a nightmare: a hellish journey from which he cannot wake up. How could such a nightmare deliver the self from the so-called anxieties of reality, or satisfy the desiring self, as is traditionally part of the wish-fulfillment informing the resolution of the quest?

Indeed, Marlow’s sense of his quest *as a nightmare* indicates the narrative’s significant divergence from the traditional formula of the quest-romance. It registers the pessimism of Marlow’s narrative psychology. His frustrated pursuit after Kurtz is reflected in the language of ascetic separation that characterizes his discourse, suggesting the lack and even impossibility of his satisfaction. One may hypothesize that Marlow’s heart (to draw on the novel’s title-concept) is resigned to an unhappy state of mourning—in contradistinction to the typically happy ending of the quest-romance inspiring Frye’s formula. In Conrad’s novel, the romantic quest does not lead prospectively to the unification of the hero with the object of his desire; instead, Marlow’s groping journey through the Congo is the object of solemn retrospective analysis. In his role as secondary narrator, he remorsefully narrates the failure of his quest in front of the listening audience aboard the *Nellie*.

Heart of Darkness significantly modifies the structure of the traditional romance plot by recounting the failure of the quest that circumscribes unfulfillment through the absence of the quest-object. In this sense, the text’s romance plot accords with Fredric Jameson’s description of the modern “reinvention” of the romantic myth, that involves

the circumscription “of the fantastic as a determinate, marked *absence*” (*Political* 134). Marlow’s narrative in *Heart of Darkness* exemplifies this modern form of the romance plot. There is, in these terms, an affinity between the formal absence of fulfillment and Marlow’s ascetic narrative psychology of renunciation¹ that is produced in response to his encounter with the demonic Kurtz. In Frye’s words, demonic symbolism consists in “a presentation of the world that desire totally rejects” (147). The demonic symbol of Kurtz rebounds in the sense of Marlow’s emotional alienation, as molded by the latter’s “passage through some inconceivable world that had no hope in it and no desire” (70). Without any desirable conclusion to satisfy the wish-fulfillment motivating the adventure, the quest-romance collapses into a “tragic quest” (Wiesenfarth 185) culminating in Marlow’s estrangement.

Marlow’s employment as captain of the steamboat for the Company comprises the failed principal quest and is a fundamental source of his pessimistic narrative psychology. His tragic sense of failure must be understood as a consequence of his outlook regarding the once-esteemed employee, Kurtz. As Marlow ultimately learns, Kurtz has succumbed to the temptation of a vague and illicit hedonism, abusing his colonial authority to accumulate wealth and power in the African jungle. Marlow’s idealization of Kurtz’s nobility is dispelled as the former comes to understand the extent of the latter’s abuse of power. Yet, dying soon after he is wrenched from his post, Kurtz is nonetheless still

¹ In this particular account of asceticism (as typical of German idealism, which Conrad probably encountered in Arthur Schopenhauer), Marlow resembles the Hegelian “unhappy consciousness.” Hyppolite writes of this kind of alienated consciousness, “Consciousness, as such, is in principle unhappy consciousness, for it has not yet reached the concrete identity of certainty and truth, and therefore it aims at something beyond itself. The happy consciousness is either a naïve consciousness which is not yet aware of its misfortune or a consciousness that has overcome its duality and discovered a unity beyond separation” (190). See also 212-213 on asceticism as unhappy consciousness.

ironically remembered as a hero by his beloved Intended, whom Marlow consoles with a lie in the novel's final scene. If the idea of Kurtz stands in for the elusive object of the quest in a certain respect, it is the specter of his savagery and the sense of his vanishing from the scene that dismantles the circuits of desire that are symbolically routed through him, thereby defying the process of wish-fulfillment that he initially promises.

The perilous journey after Kurtz, who explodes the coherence of romantic desire, is marked by Marlow's anxiety over the nightmarish quality of primitive nature. At the end of the novel, Kurtz's demonic savagery is inimical to the respect that Marlow initially feels. Indeed, the specter of primitive savagery haunts Marlow's European crew, as evident for example in their fears over cannibalism. Marlow's quest therefore dramatizes not only the adventure through the dangerous rivers of the primitive jungle, but also the psychological intricacies of the modern colonial subject negotiating the threats of a frontier. Marlow's negotiation of these dangers are part of the first stage of his romantic quest, what Frye calls the "the perilous journey" (187), in which Marlow's wishful ideation of Kurtz is still palpable.

After weathering this stage of the perilous journey, Marlow's hopeful desire for Kurtz is soon transformed in confronting Kurtz's demonic personality. As Kurtz has enlisted the natives in an attempt to murder him and his crew, Marlow abandons any hope that Kurtz may deliver him from his anxiety. No longer in the guise of an enlightened, civilized subject, Kurtz inhabits a "lightless region of subtle horrors, where pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief, being something that had a right to exist—obviously—in the sunshine" (58). To Kurtz's descent into evil, Marlow responds with a kind of shock. Once Kurtz has retreated into the bush, Marlow voices this shock

when standing before Kurtz's empty hut (64), which symbolizes the "determinate, marked *absence*" as described by Jameson. The shift in Kurtz's narrative function here, from noble icon to primitive threat, introduces the second stage of the romance myth in Frye's interpretative framework, that of the heroic struggle, albeit depicted here in abortive form. The struggle that is feared between the Company and Kurtz's mercenary army ends ironically, with Kurtz absent and succumbing to a fit of madness before dying in exhaustion.

As this summary suggests, the promise of wish-fulfillment is displaced by the novel's ultimate interest in the abuses of imperialism and the psychological extremes of colonial subjectivity. As a novel of empire, *Heart of Darkness* is also a parable about greed. In the figure of Kurtz, who is after all an ivory trader, desire and satisfaction are connected to the notion of an evil temptation rather than a satisfying wish. In fact, Conrad alludes frequently to Gustave Flaubert's *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, including in the infamous final words that Kurtz utters in horror (Gott 126). Kurtz's demonic passion suggests satisfaction is a form of evil that stands in contrast to the positively ascetic character of Marlow. This contrast marks an important difference between the two characters who are often sometimes conflated. The latter's "ascetic aspect" (Conrad, *Heart* 3) alludes to the background significance of *salvation discourse* for Conrad's characterization of these two men. This discourse ambiguously aligns the novel with the tradition of the therapeutic emotional style.

Prior interpretations of Marlow's so-called ascetic aspect concern the analogy to Buddha and the quality of Conrad's knowledge of Eastern philosophy (Bonney 8).² In this chapter, I articulate Marlow's narrative psychology in terms of an ascetic morality that is not only immanent to the culture of empire, but acts as a bedrock for the therapeutic style that grows from out of the novel. Drawing on Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, I detail this ascetic aspect as part of the culture of imperialism that functions ideologically, confirming and legitimating the idea of imperial power. Through the background of salvation discourse, the novel's deviation from the plot of romance becomes symbolically significant: it signals Marlow's ascetic virtue, on the one hand making him capable of refusing temptation, but on the other hand, accentuating the sense of his tragic dissociation from the world. Desire is not fulfilled in the wished-for object, but rather in the ideal form of the ascetic subject; absence is sublated into renunciation, a compensatory taboo against desire. By way of his restraint, Marlow models the virtues of imperial culture and translates his failed journey into a quasi-confessional discourse about the ruses of consciousness

“The Presence of What He Can't Produce”: F.R. Leavis and Conrad's Obscurity

Misrecognition of Marlow's asceticism in the context of the romance plot has hindered interpretations of Conrad's novel, beginning notably with the formalist criticism of Frank Raymond Leavis. In *The Great Tradition* (1948), Leavis's concern for moral realism in the English novel tradition informs his belief that Conrad must realistically

² In *Conrad and Empire*, Stephen Ross considers Kurtz as embodying, and then overturning, Nietzsche's ascetic slave morality, but does not address Marlow as an ascetic (51-54).

represent Kurtz's horrors through Marlow's perspective.³ Marlow's unclear or inadequate perception of Kurtz is a sign of the failure of *Heart of Darkness* in this regard. In *The Great Tradition*, Leavis writes:

The stalking of the moribund Kurtz, a skeleton crawling through the long grass on all fours as he makes his bolt towards the fires and the tom-toms, is a triumphant climax in the suggestion of strange and horrible perversions. But Conrad isn't satisfied with these means; he feels that there is, or ought to be, some horror, some significance he has yet to bring out. So we have an adjectival and worse than supererogatory insistence on 'unspeakable rites', 'unspeakable secrets', 'monstrous passions', 'inconceivable mystery', and so on. (179)

For Leavis, Kurtz's perversions are aesthetically tolerable insofar as they are clearly intelligible; what Leavis objects to is Conrad's use of adjectives suggesting inadequate knowledge—which for him serves as proof of Conrad's technical failures. Yet, we should recall that Kurtz's "perversions" are aligned by Marlow with the text's title-concept, the metaphor of a "heart of darkness." Leavis's reading is contrary to the basic idea of obscurity in this metaphor. Drawing on his prejudice regarding the value of realism, Leavis assumes that Kurtz's perversions should be subject to clarity and illumination by Conrad. However, in simply diagnosing Conrad's adjectival obscurity as a sign of the author's failure, Leavis does not account for a more basic formal point: in the text, the language regarding Kurtz's horrors is the product of Marlow's ascetic narrative psychology.⁴ In other words, Leavis's interest in the author bypasses form, without attention to how Marlow's ascetic aspect informs the representation of Kurtz.

³ Similar readings include Douglas Brown (1961). On the significance of the English novel's moral realism for Leavis, see Robert Burden 33-35.

⁴ As Michael H. Levenson writes of Conrad's style, "Conrad depends ... on metaphor or simile to suggest psychological attitudes or states, while he scrupulously avoids direct psychological speculation" (*A Genealogy of Modernism* 5).

What is indeed at stake here is the form of desire that constitutes Marlow's relationship to the quest-object. In *The Great Tradition*, Leavis assumes that Conrad intends to represent a positive "daylight"⁵ epiphany, in the manner of a traditional romance, through the meeting between Marlow and Kurtz. On the basis of this assumed intention, Leavis effectively deduces that Conrad has failed according to the tenets of the romance tradition, since Kurtz and his deeds remain obscure. Certainly, Conrad's text does not present a positive epiphany in the sense of a clear or adequate perception of Kurtz. However, might this lack be constitutive of Conrad's modernist innovation with respect to the romance plot? Consider the terms which guide Leavis's evaluation. In Leavis's words, Conrad's failure consists in his attempt to produce "a 'significance' that is merely an emotional insistence on the presence of what he can't produce. The insistence betrays the absence, the willed 'intensity,' the nullity. He is intent on making a virtue out of not knowing what he means" (180). Effectively, accusing Conrad of failing to produce presence through a scene of epiphany, Leavis's reading adheres to the obsolete hermeneutics of pre-modern romance. As Jameson writes in *The Political Unconscious*, the term epiphany is "misleading" in modern literary criticism since "it suggests that in the secularized and reified world of modern capitalism, epiphany is possible as a positive event, as the revelation of presence" (122). While erroneously suggesting the possibility of epiphany, Leavis's evaluation of Conrad nonetheless raises an important question, which we may amplify: that is, what is the precise function of "absence" in Conrad's text? Leavis does not consider that Marlow's role may be to bring attention to such

⁵ I allude to Ryan's categorization of modernist mysticism (171), which, however, in turning to spiritualist philosophers such as Henri Bergson, sidesteps Jameson's point about absence.

absence. As outlined above, Marlow's narrative psychology develops through a specific organization of desire that informs the text's ascetic romance plot. It is the ascetic form of this desire that must be interpreted when considering how "absence" figures in the case of Marlow's narrative.

Leavis, in his moralizing over the eponymous "great tradition," searches for what Frye considers to be the apocalyptic symbolism of revelation⁶—an event providing clear, epiphanic knowledge, sometimes understood as a process of maturity.⁷ It is no surprise, then, that Leavis is unwilling to consider *Heart of Darkness* as technically successful: the novel lacks the apocalyptic symbolism of revealed truths, evidencing the supposed immaturity of Conrad's style with regards to the true potential of the English novel tradition, Leavis presumes. In search of the apocalyptic, Leavis however overlooks the text's overriding commitment to demonic symbolism, which, in representing a world that resists desire, amounts to the opposite of the apocalyptic, suggesting instead a parody of truth and the tragedy of obscurity. Indeed, the title-concept of a heart of darkness transforms the traditionally apocalyptic symbol of the heart (as the seat of revealed truths in the Christian tradition⁸) into a demonic symbol of obscurity,⁹ suggesting in this visual metaphor the impairment of presence as revelation.

Heart of Darkness abounds with demonic symbolism involving the figure of impaired vision. Examples speak, moreover, to a close association between obscured

⁶ This meaning of "apocalyptic" draws on the etymological and biblical significance of the apocalypse as the disclosure of truth.

⁷ On this point, see Richard Lansdown.

⁸ As Peter John McGregor writes, in Scripture the heart (Greek: *kardia*; Latin: *cordis*) is "the place that God searches and knows, the place of revelation and the refusal of revelation, and the place of God's indwelling" (183).

⁹ "To be ... darkened, in heart, is to be far from Thy face" St. Augustine writes of his own alienation from the apocalyptic truth of God in *Confessions* (19).

vision and the mindset of civilization—as if the absence of epiphany derived from the culture of imperialism. In an early quoted monologue by Marlow, the original Roman colonists in Britain, facing savagery beyond the empire, are characterized as “going at it blind ... [as] is very proper for those who tackle a darkness” (7). According to Marlow, enlightenment, traditionally associated with civilized culture, is but “a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker!” (6). Waiting for the steamboat to be repaired at the Manager’s station, Marlow discovers the sketch produced by Kurtz that depicts “a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch” (25). Symbolically resonating with this sketch, in order to convey his experience of piloting the steamboat Marlow encourages his audience to “[i]magine a blindfolded man set to drive a van over a bad road” (34). The earlier image of civilization, shrouded by clouds that contain its blinding flash, is figuratively extended to Marlow’s later description of a sunrise that disorients him as his boat nears Kurtz station, illuminating the dense “white fog ... and more blinding than the night” (39).

Obscurity produces particularly significant effects with regards to the possibility of self-knowledge. Marlow regularly notes the difficulty of obtaining knowledge regarding his experience of the journey into the Congo. Anticipating the absence of clear meaning that characterizes his meeting with Kurtz, Marlow states in the beginning of the first chapter that the Congo “seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me—and into my thoughts. It was sombre enough too—and pitiful—not extraordinary in any way—not very clear either. No, not very clear” (7). The notion of unclear reflection invoked by Marlow recalls the biblical origins of the novel’s title-concept, pertaining to the apocalyptic symbolism of Christian love that is

appropriated by Conrad. This appropriation transforms the apocalyptic symbol of the heart, as presented in 1 Corinthians 13 (a passage commonly termed “The Way of Love”), into a demonic symbol. In the biblical passage, adequate and salvific self-knowledge is promised through the eschatological fulfillment of love, culminating in a distinction between the obscurity of worldly vision (the way of sin) and the clarity of divine revelation (the way of love): “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. / For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (*King James Version*, 1 Corinthians 13: 11-12). *Heart of Darkness* broods over the worldliness of seeing through a “glass, darkly,” while neutralizing the payoff of the apocalyptic face-to-face encounter that reveals truth. Accordingly, it amplifies the sense of visual impairment that obscures the clarity of the face-to-face relationship, casting human existence as confined to a corrupt nature and without means of ascent to clear knowledge. In short, this is a symbolic inversion of the biblical passage.

A year before the initial serialization of *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad writes in a letter to his friend R.B. Cunninghame Graham, alluding to this biblical glass metaphor. “There is no morality, no knowledge and no hope; there is only the consciousness of ourselves which drives us about a world that whether seen in a convex or a concave mirror¹⁰ is always but a vain and fleeting appearance” (Conrad, *Letters* 71). Here, the verse which in the New Testament conveys the positive difference between worldly fallenness and Christ’s good news, signals for Conrad only elements of an unhappy

¹⁰ In Koine Greek, “glass” more commonly denotes a mirror, as Conrad’s allusion recalls.

consciousness,¹¹ incapable of salvation. Conrad's nihilistic appropriation of the biblical passage seemingly disqualifies the apocalyptic symbol of the face-to-face encounter that features in the ultimate moment of "The Way of Love." Yet, focusing on the sense of obscurity in the metaphor of reflection (part of the "glass, darkly" metaphor), Conrad does not venture to consider what remains of the verbal metaphor, speaking as a child. In the apocalyptic moment outlined in the biblical passage, the world is purified of its demonic content with not only visual but also discursive effects. Salvation is imagined discursively in terms of speaking like a "man" who has "put away childish things."

Although we will turn to the problem of salvific speech later, let us first highlight the principal features of the visual metaphor of obscurity. Of particular significance is that the obscurity indicated by the "glass, darkly" metaphor functions as a figure organizing Marlow's libidinal reaction to Kurtz, and hence helps to understand his response to the demonic symbolism informing the quest plot. On this basis, the absence of clear epiphany in the quest is not, as Leavis suggests, a technical failure but rather is linked to the psychological disposition of the heart in facing the demonic. Indeed, Marlow's ultimate statements regarding self-knowledge seem resigned to accepting an irreducible element of obscurity: "Droll thing life is—that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope for is some knowledge of yourself—that comes too late—a crop of inextinguishable regrets. ... If such is the form of ultimate wisdom then life is a greater riddle than some of us think it to be" (70). The notion of self-knowledge as an obscure riddle, whose only clues are past regrets, presents

¹¹ Unhappy or tragic, Conrad's idea of man's position with respect to the divine here fits within the tradition of *deus absconditus*, in the well-known sense as analyzed for example by Lucien Goldmann in *The Hidden God*.

the exact opposite of the (progressive) notion of divine communication promising future truth, as is traditionally part of the face-to-face encounter, provided by the apocalyptically clear self-reflection in the glass metaphor.

The biblical glass metaphor that Conrad appropriates from “The Way of Love” passage functions explicitly in the technique of delayed decoding that sets up the encounter between Marlow and Kurtz. Arriving at Kurtz’s station, Marlow surveys from his steamboat Kurtz’s hut. He discovers through his binoculars that what he originally regarded from a distance as ornamentation decorating Kurtz’s hut is in fact a collection of severed heads. Marlow recalls:

I directed my glass to the house. ... Now I had suddenly a nearer view and its first result was to make me throw my head back as if before a blow. ... These round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing. ... They would have been more impressive, those heads on stakes, if their faces had not been turned to the house. (57)

Here, through the glass of his binoculars, Marlow discovers not the apocalyptic truth of a face-to-face encounter, but rather recoils before demonic faces whose expressions, absent bodies, cannot reflect any truth incarnate. The heads, with visages hidden from Marlow (since turned toward Kurtz’s hut), convey only the idea of Kurtz’s evil. They signify his abandonment of the modern principle of efficiency (“There was nothing exactly profitable in these heads being there,” he notes) and suggest a descent into primitive enjoyment, that “Kurtz lacked restraint in his various lusts” (57). Ultimately, the scene reveals how Conrad’s appropriation of the glass metaphor is in the service of a demonic concept of obscurity. This obscurity results in the breakdown of *salvific communication*. Unlike a noble man, he has become more like a narcissistic child: his desires are based in a drive that cannot be satisfied by “magnificent eloquence” (66), and his regression to an

infantile state is represented in Marlow's observation that, upon death, Kurtz "was not much heavier than a child" (66). Kurtz is fully consumed by the malevolent forces of primitive nature, that communicate only destruction in "whisper[ing] to him things about himself which he did not know" (57). In such instances, the alien influence of inhuman suggestion that corrupts human desire, takes the place of apocalyptic self-knowledge.

Consequently, Kurtz's temptation in the wilderness brings about a demonic self-knowledge—not the restoration of the human being's divine image, but rather in the form of a moral transgression that ends in exhaustion. Evaluating Kurtz's final moments, Marlow asks, "Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge?" (69). Kurtz's enigmatic fate may be read in this respect as a parable about the temptation to evil, in contrast to Marlow's unhappy resignation to the controlling device of asceticism. When it comes to their comportment regarding this temptation, the two are positioned as antithetical. While, in chapter two, Marlow still attributes to Kurtz "the gift of expression" and assumes that he is capable of communicating "a sense of real presence," the nature of this gift is ambiguous, since it is understood to derive from "the heart of an impenetrable darkness" external to Kurtz (47). In chapter three, Marlow describes the faciality of this jungle, as if, having infected and subsumed Kurtz, this evil nature is now the primary persona against whom Marlow must now struggle. Following the harlequin's story of Kurtz's business at the beginning of chapter three, Marlow notes, "There was no sign on the face of nature of this amazing tale The woods were unmoved like a mask—heavy like the closed door of a prison" (56). Even nature, which Marlow faces in his heroic struggle, remains obscure.

The Status of Development for Marlow's Narrative Psychology

Where does all of this leave Marlow with respect to the teleological scheme of development implicit in the glass metaphor? After all, it is Marlow who observes Kurtz as if through a “glass, darkly,” and in witnessing Kurtz he gains some sort of knowledge, despite his reservations about its obscurity. Certainly, it is one thing to succumb to narcissistic satisfaction, as Kurtz does; it is a different thing to narrate another's descent and simultaneously attempt a diagnosis of its causes, as does Marlow. The former risks self-destruction; the latter approaches therapeutic rationality in the guise of clinical objectivity. “Ever any madness in your family?” the “old doctor” asks Marlow during his medical evaluation in chapter one, prior to his setting out for the Congo. With this question lingering, Marlow's observations about Kurtz resonate with the doctor's interests (12). Marlow diagnoses Kurtz thus: “His soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad. I had—for my sins, I suppose—to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself” (66). As if in reply to the doctor's question, Marlow's discourse affirms that madness *does* lurk within the anthropological family: at the primitive origins of humanity, in primitive man's “remote kinship” with civilization (36).

Attention to the dynamics of Marlow's “kinship” with primitive nature brings us to the horizon of the landmark psychoanalytic interpretation of *Heart of Darkness* by Albert J. Guerard, whose Jungian reading casts Marlow as an avatar of the therapeutic process, representing the ego confronting the id. The would-be hero's introspective

confessions¹² make explicit the unconscious conflicts between civilization and nature that are personified in Marlow's familial "brotherhood" with Kurtz; thus, even if Marlow is not a traditional quest-hero, he becomes a hero of the therapeutic style nonetheless. In these terms, Guerard's *Conrad the Novelist* (1958), which was completed with a Guggenheim Fellowship, had become a staple reference of critical attention throughout the 1960s-70s, as evident in the 1963 Norton edition of the novel that includes supplementary "Critical Debate" essays organized under the Jungian heading of "The Structure of the Descent into the Self" (Kimbrough vi). With this critical success, Guerard's interpretation of Conrad as a "psychological novelist" (*Conrad* x) is effectively the first comprehensive bridging of Conrad's novel with the psychoanalytic grand narrative of modernity, regarding the Marlow-Kurtz relationship as a symbol of the emotional division of modern selfhood (discussed in Chapter 1).

In *Conrad the Novelist*, Guerard uses Jungian psychoanalysis in his focus on Conrad's use of Marlow as narrator, arguing that Marlow's journey symbolizes a therapeutic encounter with the unconscious. Guerard's emphasis on archetypal symbolism—primarily the symbolism of the "night sea journey" (Jung)—advances an interpretation of the symbol of obscurity which has functioned as a "strong counter-argument" against Leavis's charges of technical failure (Burden 36). In Guerard's

¹² As Jung says, detailing religion in a "psychological sense," "complexes weighing on the soul are consciously transferred to the God-image. This, it should be noted, is the direct opposite of an act of repression, where the complexes are handed over to an unconscious authority, inasmuch as one prefers to forget them. But in any religious discipline it is of the highest importance that one should remain conscious of one's difficulties—in other words, of one's sins. An excellent means to this end is the mutual confession of sin (James 5: 16), which effectively prevents one from becoming unconscious. These measures aim at keeping the conflicts conscious, and that is also a *sine qua non* of the psychotherapeutic procedure" (*Symbols of Transformation*). Guerard interprets Kurtz as a confessional "God-image" in that sense.

reading, which uses a popularized psychoanalytic vocabulary, Marlow's adventure into the "heart of darkness" amounts to an archetypal "inner journey" of the self toward the depths of the primitive unconscious. Marlow's journey is framed by Guerard in terms of an "introspective plunge and powerful dream," thereby shifting the question of Marlow's desire, from the perspective of the romance-quest, into the framework of introspective psychotherapy (*Conrad* 39). The obscurities in Marlow's narrative signal the difficulty of conscious perception facing the obstructions of the unconscious. Alluding to Leavis, Guerard writes, "I am willing to grant that the unspeakable rites and unspeakable secrets become wearisome, but the fact—at once literary and psychological—is that they must remain *unspoken*. A confrontation with ... a facet of the unconscious cannot be reported through realistic dialogue" (42). The obscurity of Marlow's account is here elevated to a new level: it is the marker of a modern psychological novel detailing the intricate problems of introspection, as one finds in "the spiritual autobiography, the fictional *examen-de-conscience* and confession" (12). What is depicted symbolically through Marlow is the working of the human psyche, especially in extreme emotional or spiritual crises. In sum, Guerard judges the obscurity of Marlow's narrative not as a technical failure, but rather as evidence of Conrad's success in attempting to novelize the psychoanalytic idea of the ego's transformative encounter with the unconscious (39; see also Middleton 143).

For Guerard, the psychoanalytic impact of Marlow's story pertains to "the night journey into the unconscious, and confrontation of an entity within the self" (*Conrad* 39). Guerard introduces the idea of the night journey in these terms: it refers

to the archetypal myth dramatized in much great literature since the Book of Jonah: the story of an essentially solitary journey involving profound spiritual change in the voyager. In its classical form the journey is a descent into the earth, followed by a return to light. Sometimes the dream is literally an illuminating dream ... ; more often it is dramatized through an actual voyage and movement through space. A familiar variant concerns passage through a tunnel or other dark place; another describes descent into the depths of the sea. ...

... [T]he dream appears to be about the introspective process itself; about a risky descent into the preconscious or even unconscious. (15)

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow's night boat journey confronts him with the entity of Kurtz, representing the forces of "the Freudian id or the Jungian shadow or more vaguely the outlaw" (39). These forces of the unconscious must be mastered and defeated in a kind of spiritual combat or joust. Marlow's quest is symbolically directed toward the mastery or even purification of these forces, exemplified in the culmination of his struggle with the demise of Kurtz. Thus, the absence of revelation decried by Leavis becomes, for Guerard, the sign of therapeutic purification: "Hence the shock Marlow experiences when he discovers that Kurtz's cabin is empty and his secret sharer gone; a part of himself has vanished" (41).

This interpretation depends on the synecdochal framing of Marlow and Kurtz as figurative parts of a single psychic subject. Indeed, Marlow suggests such synecdochal framing in his claim that, in Kurtz's final moments, "[i]t is his extremity that I seem to have lived through" (70). Guerard's reading amplifies this moment of transindividual communication in Marlow's narrative, seeing in it systematic implications for understanding the dynamic of Marlow's attachment to Kurtz. Thus, the two share "brotherhood and loyalty" as facets of a single psyche (Guerard, *Conrad* 48). What is important for Guerard is that such terms convey the fundamental idea that Kurtz is Marlow's "double" (39), a figure suggesting a mimetic bond enabling the communication

of vital forces in one single subject. Kurtz reflects the repressed part of Marlow-as-ego. In this way, the notion of the double consolidates both characters as figurative aspects of the Freudian psyche. Thus, Marlow shares in Kurtz's horrors. He not only unconsciously identifies with them, but battles them in an attempt to purify himself of evil.

Though not without its shortcomings, this interpretation presents a widely-influential, systematic account of the hero's journey in *Heart of Darkness*, based on the archetypal symbolism of psychoanalytic self-development. Such development is seen through the mimetic doubling and struggle between the novel's two major characters. The terms of brotherhood and fraternity between Marlow and Kurtz have since become clichés in references to the text. As Rita Bode writes, looking back on generations of scholarship, "The theme of brotherhood, particularly as it plays itself out in the doubling of Marlow and Kurtz, has long been accepted as a fruitful approach to Conrad's work" (20). This theme continues to inform feminist readings that offer critiques of the patriarchy or misogyny embedded in fraternal loyalty,¹³ or, in contrast, draw inspiration for an alternate idea of sisterhood that empowers the women of the novel.¹⁴ In any case, in my view it is not self-evident that Marlow sincerely holds a bond with Kurtz; in an underappreciated relevant passage, it is actually the Manager, not Marlow, who, in a misrepresentation of the events, ironically accuses Marlow of being in cahoots with Kurtz (62). Furthermore, diverging from Guerard's theory of doubling, Marlow maintains, "I would not have gone so far as to fight for Kurtz" (27). In his emphasis on Marlow's sincere loyalty toward Kurtz, Guerard makes no attempt to

¹³ See Johanna M. Smith; and Joseph Allen Boone 362n25.

¹⁴ See Bode; Diana Knight; and Kathryn Marie Smith.

account for these ironies. Yet, the distance which they suggest is key to differentiating Marlow's asceticism from Kurtz's hedonism.

In referring Marlow's interest in Kurtz to an archetypal model configured in terms of a mimetic doubling, Guerard's interpretation skirts the need to account for the singularity of Marlow's distanced perspective, which may also be linked to a cultural ideal rather than a universal psychic process. Admittedly, Marlow does entertain a fascination for Kurtz in the text's early sections, while he is still under the spell of the idea of Kurtz's genius (28). Nonetheless, Marlow ultimately withdraws in aversion from Kurtz, as if in disgust. As Marlow recalls, Kurtz "had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot" (70). Again demonstrating his distance from Kurtz, whose sabotage is responsible for the death of the respected helmsman, Marlow bemoans, "I am not prepared to affirm the fellow [Kurtz] was exactly worth the life we lost in getting to him. I missed my late helmsman awfully" (50).

To put it differently, the universalizing approach of studies such as Guerard's landmark *Conrad the Novelist* clouds over the particular intricacies of Marlow's ascetic narrative psychology.¹⁵ As archetypal analysis, especially, tends to normalize and universalize the idea of the psyche's participation in a collective consciousness, Guerard's Jungian application of psychoanalytic theory is led astray from certain historically-specific particulars of Marlow's character. Is it merely a coincidence that Guerard sees therapeutic salvation afforded to the white European adventurer who

¹⁵ The therapeutic outlook of Guerard's analysis continues to inform such works as Nidesh Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego*, although Lawtoo's concept of the therapeutic process is more informed by the Girardian theory of mimetic desire than by Jungian psychology (3-5).

traverses a subordinate domain at the apex of high imperialism? In Guerard's reading, Marlow's perilous journey exists independent of such historical-specificity, and the particulars are tossed aside in favor of the theory of therapeutic introspection. Of course, Guerard's psychoanalytic reading of *Heart of Darkness* is encouraged by Marlow's statements regarding the *dreamlike* quality of his journey, but it is not necessarily certain that these statements must be reduced to an archetypal process.

Indeed, Guerard's idea of the psychological novel here risks misreading the text in two interrelated ways. By placing so much weight on Marlow's relation with Kurtz as an allegory of psychoanalytic self-development, Guerard's reading, despite its emphasis on symbols of obscurity, implies an apocalyptic resolution to Marlow's journey, where the ego is thought to successfully master the id. Is it really the case that *Heart of Darkness* resolves into a parable about successful or therapeutic mastery? Second, by highlighting the thematic importance of fraternity, Guerard overlooks the gender relations that inform Jung's conception of the night journey, which involves a mother-symbol to organize the process of rebirth. In the case of *Heart of Darkness*, who is the mother responsible for rebirth? The purportedly homosocial relationship between Marlow and Kurtz begs the question of how the steamboat, or river more generally, stands in for the Jungian process of birth. In order to understand the text's engagement with the metaphor of rebirth and psychoanalytic idea of self-development, it is necessary to further detail the precise kind of transformation that Marlow undergoes through the course of his steamboat journey. In doing so, it becomes clear that Marlow is not simply an archetype, but rather personifies the cultural ideals of imperialism, as understood by Said.

Any interpretation of self-development must accurately consider the initial and terminal phases of the developmental process. Guerard's interpretation, which relies on the assumption of Marlow's transformative encounter with the unconscious, exemplifies the dominant tendency in scholarship, which—arguments with Leavis notwithstanding—continues to search for apocalyptic meaning in the text. Apocalyptic symbols need not take the form of objective revelation: they may also involve the form of the subject's therapeutic rebirth, in which enlightenment and reason triumph over the primitive forces of nature.¹⁶ This interpretation is usually reinforced by the therapeutic light metaphors that inform the Jungian archetype: from the light of day, Marlow descends through the night (or the underworld), to be awakened or restored to reason by dawn. This line of thought is typical of moralist readings of the text. In Steve Ressler's words, such readings make Marlow "more safe, sane, and 'positive,' to mitigate the extremes of his doubt and soften the darker implications of his tragic vision" (3). In this respect, both Guerard and Leavis have underappreciated the full significance of the demonic within the novel by sanitizing it in their search for apocalyptic symbolism, moral or therapeutic. As evident in Marlow's final ambiguous meditations on light and darkness (75-77), however, the residue of the demonic prevents an apocalyptic return to the enlightenment of day. Indeed, it is by withholding the sense of apocalyptic awakening that Marlow's narrative makes sense specifically as a nightmare.

Readings which fail to attend to the text's demonic symbolism impose, from without, an apocalyptic sense that is hard to locate in the text by itself. The sanitization of

¹⁶ This tendency is already implicit in Leavis's equation of Marlow's quest with the search for epiphany. Even Said is drawn to framing Marlow's journey toward Kurtz in apocalyptic terms: for him, the former is "an inquiring Western mind trying to make sense of an apocalyptic revelation" (*Culture* 164).

Marlow's tragic vision, through emphasis on his progressive enlightenment, extends to critics such as Ian Watt, who characterizes the initial phase of Marlow's development as follows: "Marlow leaves a white civilization which masks death and darkness to confront the Dark Continent; and this will bring about a complementary transvaluation of the habitual assumptions which he initially shared with his society" (218). In a similar (mis)reading of Marlow's development, this time considering the end of Marlow's journey, Richard Lehan writes that Marlow discovers the mysterious "secret" of civilization in Kurtz, ultimately by recognizing that civilization is inseparable from a "destructive element" (164). These readings depend on the characterization of Marlow as an initially naive person who, in the course of his journey, is enlightened by discovering a shocking violence that was previously concealed to him.

Marlow's Transformation; or, How Marlow Becomes an Ascetic

In my view, Marlow's development is more tragic than is suggested in the above readings. In the first chapter of the novel, prior to his journey into the heart of darkness, Marlow already considers civilization to be a mask for the organized abuse of power. As a criminal, he knows the depravity of humankind. As he reports to the audience of the *Nellie* of his time in London before employment with the Company, "I was loafing about, hindering you fellows in your work and invading your homes, just as though I had got a heavenly mission to civilise you" (7). Marlow's initial position regarding civilization is ironic: he identifies with the European agents of such a mission, but only on the basis of the dissonant idea of civilization as violence. Moreover, Marlow professes skepticism

regarding Christian virtue, undermining any sympathetic identification with European ideals of progress. After he takes his position as steamboat pilot for the Company, his aunt praises him for his participation in the civilizing mission as a kind of developmental process. The civilizing mission will “wean those ignorant millions from their horrid ways” (12). His cynical reaction to his aunt’s enthusiasm for the mission exhibits his clear distrust of the developmental ideal of progress. Countering his aunt’s belief in the charity of the civilizing mission, he “hint[s] that the Company was run for profit” (12). Thus, in the initial stages of his journey, Marlow does not entertain any illusions regarding the benevolence of civilization or developmental progress. His cynical comments suggest his disidentification with the surrounding culture. In this respect, he is not committed to the illusions of civilization, as are supposedly revealed by Kurtz’s savagery. Instead, Kurtz’s deeds seem only to confirm his initial hypothesis regarding the violence that discredits the civilizing process.

With these initial features in mind, we can trace the development of Marlow’s psychology to its terminal phase. What changes in the production of Marlow’s narrative psychology is his relationship to what, in classical psychology, falls under the category of the passions, which are personified by Kurtz. The primary narrator’s description of Marlow in the narrative frame in chapter one of the novel offers some evidence of this change: “He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol” (3). His body is deprived and sickly, suffering from ascetic discipline; this austere restraint is in marked contrast from the enthusiastic thieving that characterized his initial period in London. Marlow no longer derives satisfaction by thievery: recoiling from the example

of Kurtz, his sovereign will to power, so to speak, has been dominated to a kind of virtuous ascetic passivity. On the basis of this ascetic aspect, Marlow is certainly antithetical to Kurtz, who continues to satisfy his lusts through violence. Extending the pronounced characterization of Marlow as an ascetic, the primary narrator further adds: “he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower” (6). This last description of Marlow “without a lotus-flower” recalls the central motif of absence in the text’s negotiation of scenes of epiphany, but intimates the Nietzschean inversion of the ascetic ideal as a will to nothingness. As an ascetic who is paradoxically without enlightenment, the figure of Marlow must be read in continuity with the text’s generally demonic deconstruction of the tropes of the romance-quest.

The significance of Marlow’s asceticism as a feature of his psychological development must be read along with the ironic praise for faith that he announces in the novel’s third chapter. For Marlow, faith—traditionally defined as belief in immaterial things—amounts to the disavowal of material reality. In the psychoanalytic formula of “I know that, but ...,” the process of disavowal favors the invisible over the visible, or absence over presence, in the basic refusal of conscious perception. As an expression of disavowal, faith for Marlow is also then an important key to understanding the significance of all the obscure perceptions lining his narrative. His commitment to faith understood in this negative sense—of the production of absence, or the repression of the real—is metaphorized in the blindness and ignorance that overdetermine his account of primitive nature. Regarding faith, Marlow says:

The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells, too, by Jove!—breathe dead hippo, so to speak, and not be contaminated. And there, don’t you see? Your strength comes in, the faith in your

ability for the digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in—your power of devotion, not to yourself, but to an obscure, back-breaking business. (49)

Faithful work amounts to a repressive *burial* of affective sensuality, resulting in the disavowal of primitive nature. As another example of the novel's demonic symbolism, faith here recalls Conrad's inversion of the glass metaphor, through the shared emphasis on the breakdown of (salvific) communication. In this passage, faith does facilitate communion with spirit, but rather consists in a denigrated mode of relationity, as work produces a state in which the perception of the outside is inhibited by devotion to imperial business.

The significance of disavowal in Marlow's references to the contamination of "dead hippo" meat is enmeshed with Marlow's anxieties regarding savage cannibalism.¹⁷ In the course of Marlow's journey, the colonialist fantasy of savage cannibalism is applied to the conscripted natives on the Company's steamboat, and haunts the crew members who may have to resort to cannibalism in the case of a shipwreck. Marlow notes that the native conscripts "did not eat each other before my face: they had brought along a provision of hippo-meat which went rotten, and made the mystery of the wilderness stink in my nostrils" (56). These details suggest how cannibalism represents an economy of the appetites and hints at the violent gratification of desire that is thought to attend savagery. In this respect, Marlow's comments project onto the natives the "fantasy of a pre- or rather non-Symbolic consciousness, of a condition wherein desire is

¹⁷ In psycho-biographical terms, Marlow's anxiety recalls Conrad's own, as may be traced to the first "realistic story" the latter remembers (recounted to him by his great uncle): "Once an officer in Napoleon's army, the old gentleman can never forget the retreat from Russia when, near starvation, he and some comrades had made a meal off a Lithuanian dog" (Said, *Joseph Conrad* 155). See also William Bonney, on the threat of "violent self-consumption" (225n31).

immediately satisfied, wherein being is pure and unmediated by culture,” that is, representing savagery as “a state of *jouissance*” (Jackson 102). While the hippo-meat defers the savage violence of cannibalistic enjoyment, the crew on the steamboat is hardly better off (41). The tenuous status of the ascetic discipline that restrains primitive desire is confirmed by the demonically unrestrained passions of Kurtz, who may be suspected of resorting to cannibalism.

As the topic of the appetites suggests, civilized and primitive are distinguished only through the quality of their separation from nature. Civilization is separated from nature as it invents means to compensate for inhibited savage desire. In a monologue describing “what particular region of the first ages a man’s untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude—utter solitude without a policeman,” Marlow comments that “you all [in the audience] are each moored with two good addresses like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal—you hear—normal from year’s end to year’s end” (47). In this passage, the satisfaction proper to civilization is described as a process of controlled mediation, represented by the butcher, whose delicately specialized handling of the carcass separates the consumer from the immediate violence of nature. Through this logic, the butcher’s activity recalls Marlow’s aunt’s maternal definition of civilization as the outcome of “weaning” (12). Both activities displace immediacy onto the veneer of a substitute object. Marlow’s idea of savage nature is thus redolent of the typical nineteenth century view of civilization as a mask over nature, anticipating the so-called hermeneutics of suspicion.¹⁸

¹⁸ On this view of nature, see Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx” 277; and Paul Ricoeur 33-36.

The importance of masked nature here also draws attention to Marlow's immunological response to the primitive. As Marlow notes, "You can't breathe dead hippo waking, sleeping, and eating, and at the same time keep your precarious grip on existence" (41). Marlow's discourse on the intolerable hippo-meat speaks to how civilization acts as a controlling mechanism that inhibits or represses natural forms of satisfaction: getting a grip on existence requires "the faith in your ability for the digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in," as invoked in the earlier discussion of disavowal (49). In this sense, burial metaphorizes psychic repression. As Sigmund Freud writes in "The Unconscious," "to repress the development of affect is the true aim of repression" (127).¹⁹ Marlow's concern for burying the stinking hippo meat illustrates the immunological response of a psyche confronted with a reality that it struggles to negate.²⁰ Encountering the primitive, Marlow adapts the tactic of repression as necessary for the containment of savagery, consequently displaced to a purportedly safe position of exteriority.

Beyond the moral and therapeutic terms of Leavis and Guerard, the representational effects of repression in Marlow's narrative psychology point to another problematic: that is, the ideological effects of civilization. In his essay "The 'Unspeakable Rites' in *Heart of Darkness*" (1966), Stephen A. Reid stresses Marlow's commitment to ignorance, which may be understood as an ideological effect in this sense. Reid's interpretation suggests that Marlow's characteristic ignorance is part of an immunological apparatus, differing from Leavis's evaluation and Guerard's allegorization. In this view, ignorance is like an ideological effect that protects Marlow

¹⁹ I owe this salient reference to Henry Staten 720.

²⁰ On immunological negation, see Byung-Chul Han 1-3.

from knowing too much; it registers Marlow's safe distance from Kurtz and his evil. Reid argues that Marlow's use of phrases like "unspeakable rites" or "inconceivable mystery" is motivated by the fact that "[i]t is not only that Marlow does not know specifically what the rites are—he will not learn. The point is simply that if one is going to admire the bestial in man, it is safer not to know too much about it. ... He dare not go further in discovering within himself the kinds of bestiality he vaguely understands to have been in Kurtz" (54). Reid interprets the novel's motif of obscurity as an outcome of Marlow's limits as a narrator. Reid's point, that Marlow understands "it is safer not to know too much about it," highlights the protective role of civilization in the capacity of a controlling or exclusionary mechanism. Whereas Leavis sees in Marlow the failure of a moralist, and Guerard, the success of a psychologist, Reid's interpretation anticipates the culturalist approach to Marlow as an ideologue of empire that emerged in the late 1970s,²¹ culminating in Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), which reflects post-Cold War interest in the theorization of capitalism as ideology.

When the novel is seen as expressing the contradictions of capitalism, Marlow's preference for ignorance is symptomatic of his ideological disavowal of colonial experience. Obscurity is the symbolic correlate to his conservative withdrawal into the contemplative position of ascetic observer-narrator. As in the case of the Manager (18), ignorance is praised as a technique for eliminating inefficient distractions that prevent the successful performance of duty. Neither the Manager nor Marlow will learn of the horrors of imperialism precisely, since their ultimate allegiance to the business of empire manifests in the form of a convenient perceptual exclusion. As I consider below,

²¹ Other examples of this trend include Bonney's *Thorns* (1980); Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1981); and *Contexts for Conrad*, eds. Keith Carabine et al. (1993).

Marlow's narrative psychology develops through increasing abstraction that serves as a kind of protective enclosure, preventing empathetic narration and extricating him from a sense of active participation. In this sense, the question of the therapeutic process, as popularized by Guerard, is not altogether rejected in the cultural analysis of ideology: rather, the psychoanalytic terms of the therapeutic interpretation are historicized in connection to a cultural discourse of power and mastery that reifies the status of the imperial ego. Indeed, Achebe had already begun the demystification of the grand narrative of psychoanalytic self-development in his critique of the critics' fascination with "reducing Africa to the role of props for the breakup of one petty European mind" (788).

Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), a masterpiece grounded in the author's career-long interest in Conrad,²² best represents the impact of cultural analysis for the interpretation of *Heart of Darkness*. In his study of empire, Said philosophizes about the complexities of Marlow's narrative psychology to construct a broad and systematic theory of culture and imperialism based on the conceit of *ambiguity* in Conrad's novel. The story about empire—alternating between glorifying it, and at times desecrating it—is framed as key to the global imagination of Western imperialism, in the late-nineteenth century period of European high imperialism, as well as the contemporaneous period of American neo-imperialism. In his systematization of Conrad's two alternating visions of imperial glory and its desecration, Said recasts Georg Lukács's conception of the "antinomies of bourgeois reason"²³ for the purposes of his literary analysis of culture,

²² Said had focused on Conrad already, almost 30 years earlier, in *Joseph Conrad*.

²³ This idea about Lukács is adapted from J.M. Bernstein's *The Philosophy of the Novel*, which makes a similar point in discussion of Said's earlier work (107).

understood as a site embattled by history. In relation to this antinomy, cultural hegemony is analogized to the stasis of bourgeois contemplation, and history to the flux of transformative praxis. In these terms, Said interprets Conrad's novel as an important starting point, and continually relevant resource, for understanding the dialectics of modern culture—that is, the negation and construction of tradition; one reviewer, gesturing to the centrality of Conrad's novel for this theoretical project, describes Said's study as a "journey into the Heart of Whiteness" (Eber 3).

Said explains the special significance of Conrad's ambiguous representation of empire in a chapter titled "Two Visions in *Heart of Darkness*." On the one hand, the novel appears to be a quest about mastery: "Conrad wants us to see how Kurtz's great looting adventure, Marlow's journey up the river, and the narrative itself all share a common theme: Europeans performing acts of imperial mastery and will in (or about) Africa" (23). This mastery intends to firmly hold the world still, under control. In this first vision, which may be called ideological (in contradistinction to the adversary second vision described below), the narrative functions as an discursive-cultural tool for "resurgent empire," expressing an ideology that justifies and confirms the idea of imperial hegemony over colonized peoples (26). According to Said, this first vision extends even to the postmodern defense of micropolitics, prioritizing individual self-development over the macro-political issue of colonial liberation. The psychoanalytic question of Marlow's salvation through the therapeutic process may be read as an originary example of this priority at the expense of the macropolitical problem of liberation.

On the other hand, in contrast to the first ideological vision of resurgent empire, Said identifies in *Heart of Darkness* a second, *adversary vision* that works to destabilize fantasies of Western mastery, as in Conrad's "ironic distance" from imperial culture (23). In attending to all the failures and misdirections of imperialism (some discussed below), Conrad effectively "*dates* imperialism, shows its contingency, records its illusions and tremendous violence and waste" (26). This vision of the infirmity of the empire is contrary to the first ideological vision. The second vision sees *beyond* the historically contingent power and limits of the empire. Through the second vision, Conrad's literary modernism is crystallized in terms of an adversarial movement in opposition to imperial culture.²⁴ Drawing on the (Kantian) philosophical language that informs Said's categories, one might say that Conrad's modernist-adversarial gesture dispels the transcendental illusion of the empire by drawing attention to its contingent limits.²⁵

The two discrepant visions of imperialism concretize Said's ego-psychological theory of literary culture. In Said's view, narrative fiction and history are premised on the "recording, ordering, observing powers of the central authorizing subject, or ego" (79). Narrative as cultural ideology reifies these powers of the ego; the underlying psychology of the authoritative-imperial subject serves as the foundation for the European novel:

Without empire, I would go so far as saying, there is no European novel as we know it, and indeed if we study the impulses giving rise to it, we shall see the far from accidental convergence between the patterns of narrative authority constitutive of the novel on the one hand, and, on the other, a complex ideological configuration underlying the tendency to imperialism. (70)

²⁴ Said considers Flaubert's *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (163) as one example of this adversarial modernism; Thomas Mann's *Death of Venice* may be read as another.

²⁵ On transcendental illusion in the context of Lukács, see Austin Sarfan, "Transcendental Illusion & Commodity Fetishism from Kant to Rancière" 8-13.

The patterns of narrative authority act as a supplement to a basic imperial will to power. The first vision in *Heart of Darkness*, that speaks to the power of the empire, is an instance of this mode of narrative that confirms the impulses of the imperial ego, in “keeping the subordinate subordinate, the inferior inferior” (80). With this definition, Said theorizes narrative as a technique of hegemony that, in its rhetoric of mastery, delimits a domain subject to imperial control.²⁶ He thus highlights the ways in which narratives ideologically reinforce the self-concept of imperial subjectivity, preparing the self to subordinate others. Of imperialism and colonialism,

[t]here was a commitment to them over and above profit ... which, on the one hand, allowed decent men and women to accept the notion that distant territories and their native peoples should be subjugated, and, on the other, replenished metropolitan energies so that these decent people could think of the *imperium* as a protracted, almost metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior, or less advanced peoples. ... The will, self-confidence, even arrogance necessary to maintain such a state of affairs can only be guessed at, but, as we shall see in the texts ... these attitudes are at least as significant as the number of people in the army or civil service, or the millions of pounds England derived from India.

For the enterprise of empire depends upon the *idea* of *having an empire*, as Conrad so powerfully seems to have realized, and all kinds of preparations are made for it within a culture. (10-11)

²⁶ In this respect, Said’s cultural analysis of narrative-as-delimitation recalls Foucault’s own concept of the “tragic structure” of cultural “limit-experiences” detailed in the famous “Preface to the 1961 Edition” of *History of Madness*: “We could write a history of *limits*—of those obscure gestures, necessarily forgotten as soon as they are accomplished, through which a culture rejects something which for it will be the Exterior; and throughout its history, this hollowed-out void, this white space by means of which it isolates itself, identifies it as clearly as its values. For those values are received, and maintained in the continuity of history; but in the region of which we would speak, it makes its essential choices, operating the division which gives a culture the face of its positivity: this is the originary thickness in which a culture takes shape. To interrogate a culture about its limit-experiences is to question it at the confines of history about a tear that is something like the very birth of history” (xxix).

As Said's language suggests, narratives in the mode of ideology work as technologies of power: While perhaps subtler, this kind of narrative discourse keeps the native *under control* as similar to the hard power of "the army" that subordinates colonized peoples.

This function of narrative-as-power would have disastrous consequences in the modern West, given that the West not only authorized cultural narratives about its superiority, but also made use of its technological prowess to oppress and subordinate those rendered inferior. As Said writes, "All cultures tend to make representations of foreign cultures the better to master or in some way control them," but "not all cultures make representations of foreign cultures *and* in fact master or control them" (100). *Heart of Darkness* speaks to the historically-specific, reflexive relationship established between representation and technical mastery in the West. Marlow, as an analytic narrator-observer, is superior to the primitive nature that he resists through ideological difference and technical know-how. He is the virtuous self-controlled businessman of the Company, who does not fall victim, like Kurtz, to the primitive impulses in nature. All of these elements are part of the first vision in *Heart of Darkness*, confirming the power of the empire.

At one level, the primary technology in Marlow's adventure—the steamboat—obviously symbolizes resurgent empire in its capacity for imperial mastery of nature. Yet, the success of the boat is not without difficulties. Consider the episode at the end of the first chapter, in which Marlow is supposed to assume authority of the steamboat after his arrival at the Central Station. Because the steamboat has just sunk under the command of the Manager prior to Marlow's arrival, Marlow must wait now for more rivets to repair the boat and ensure its panels are watertight. "What I really wanted

was rivets, by heaven! Rivets. To get on with the work—to stop the hole. Rivets I wanted. ... and rivets were what really Mr. Kurtz wanted, if he had only known it” (28). As part of the steamboat metaphor, rivets are crucial for the maintenance of imperial power and hence the figurative authority of the ego facing external pressure from without. The rivets secure the vessel and, figuratively, the ego. Without rivets to hold back the water, the boat will be shipwrecked. Furthermore, Marlow’s claim that Kurtz must also have desired rivets presages the terms of the latter’s ironic demise: if Kurtz “wants” rivets (unbeknownst to himself), this means that he is incapable of withstanding the pressure of nature outside the empire. Hence, Kurtz metaphorically sinks in the wilderness “as the sea closes over a diver” (33). As a psychological metaphor, rivets, to wit, guarantee the structural integrity of the ego by excluding external pressures that are encountered in the process of fronting (on the ego as a frontier creature, see Chapter 1). As such, the rivets are essential components for channeling and securing imperial mastery further into the jungle. And since the boat has just been sunk by the Manager prior to Marlow’s arrival, even the success of Marlow’s journey is called into question. This is why Said stresses the ambiguity or duality of Conrad’s vision.

Conrad’s adversarial vision of empire is an irreducible dimension of the novel as modernist literature. In Said’s view, the deconstruction of imperial authority and the rupturing of the authorial ego become the principal concerns of literary modernism in its ironic-adversarial engagement with the imperial world-system and the contemporaneous conventions of realism.²⁷ Indeed, Said’s postcolonial conception of modernism anticipates the now-canonical idea of subversive unknowing (discussed in Chapter 1).

²⁷ For another account of the engagement between modernism and imperialism, see Jameson, “Modernism and Imperialism.”

Literary modernism transforms “the triumphalist experience of imperialism” into “extremes of self-consciousness,” symbolizing the *destabilization* of the ego by “external pressures on culture from the *imperium*” (188). Here, the second vision takes revenge on the first. In the second vision of empire, there is a modernist subversion of the tenets of imperialism, focalized through the authorial ego (Marlow) who is destabilized by external pressures (the primitive); these external pressures dispel the empire’s superiority (the death of Kurtz). With attention to the parallax view provided by Conrad’s two visions of empire, Marlow’s narrative is thus suspended between the ego’s illusory salvation and the demonic forces of nature. This suspension—in my view, accurately describing the mood of the novel’s conclusion—points to a Conradian pessimism that stands in contrast to Guerard’s therapeutic optimism.

Let us consider the problem of salvation as Said understands it, which in a way updates Trilling’s claim about the importance of spiritual salvation for modern literature. “Salvation in this context is an interesting notion. It sets ‘us’ off from the damned,” Said writes (69). Yet, for Said, salvation is an expression of ideology: it confers false magnanimity on the reified colonial subject supposed to be protected from corruption by the outside. In contrast, the second vision negates the reified limits constituting the triumphant ego, exposing the self back to the world that exists beyond containment. Despite its ideology of superiority and transcendence, the ego homologous with empire “cannot be antiseptically quarantined from its worldly affiliation” (xiv).

Thus, salvation for Said ends in the collapse of reified limits. This is why Said highlights the devastating return of the repressed, so to speak, in the case of Kurtz’s failed asceticism. The ironic fate of Kurtz as the “imperialist who attempts self-redemption” is

typical of “modern versions” of the imperial personality (163). Unsettling the colonial ideology of control, in this case nature “purged of its troubling resistances to their control of it” takes revenge on the imperial personality by compromising the once-purified boundaries. In literary modernism, salvation is “doomed ironically to suffer interruption and distraction, as what they had tried to exclude from their island worlds penetrates anyway” (163). The failure of Kurtz in his withdrawal from civilization serves as a “realistic” reminder “that no one can in fact withdraw from the world into a private version of reality” (163). This fate undermines the ideal of mastery and authority that is traditionally modeled by the imperial persona (110). Kurtz’s demise is a parable in demonstrating that the world, essentially communal, cannot be bent merely to serve an imperial will to power. In this way, his fate illustrates the “continuity” between Conrad’s modernism and the “institutional aspects of the novel form itself, where the aberrant individual is usually disciplined and punished in the interests of corporate identity” (163). Indeed, the Manager, in recalling Kurtz from his post, aims to enact the interests of discipline and punishment by replacing the aberrant (or perverse) Kurtz with a more *obedient* agent. If this signals the failure of imperial sovereignty, it also showcases the success of imperial discipline through hierarchical organization and technological superiority, two modes of imperial mastery.

Steamboat Discipline

The notion that the interests of corporate identity are consolidated in Marlow’s steamboat journey introduces the question of how the steamboat functions as a symbol of

disciplinary power. In fact, the distinction between disciplinary and sovereign power informs Marlow's own work ethic that provisionally functions as a means of salvation-through-efficiency, as Said highlights (69). Consider the scene of discipline narrated by Marlow in chapter two, wherein the African helmsman, subject to Marlow's command, is speared by the primitive group attempting (by the order of Kurtz) to ward off the Company's arrival: "Poor fool! If he [the speared helmsman] had only *left that shutter alone*. He had no restraint, no restraint—just like Kurtz—a tree swayed by the wind. As soon as I had put on a dry pair of slippers, I dragged him out, after first jerking the spear out of his side, which operation I confess I performed *with my eyes shut tight*" (51; emphasis added). Here, the theme of perceptual exclusion—specifically through the symbol of inhibited vision—features doubly in Marlow's work ethic. Since the helmsman dies attempting to observe the attacking group, Marlow's remark that "If he had only left that shutter alone" betrays the idea that here, the duty of not looking is taken to be a means for salvation. The helmsman's lack of restraint, exemplified in his temptation to look, causes his death. Nowhere is the psychology of Marlow as a disciplined imperial personality "worthy of his hire" (12) more on display than in his confession that he administers last rites with his eyes closed. Marlow is worthy of his hire because he is psychologically capable of refusing temptation; his virtuosity in efficiency in this case amounts to an odd sort of worldly salvation through quarantining the outside.

In short, discipline for Marlow consists in *not* looking at the external world. Disciplined work is a form of inhibited or obscured vision; it represses the perception of the outside. This disciplined inhibition functions as a technique of imperial mastery; as in the metaphor of perceptual burial and necessary rivets, exclusion enables the ego to resist

primitive nature. In the comparison of the helmsman to Kurtz, who both have “no restraint,” Marlow demarcates two important categories. These categories echo the convention of Victorian fiction, according to Levenson, in which “[t]ypically ... two figures divide between passivity and activity, asceticism and sensuousness, contemplation and will, restraint and license; and, also typically, the dramatic emphasis comes to fall upon the passive, ascetic, contemplative and restrained individual who becomes the center of moral discrimination” (*Modernism* 123). On the one hand, there are those in the novel who succumb to the impulse to look, and through such license provide opportunity for demonic infection. Kurtz dared to see and suffered the consequence of his temptation: his final stare is “wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness” (Conrad, *Heart* 70). On the other hand, there are those who suppress the temptation to look; through this perceptual closure, they are limited to obscure knowledge, but are protected from violation. This latter mode is disciplined by way of its inhibition. Such inhibition amounts to a fortification of the imperial ego as it attempts to maintain its superiority over external forces, falling under Said’s so-called first vision.

As Bode highlights (22), Marlow’s labor induces him into a private world of his own. He praises *his own exclusion*: “I like what is in the work Your own reality—for yourself—not for others—what no other man can ever know” (29). Following the terms of Said’s ideology critique, attention to Marlow’s work ethic as an ironic form of estranged salvation challenges Guerard’s optimistic-therapeutic interpretation. Losing contact with the world as a result of the prohibition against looking, Marlow’s obsession with work resembles a modern neurosis, “sometimes known as ‘touching phobia’”

(Freud, *Totem and Taboo* 35). The idea, in Said's focus on work, is that Marlow's neurosis is the tragedy of his own psychic numbing.

The journey through the heart of darkness brings about Marlow's narrative psychology as excluding the world becomes necessary to ward off the source of demonic molestation. Marlow's ascetic transformation, so to speak, may be read as the galvanization of a defense against forces that disrupt imposed limits. One can indeed locate traces of Marlow's dissociation from the world, and retreat into a private space, throughout his changing language. As nature presents obstacles to his sense of imperial mastery, Marlow abandons the empathetic language that suggests commensurability between the ego and the natural world. Instead, he comes to rely on the language of abstraction that, in its idealization, obscures the perception of particular events and provisionally wards off the intrusion of a disordered reality.

At a certain level, Marlow's abstraction may be read as the outcome of a process of maturation in contrast to Kurtz's regression. As Morton Levitt writes, "Marlow's maturity as a narrator ... is possible only after he has been to the Congo" (54). Why? The initial form of Marlow's Romantic ambition to enjoy nature, still predominant in his narration of "Youth,"²⁸ is dispelled after his experience of evil and his resulting ascetic renunciation of the world in *Heart of Darkness*. The journey initiates Marlow into adulthood, if that may be based on a disciplined work ethic. In *Heart of Darkness*, this work ethic consists in the inhibition of temptation, thus partially resembling the Protestant ethic in the Weberian sense. Yet, unlike Protestant asceticism, Marlow's renunciation of the world is neither an expression of his otherworldly salvation, nor

²⁸ See 164, 171, 176, 180.

simply a sign of his vocation for innerworldly success. In Marlow's case, ascetic labor is reduced to a parody contemplative withdrawal, amplifying the ironies of the capitalist-spirit in ways that even Max Weber could not have imagined. As Watt notes, Marlow's own work ethic is more akin to that described by Professor Teufeldröckh in Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, who declaims "the folly of that impossible Precept, *Know thyself*; till it be translated into this partially possible one, '*Know what thou canst work at*'" (Carlyle 118 in Watt 150). Kurtz desecrates the lofty *impossible* precept of self-knowledge through his descent into evil, while Marlow modestly takes over the remaining *partially possible* precept regarding work. Consistent with the Victorian ideal of work more generally, here work acts as "a defence against temptation, hedonism, and loss of faith" (Watt 150). In its ironic-secular form, Marlow's asceticism comprises such an attempted defense, suggesting how "Conrad gave the hermit figure a key form in the development of his own theme of limitation ... [as] the ascetic ideal becomes absurd and the hermit himself a prey to the evils which he seeks to reject" (Wiley 73).

Empathy and Abstraction: Mutations of Marlow's Language

The most instructive passage evidencing Marlow's initial psychology—that is, prior to his ascetic transformation—relates his vision of Africa from aboard the passenger ship that brings him to the African coast:

The idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform sombreness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion. The voice of the surf heard now and then was a positive pleasure, like the speech of a brother. It was something natural, that had its reason, that had a meaning. (13)

Two temporal perspectives contribute to the dissonance of this narration: on the one hand, there is the perspective of Marlow contemporaneous to the experience, for whom the surf speaks like a brother. On the other hand, there is the perspective of Marlow subject to a confessional increment, having unlearned his delusions. In this second viewpoint, Marlow has recognized the ironic “truth of things” that is concealed by the illusion of the initial impression. The presumed empathetic communication indicates Marlow’s (short-lived) self-confidence;²⁹ the Romantic impression of his fraternity with nature is however soon overwritten by tragic consciousness of nature’s cruelty and a hopeless desire for separation. In the first chapter, Marlow’s juxtaposition of these two narrative modes, of empathetically narrated monologue and dissonant memory narrative, as in the above example, dramatically anticipates the conflict between self and world which arises in his epistemological unmooring during the journey. In a similar fashion, the Eldorado Exploring Expedition undergoes a more radical, because mortal, unmooring, after the uncle of the Manager arrogantly advises his nephew to “trust to” nature (33).

Beginning with his arrival at the African coast, Marlow’s figurative language confuses organic nature and artificial mechanism, suggesting a breakdown in the logic of empathetic communication. In this respect, Marlow’s language may be interpreted as the objective correlative of his psychological estrangement. Consider, for example, Marlow’s language upon first sight of the colonial wasteland on the coast. A railway truck lies “on its back with its wheels in the air. One was off. The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal” (15). Here, the typical association of the organic with nature is converted

²⁹ For this definition of empathy, see Wilhelm Worringer 5. For an illuminating account of Worringer’s notion of empathy in the context of British modernism, see Levenson, *Genealogy* 94-96.

into its opposite, in a simile that naturalizes instead the colonizer's industrial machinery, as if European technology were a native element in the African environment. However, the power of this machinery is ironized, displacing the idea of imperial power. The figurative comparison of the railway truck to an animal carcass suggests an adversarial transformation of Marlow's gaze, struggling to make sense of the reason that animates the journey.

Dissociated from empathetic understanding, Marlow's language becomes increasingly abstract. Imperialism is reduced to an inhuman project, abstracted from bodies, codified as a collection of mechanical tools and geometric plans. The exhausted laborers leaning against a tree are described by Marlow as "bundles of acute angles" (17). The Manager's gaze is "as trenchant and heavy as an axe" (21). In these examples, we are without reference to the mess of organic particulars. Hence, the Manager recommends, in order to survive, "Men who come out here should have no entrails"—conjuring an image of the imperial personality as disemboweled, that is, already having been prepared to bury all that pertains to embodiment. Through the hollowed body's resemblance to a mere hull, the image of a body without entrails (reminding us of T. S. Eliot's "hollow men") returns us to the figure of the boat as a metaphor for the ego. Both the boat and the ideally disemboweled agent survive by floating just above, or repressing, the depths of existence that threaten real and figurative shipwreck.

Marlow's flight into disembodied abstraction reaches its apex in his accidental find of a textbook in the jungle. The resulting sense of an aleatory epiphany is soon shown to be a delusion. Having just briefly come ashore, Marlow stumbles on "*An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship* by a man Towser, Towson—some such

name—Master in his Majesty’s Navy ... dreary reading enough with illustrative diagrams and repulsive tables” (38). Marlow explains that he recognizes in it a “singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work,” in other words, a kind of mechanical exactitude and idealized order—an ideological sense of European superiority—that has been disentangled from the chaos of the river. The book excites Marlow with “a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real,” making him temporarily “forget the jungle” that has become an oppressive nightmare (38). The book offers, in distilled form, the ideological inversion of reality: abstract diagrams and tables regarding maritime activity are in this case for Marlow *more real* than the particulars of the natural world. Reality is in this case the ideal projection of the discipline and knowledge required to captain the boat. Marlow’s respect for such abstraction conveys a sense of the bourgeois ideology of contemplative reason reflecting the claim to superiority of the ascetic imperial ego.

The textbook at first allows Marlow to confirm his epistemological superiority as an intelligent reader. Marlow is impressed by the marginal notes that seem to be written in cipher: “Fancy a man lugging with him a book of that description into this nowhere and studying it—and making notes—in cipher at that!” (38). The cipher presents evidence that the book has been formerly possessed by another man of culture and intelligence, implicitly suggesting Marlow too may be inserted into this lineage of authorship and readership. However, the grand illusion of culture is soon deconstructed when Marlow learns that the cipher was written by the uncouth Harlequin (53-54). At this point, Marlow’s claim to imperial mastery through practical knowledge is rendered hopeless, and the sense of the imperial ego’s authority over others collapses along with

the nobility of culture that was once represented by Kurtz. This tragic outcome may be read as the expression of Conrad's "modernist antipathy" toward the self-help idea of the "individual [as] the ground of value" (Levenson, *Genealogy* 15). In the wreckage of the disastrous situation at the Inner Station, we find the Conradian "critique of social failure" associated not only with Kurtz's greed, but also with the false promises of Marlow's abstraction, gesturing to the "solipsistic fate of the Conradian ego" that vainly attempts to seek refuge from the world (Levenson, *Modernism* 58, 64).³⁰ The virtues of the authorial ego are thus ironized in a similarly dissonant register in one of the rare scenes of Marlow's communication with the bourgeois audience aboard the *Nellie*, who are equally powerless to gain any insight about the events. Wondering if any meaning may be salvaged from the quest's ruins, Marlow says,

'You can't understand. How could you?' ... He paused again as if reflecting, then added: 'Of course in this you fellows see more than I could then. You see me, whom you know.'

It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already he had been no more to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody. (27)

The absence of clear sense-perception in the immediate darkness symbolically doubles the obscurity of Marlow's past experience that defies straightforward comprehension. Without the ultimate, apocalyptic triumph of the ego over the forces of nature, Marlow's hollowed-out, compromised asceticism—hopelessly suspended between the illusion of control and a reality that cannot be quarantined—gestures to the infirmity of an empire that must have seemed miniscule, even powerless, at the novel's foreboding conclusion. There, he and the audience are shadowed by the horizon "barred by a black bank of clouds" covering the "ends of the earth ... under an overcast sky" (77). As the tide turns,

³⁰ See also Watt 245.

the horizon receding into obscurity is the sublime obverse of the placid repose momentarily enjoyed by the bourgeoisie on board the ship.

If the question of apocalyptic symbolism has loomed throughout the critics' debates, it is because *Heart of Darkness* incorporates salvation discourse as an element involved in its novelistic critique, thereby suggesting the futility of the ideals of imperial culture. Embodied in Marlow's asceticism and reflected through the negative example of Kurtz's demonic temptation, the significance of salvation for the narrative has perplexed critics. While Guerard interprets Marlow and Kurtz as metaphorizing the Jungian therapeutic transformation of the psyche, Said analyzes the drama of the imperial ego in the more Foucaultian terms of colonial power-knowledge, rendering the Freudian-psychological notion of the ego's pioneering homologous with colonial subordination. This critical interpretation recognizes that Conrad does not present the process of purification or mastery from one angle alone: the question of salvation is complexified by the irreducible element of the adversarial second vision, imperiling the reified discourse of imperialism by exposing the faultlines of its dominion. Nonetheless, staged in front of his fellow passengers aboard the *Nellie*, Marlow's story—told as a contemplative, introspective monologue—doubtlessly appeals to the form of an examination, confession, or testimony, thereby soldering the speech of the imperial personality to the question of salvation, in protean affinity with the therapeutic emotional style that is elaborated as a literary tradition in the novel's wake.

3. From *Heart of Darkness* to Apocalyptic “Burn-Out”: Graham Greene’s *A Burnt-Out Case* as Therapeutic Romance

Having exhausted his resources at home, an industrious but disillusioned laborer travels by steamboat to the “primeval forest”¹ of a foreign land; there, tasked with vague errands, he is troubled by the colonial situation; and in his engagement with this new world, he battles the powerful and inadvertently wins over the affections of an idealistic girl. In these basic terms, the plot of Graham Greene’s *A Burnt-Out Case* (1960) reproduces the plot of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Yet, in Greene’s rewriting of the text, a therapeutic logic of health and recovery is made explicit through a disease metaphor about leprosy—that of *burn-out*—adding an optimistic-romantic dimension to the story, now recast to tell of the saving power of love.

As Rod Edmond writes, “[T]he foundation text of Greene’s leprosy writing is Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*” (233). Indeed, while conducting background research for *A Burnt-Out Case*, Greene had been rereading Conrad’s novel during his visit to the Yonda leper colony in January 1959, situated off the River Congo that Conrad had traveled half a century earlier (Lechat 51). Whereas *Heart of Darkness* is informed by the structure of a heroic albeit aborted duel between Marlow and Kurtz, Greene’s *A Burnt Out Case* redoubles this struggle in the form of the psychic tension held by the protagonist, the disillusioned Catholic architect, Querry, who struggles to come to terms with his past misdeeds while aiding the cause of a remote African hospital. In this respect, the quest of *A Burnt-Out Case* concerns Querry’s moral renewal in light of the transgressions of his *retrospective self*, who stands in for the barbarous Kurtz. Greene thus revises the horror

¹ The notion of a primeval forest is borrowed from the title of Albert Schweitzer’s book, *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*.

of the heart-of-darkness narrative to apply to the self's relation to itself, in negotiating a repressed trauma that motivates a plot of therapeutic recovery.

Written and published after the waning of Greene's mid-century popularity, and with a late-modernist, almost Beckettian style that refuses readerly pleasure, *A Burnt-Out Case* has nonetheless remained a minor text in Greene's bibliography. It postdates, by a few years, the first edition of John Atkin's influential retrospective study, *Graham Greene* (1957), and is usually sidelined in critical focus that gathers instead around the esteemed "trilogy": *Brighton Rock* (1938), *The Power and the Glory* (1940), and *The Heart of the Matter* (1948).

Although perhaps minor within the canon of Greene's writings, the late novel represents an interesting and pronounced shift in Greene's literary style, as noted by Atkins in the revised 1966 edition of *Graham Greene*. Compared to the villainous Pinkie Brown of *Brighton Rock*, who seems to incarnate a hateful death-wish, the gentle Query of *A Burnt-Out Case* serves as a subtle reminder of the saving power of love. Suicidal ideation² has evidently been replaced by a sort of therapeutic optimism. In its staging of Query's moral formation, *A Burnt-Out Case* is "the first of Greene's books which suggests salvation in this world" (Evans xii in Atkins 245;³ see also Lewis 235). An important text in the pre-history of this shift toward salvation may be Greene's earlier adventure narrative and travel journal, *A Journey Without Maps* (1936). That text, with its Conradian "atmosphere of pioneering" (Atkins 71) through Liberia, culminates in Greene's dramatic near-death experience of illness, discussed below—recalling Marlow's

² On the biographical detail of Greene's adolescent suicidal ideation, see Atkins 188-190.

³ Atkins's quote of Evans is more accurately a paraphrase; to my knowledge, the exact language attributed to Evans does not appear in the latter's essay. Evans writes instead that "Prior to *A Burnt-Out Case* there has been no salvation possible in this world" (xii).

own feverish “passage through some inconceivable world that had no hope in it and no desire” (Conrad, *Heart* 70). Outlined in that journal are the first basic elements of Greene’s mature stylistic adoption of a therapeutic outlook, revealing insight into a textual dialogue with Conrad that motivates Greene’s own therapeutic emotional style.

Indeed, *A Journey Without Maps* may contain the first instance of Greene’s use of the term “burn-out.” There, he associates the term with salvation produced by a therapeutic experience of recovery from disease. Suffering from a fever, sedated with whiskey, and caught in a storm outside his final destination, Grand Bassa, Greene faces the prospect of death and recovers with a newfound sense of life’s value. Debilitated and incapable of “writ[ing] more than a few lines in my diary,” his near-death experience produces a moral-existential conversion (*Journey* 206). The night of his worst suffering, he is curiously preoccupied with thoughts of a fellow traveler, a prospector named Van Gogh, around whom is condensed great anxiety. “As scared as I have ever been,” Greene lies awake in his feverish dreams, “remembering Van Gogh at Bolahun *burnt out* with fever” (206; emphasis added). Thinking of this fellow’s burn-out, Greene withstands the night. “By the early morning it was sweated out of me,” he celebrates, although this is more than a simple recovery; it initiates profound spiritual changes. Through this experience, Greene writes of “discover[ing] in myself a passionate interest in living. I had always assumed before, as a matter of course, that death was desirable. ... It was like a conversion, and I had never experienced a conversion before” (207). Like a conversion, here disease produces salvation by optimistically transforming one’s outlook, forging burn-out as a therapeutic process that reveals an apocalyptic truth.

This early example of Greene's interest in burn-out expresses the core idea of *A Burnt-Out Case*. In Atkins's view, by surviving his illness Greene learned "to hang on" to life through the power of love (67). Similarly, R.W.B. Lewis argues that Greene's Liberian journey is "the turning point in Greene's [authorial] development" (235), providing the characteristic experience of a "motion from death to life" (238) that readers may recognize in Query. In biographical terms, Greene's experience of illness and recovery facilitates a conversion from passive nihilism and informs subsequent characters with a sense of active, fighting attachment to life (235-238). In this manner, love—albeit "battered, even warped" (Atkins 63)—ultimately emerges as a therapeutic resource for narrative. As in *A Burnt-Out Case*, love is presented as the ground for a passionate attachment to a troubled world. Query's groping for purpose is directed toward charity, saving his assistant, Deo Gratias from a fall in the forest, and the young girl, Marie Rycker, from suffering at the hands of her domineering husband. Rewriting *Heart of Darkness*, Greene turns Marlow's nihilistic encounter with demonic forces of evil into Query's apocalyptic testament to the saving power of love.

This conception of love, therapeutic in the elimination of suffering, informs Greene's idiosyncratic take on the Conradian *psychological adventure*. In this sense, Greene's therapeutic style innovates with respect to the psychological inspiration that his novels had drawn from Conrad. As Robert Pendleton writes in *Graham Greene's Conradian Masterplot*, Conrad had originally created a "unique type of political adventure story dramatised by a psychological motivation" (2). In Pendleton's view, Greene perfects a Conradian form of narrative (the so-called "masterplot") in which "[p]sychological revelation actually structures the adventure plot, the conspiratorial

machinations of which enmesh ... protagonists in a more than physical way” (2). A psychological adventure, primarily “concentrat[ing] upon dilemmas of human interiority” (6), overwrites the archetypal quest plot. As if further involuting Marlow’s quest for Kurtz, in *A Burnt-Out Case* the reader is presented with a psychological adventure concerning the interior affects and transcendence of love; the dialectic of self/other in desire; and an imperiled sense of human sin tenuously subject to grace.

However, this psychological adventure format was by no means apparent to the novel’s earliest critics, who rather dismissed the novel as an outmoded gesture toward the dilemmas of religious faith. Of course, they are not entirely incorrect in highlighting a religious sensibility: in its optimistic rewriting of *Heart of Darkness* to advocate for the saving power of love, *A Burnt-Out Case* certainly makes use of religious tropes, most pointedly those found in the long tradition of ascetic conversion narratives. Greene’s plot is canvassed by the ascetic virtues of chastity, humility, and obedience that traditionally appear in conversion narratives. Having humbly renounced his career, and haunted by romantic failures, Querry resigns himself to obediently work for the charitable but meek cause of a leper’s hospital. Coincidentally, there he also meets—and effectively saves from a troubled marriage, all while preserving his own chastity—the young girl Marie Rycker, the adoring young wife of the domineering Rycker.

The religious plot of *A Burnt-Out Case*—in particular, the novel’s clear echoing of such famous conversion narratives of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, as well as “The Life of St. Francis” by St. Bonaventure —doubtlessly obscured its contemporaneity. The Christian rejection of pride, and the rebirth of the self through conversion, are relatively ancient themes compared to the antinomian spirit of the ‘60s that loomed while Greene

composed this novel. Querry's disavowal of the fame he has gained in Europe as a renowned Christian-modernist architect, and his subsequent withdrawal to Africa where he achieves a moral renewal through charity, recalls the exemplary path set by Augustine in late antiquity. Querry's own distaste for fame resembles well-known passages in Augustine's *Confessions* concerning the sinfulness of pride (Brown 201)—part of the broader anthropology of Christian spirit that is defined by Augustine in opposition to the fallenness of the allegorical Jew.⁴

In addition to the Augustinian tropes informing Querry's spiritual conversion, Querry's charity in the medical context alludes to "The Life of St. Francis." Doctor Colin's proximity to the pragmatic clergymen that also staff the *léproserie*, and Querry's humble commitment to assist with the construction of a new hospital building, recalls the therapeutic ambitions of Christian charity that characterize the saintliness of Francis. Querry's moral renewal through his aid to the sick specifically makes use of tropes about leprosy found in the conversion narrative of St. Francis. According to the the hagiographic narrative of his conversion, Francis ascetically renounces the world that is corrupted by wealth, status, and honor, then:

From that time on he clothed himself with a spirit of poverty, a sense of humility and a feeling of intimate devotion. Formerly he used to be horrified not only by close dealing with lepers but by their very sight, even from a distance; but now he rendered humble service to the lepers with human concern and devoted kindness in order that he might completely despise himself, because of Christ crucified, who according to the text of the prophet was despised as a leper (Isa. 53:3). He visited their houses frequently, generously distributed alms to them and with great compassion kissed their hands and their mouths. ("Life" 189-190)

⁴ This classic anthropology, elaborated in works such as "The Spirit and the Letter," reflects Augustine's concept of the will of the spirit—which is not law-bound. See Austin Sarfan, "Philosophical Conversion in Athanasius and Augustine" 15-17.

The connection between disease and religion in this context is not only symbolic, but also practical. Francis's respect for the leper models the uniquely Christian duty to provide charity to the diseased; as William H. McNeil writes, "One advantage Christians had over their pagan contemporaries was that care of the sick, even in times of pestilence, was for them a recognized religious duty" (135). Through the broad aims of the "therapeutic clergy," the tenets of the Church are thus cemented historically at the origins of the modern clinic.⁵ The tradition of religious hospitality that inspires the development of medical institutions across centuries is certainly reflected in the religious culture depicted in *A Burnt-Out Case*. However, the novel's inscription within this long genealogy of therapeutic care was by no means apparent to its earliest critics.

Religion According to the Initial Critics

Early reviews of the novel had doubtlessly recognized traditional religious elements at work in *A Burnt-Out Case*, yet most seem to dismiss the novel as an interesting but not excellent attempt by a writer who, although popular, was no longer in his prime. The tone of the critics' rejection—and the primary idea suggested therein: that the novel involves a religious sensibility unfit for the present—perhaps speaks to the percolating antinomian spirit of the times that erupted in the 1960s to unsettle old traditions. Not only when compared to the libertinism of the "free spirits" of '68 (as Raoul Vaneigem had called them), but also when juxtaposed with the monumental political event of the "Year of Africa" in 1960, Greene's colonial novel composed at the

⁵ The term "therapeutic clergy" is borrowed from Foucault, *The Birth of The Clinic* 32. On the kernel of religion in the modern hospital, see also 43-45.

end of the '50s seems to have little awareness of the monumental years to come. Its commitment to tropes of the ascetic narrative tradition, such as the sin of sexuality that informs the drama of coveting a wife, and its clichéd idea of Africa as a “cure for the sick heart” (*In Search* 30) feels quaint, even tedious.⁶ Imagined as a periphery of Europe, the vague colonial setting for the obscure struggles of Query’s soul perhaps belies parochial nostalgia for a Christian society blissfully removed from the political realities of the Congo. (Indeed, riots in Leopoldville in 1959 are little more than background noise [*In Search* 14n1; see also *Case* 7]).

Incensed by the centrality of religious confession for the narrative, initial reviews harped on the idea of the text as a reflection of Greene’s own anachronistic religious struggles with Christianity. Consider Elizabeth Hardwick, whose review of *A Burnt-Out Case* hammers on the question she had before posed to Greene: what, if anything, can “the Catholic novelist [Greene] ... salvage out of the modern secular ruins in which he feels compelled to place his hero” (“Loveless Love” 111)? Hardwick, sensing a disjunction between Catholicism and the modern secular, is particularly frustrated with the centrality of Query’s abstract self-condemnation “given out as Confession” (“More Loveless Love” 114). Some recognize, in the confessional aspect of *A Burnt-Out Case*

⁶ Pico Iyer describes the awkwardness of Greene’s approach to sexuality: “No one talks about sex so much as a schoolboy who knows next to nothing about it, and sometimes I wondered if Greene, like many of his protagonists, was only pretending to be wicked; he made such a big display of his interest in sex shows and brothels that it was easy to believe ... that he was a ‘sinner manqué.’ A friend of mine sent Greene a novel he’d written, and the only word the older novelist objected to in it was ‘panties.’ (‘Couldn’t you use ‘step-ins’?’ was his bizarre suggestion.) It’s remarkable how, a decade after *Lady Chatterley*, Greene chose never to go much into sex at all in his books, even as he was offering to risk imprisonment to bring *Lolita* into print in England” (134).

similarities to Albert Camus's *The Fall*.⁷ For example, D.J. Dooley understands both novels to be about "a man who had a mania for self-accusation and a compulsion to confess his guilt to others" (350). In this regard, one thinks, for example, of the second dream in the novel, where Querry "must make his confession and obtain wine" (*Case 51*). The dream manifests his own anxieties about his moral conduct that surface when surrounded by the inquisitive residents of the *léproserie*. According to Hardwick, the frame of confessional culture recalls a bygone era of Europe in which Catholic theology and the sacraments must have still mattered. Hardwick writes (parodying Greene as a bastard heir to Dostoevsky):

In trying to come to some sort of judgment about Greene as a novelist one would have to ask himself whether a significant picture of modern life in the last thirty years could be made from doctrinal puzzles, seminarian wit and paradox, private sexual jokes, Roman Catholic exclusiveness. ... The question is not, in the great Russian manner, how one can live without God, or with God; the question is how one can exist as a moral, or immoral, man without running into vexing complications with the local priest. ("More Loveless Love" 116)

Hardwick's searing review exemplifies the dominant position of the novel's initial critics⁸: the religious elements are unacceptable because obsolete; therefore, they must be excluded should the text accurately represent the modernist contemporary—that is, here, made equivalent with the "modern secular."

What is the "modern secular?" Hardwick provides a clue: the theological should evidently be replaced by the *psychological*; and more specifically, what is wanting in the novel is the *psychoanalytic* in particular. For Hardwick, the novel's "world is anti-psychological; the world of psychoanalytic motivation does not exist; its questions

⁷ However, Camus is not indicted for anachronism in the same way as Greene is, since existentialism is more conventionally understood as a post-religious phenomenon (that is, following the "death of God").

⁸ Joan Didion similarly implies that the religious themes are too boring (191).

are never raised, its interpretations never suggested” (“More Loveless Love” 116).

Reduced, this is the complaint: religion is boring, whereas psychoanalysis excites. Greene leaves us with only the interminable discourse of the priests and the vague confessions of Query; in sum, so many theological but outdated details. These anachronistic features, like burdensome weights, sink the novel before it may reach the modern shores of psychoanalysis, the land of “psychoanalytic motivation.”

Hardwick’s disavowal of the confessional novel, on the basis of its lack of psychoanalytic depth, extends the commonplace understanding of the topic of confession in Greene’s writing as stemming from his own Christian biographical background. Atkins writes in his 1957 study of Greene, encapsulating this commonplace idea, “More than the work of any other contemporary novelist Greene’s fiction is a running confession” (quoted in Dooley, “The Suspension of Disbelief” 345). Taking his cue from Atkins, Frank Kermode agrees with Hardwick that the confessional elements are burdensome, writing in his review of *A Burnt-Out Case*, “Query, the famous Catholic architect, is a famous Catholic writer thinly disguised; and if it was ever true—as Mr. Greene’s hostile critics insist—that the earlier novels are sometimes flawed by the author’s inability to stand clear of his hero or victim, it is certainly true of this book” (Frank Kermode, “Mr. Greene’s Eggs and Crosses” 71). Another reviewer wonders, at least avoiding a rote reduction to biography, “[W]here in this real world did Query ever belong?” (Jones 64).

Greene’s religious readers, on the other hand, rally around the novel’s interrogation of faith, foregrounding Query’s disavowal of his career as a church architect. Is there not something modern to the novel’s concern for the waning of the Church? What the religious readers see in the novel is also a confirmation of religion’s

decline. Greene writes in the preface of his aim in the novel, “to give dramatic expression to various types of belief, half-belief, and *non-belief*” (5; emphasis added). Some apply Atkins’s 1957 biographical judgment—that Greene, suffering from non-belief, falters in his late career—to the 1959 novel. James Noxon, in his essay, “Kierkegaard’s Stages and ‘A Burnt-Out Case,’” interprets the novel’s shifting discourse between types of belief in this way: “The stress and flaw in Greene’s fiction, which Atkins interprets as signs of spiritual disorder, are symptomatic of the inevitable conflict between [the] artist and man of faith” (Noxon 98). Evelyn Waugh, who had initially refused to review the novel, is scandalized by it because it marks “the first time that Graham has come out as specifically faithless” (quoted in Bernard Bergonzi 344). Thomas Merton’s interpretation of the novel best represents the tendency of the religious critics to focus on the apparent decline of the Church. Indeed, Merton adopts the novel’s core concept, “burn-out,” to describe his own apostasy. Describing his monastic commitments as a form of “religious leprosy” from which he hopes to soon recover, Merton writes in a letter to Daniel Berrigan, “I am about at the end of some kind of a line. ... It is burning out. In a lot of sweat and pain if you like but it is burning out for real. ... As a priest I am a burnt-out case, repeat, burnt-out case” (“Letter”).⁹ Further describing an expanded sense of the historical significance of *A Burnt-Out Case* in his journals, Merton summarily declares, “The complete burning out of Christianity in the official, clerical sense, is the subject of the book” (*Dancing* 130).

Even if they emphasize Greene’s lack of faith, or more expansively interpret the novel as anticipating the end of the Church, Greene’s religiously-minded critics still view

⁹ See also David D. Cooper 169.

the confessional format as evidencing a declining religious tradition—in effect, sharing the assumption of secular critics such as Hardwick, that the novel’s religious themes are unfit for the present. It is equally plausible, however, following the spirit of a new wave of critics, to interpret the novel as reflecting ascendant elements of modern culture—even connecting Greene’s use of the ascetic narrative genre to the revisionist psychoanalytic discourse that forms the background of an emerging therapeutic emotional style in culture. More recently, inspired by the warm welcome that the concept of burn-out has received in self-help and clinical-psychological literature, a shift in critical attention to the novel’s contemporaneity is indeed evident. This indicates that perhaps Greene’s novel is not as far removed from the discourse of psychology, as Hardwick maintains.

Yet, strictly clinical accounts of burn-out tend to misrecognize how burn-out might function, as in this narrative context, as a means to self-renewal. According to Herbert J. Freudenberger, in his landmark self-help manual, *Burn-Out: How to Beat the High Cost of Success* (1980; co-authored with Geraldine Richardson), burn-out, conceived in ego-psychological terms, results from intolerable discrepancies between “ideal self” and a “real self” (24-33). When identification with the ideal self can no longer be maintained under pressure, motivation for social commitment collapses, resulting in a deflation of the sense of self and incapacitating one’s feeling (13). Similarly, according to the clinical psychologist Christina Maslach, in *Burnout: The Cost of Caring* (1982), continuing Freudenberger’s line of thinking, those who over-identify with collective ideals, particularly in service work, are prone to burn-out (119-120). Burn-out is considered a hazard from which idealists must be saved. In this clinical literature, such emphasis on saving the self from burn-out belies the ego-psychological

assumptions that structure self-help discourse. As Matthew J. Hoffarth notes in his survey of burn-out literature in clinical psychology and self-help writings, the now popularized psychological concept of burn-out, “focus[ing] mainly on the self,” culminate in the now widespread “fear of burnout” and the social and cultural mandate to “prevent” it (42).

As the landmark text on emotional labor, Arlie Russel Hochschild’s *The Managed Heart* (1983), later defines it: burn-out is the traumatic “psychological cost” of postindustrial society. Hochschild theorizes the emergence and prevalence of burn-out in postindustrial society as analogous to that of the psychological theory of traumatic neuroses in industrial society. Just as the modern theory of psychic trauma refers to industrial accidents (as in the case of “railway spine”¹⁰), so too the postmodern theory of burn-out refers to postindustrial hazards (as in the case of what Hochschild calls “going robot” in emotional labor [22-23, 129]). In Hochschild’s view, the unfeeling state of burn-out functions as a defense reaction against the hazard of overidentification with the “acting” roles required for emotional labor (187-189). This more sociologically balanced vision of psychological burn-out contains a key insight: burn-out is an adaptive response.

As if extending this insight, Pascal Chabot, in *Global Burnout* (2013), has radically reclaimed burn-out against the distortions of clinical psychology. In his work, Chabot elaborates the meaning of burn-out in terms of a tactical protest against the contemporary situation of global capitalism. His reading returns to the redemptive potential of burn-out, restoring much of Greene’s original vision of burn-out as means to apocalyptic salvation. In doing so, Chabot returns to, updates, and amplifies the motif of religious asceticism that is associated with Greene’s concept of burn-out. For Chabot,

¹⁰ For a discussion of this topic in trauma theory, see Eric Michael Caplan 418.

burn-out is a malaise or “reactive disorder” that signifies a deliberate “renunciation” of values that are compulsory but not desirable (67). Burn-out is further symptomatic of a “[c]ondemnation of the system” of mechanized labor and “an expression of dissent” (68) with respect to the dehumanizing system of capitalism. Here, Chabot, like Greene before him, puts forward the image of burn-out as a therapeutic good rather than simply an occupational hazard.

Thus, after a long period of having been relegated, at best, to the obscure corners of specialist discourse on Greene—an author whose popularity, in any case, seems to have waned—*A Burnt-Out Case* is championed by Chabot in the name of its vision of subtle but revolutionary resistance.¹¹ As if it were no longer possible to denounce traces of religion in a supposedly secular age, Querry is now praised, in heroic terms, for his exemplary status. His burn-out showcases the potential for a “metamorphosis” and “catharsis” (23-24) that acts as an antidote to our so-called postmodern malaise. Querry’s refusal of his proud career exemplifies the rejection of labor that consumes even our “psyche” (76). Relative to the initial critics who struggled to find a lasting place for Querry, the embrace of such therapeutic language to characterize Querry’s ascetic withdrawal is striking. Yet, the precise nature of therapeutic burn-out in Greene’s novel remains to be examined; in conceiving of burn-out as a resistance to capitalism, Chabot oversteps the genre of Greene’s narrative, which is decidedly a romance.

In any case, perhaps such insights point to a real affinity between the ascetic conversion narrative and the therapeutic narrative genre as it functions today—in short, a

¹¹ The novel is similarly reclaimed by Paula Martín Salván, who details Querry’s “resistance to assimilation by collective structures through isolation, to openness to alternative forms of community codified as chances for personal redemption” (303).

compatibility between the religious and psychological sensibility, which the novel's initial critics did not recognize. Peter Brown, in his groundbreaking biography, *Augustine of Hippo* (1967), details this kind of compatibility in his interpretation of Augustine's *Confessions*. "The writing of the *Confessions* was an act of therapy," he argues (158). Alluding to the popularity of therapeutic-confessional narratives in the twentieth century, he continues, "It is this act of therapy ... which has, perhaps, brought Augustine closest to some of the best traditions of our own age" (175). Conversely, Patrick H. Hutton, extending Brown's way of thinking about this compatibility, describes the method of psychoanalytic therapy as derived from "ancient remedies of self-help, now camouflaged in a medical vocabulary" (132). One basic affinity between religious and therapeutic confession consists in their mutual concern for introspective memory, which, with regard to psychoanalysis, is likened to an "art of memory" (Hutton 124). Taking the cue from this shift in thinking about confession as a literary genre, I interpret the confessional dimension of *A Burnt-Out Case* as a hallmark of its participation in an emerging therapeutic style in culture. While Querry's ascetic renunciation is virtuous, his journey to moral purity is also illustrated through the psychoanalytic literary device of dream sequences, contributing to a sense of his unconscious as the emotional ground of memory that inspires ethical action.

The Dream as a Psychoanalytic-Narrative Device

Drawing on the spirit of Chabot's return to Greene as a contemporary, emphasis on the therapeutic style of the text allows us to consider how the ascetic virtues play an

important role in the ideological characterization of Querry. By characterizing Querry as an ascetic who saves a young girl, Greene tilts the *Heart of Darkness* narrative toward a parable about the saving power of love. Yet here, Greene evidently cannot rely on *Heart of Darkness* alone, which culminates in a suspended meditation about the bedrock of natural evil. One other important resource for Greene's romantic rewriting of *Heart of Darkness*, including his use of psychoanalytic motifs that guide the novel toward its apocalyptic resolution, is Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955). The presence of a young girl—unlike the marginal Intended of Conrad's novel—is here foregrounded to dramatize Querry's transgressive sexuality and motivate his romantic desire. This desire is, moreover as in *Lolita*, imagined in psychoanalytic terms: for Querry, Marie is the object of transference desire that recalls the memory of the lost love of his youth. The symbiosis of ascetic and psychoanalytic themes proceeds from an initial dream that outlines the repressed memories of Querry's youth.

Drawing on ideas about the unconscious common in clinical psychoanalysis—which Greene may have first become acquainted with, as an adolescent, during his own psychoanalytic therapy¹²—the novel dramatizes transference through the notion of unconscious repetition of love impulses centered on the doubling of the young girl Marie. The romantic plot, which attaches the horror of Kurtz to the issue of sexual desire, is thus a restatement, and perhaps even defense, of Greene's own controversial

¹² For a discussion of Greene's time in therapy, see Roland A. Pierloot. On the significance of dreams, see Ronald Walker. Greene's psychoanalyst, Kenneth Richmond (who also treated D.H. Lawrence), acknowledges dreams' "most usual function of giving vent to repressed personal difficulties" in a 1920 essay (276). In a 1935 essay, Greene connects Conrad's representation of the "unexplained brutality" committed by European colonizers, to the more personal memory of the traumatizing physical abuse he suffered as a schoolboy ("Analysis of a Journey" 459-460).

admiration for Nabokov's *Lolita*. In December of 1955, Greene had catapulted the then relatively unknown book into the public media spotlight after nominating it as book of the year in *The Sunday Times* (Attlee 4). While the book was threatened with censorship for its obscenity, Greene amplified his praise for *Lolita*, not just the book of the year but "one of the most amusing, and interesting novels of the last ten years" (Russel 7).

Let us consider the "case" of Query that, in its clinical format, points to the production of psychological knowledge and hence the background conventions of a new therapeutic style. As Foucault writes in *Discipline and Punish*, "*The examination, surrounded by all its documentary techniques, makes each individual a 'case'*" (191; emphasis original). Like the secondary narrator Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*—who has written the found novel, "Lolita, or the Confession of a White Widowed Male," that is included in the dossier examined by the primary narrator, psychiatrist John Ray, Jr., Ph.D.—the *case history* of Query similarly presents material for examining the protagonist's perversion, or what Nabokov calls "moral leprosy" (4-5). Under the gaze of the analyst-priests who are consulted for guidance, the presentation of the unconscious within the narrative functions as a confession that contributes evidence for the examiner of Query's case. Over the course of the narrative, the reader learns of Query's unconscious wish to redeem his past transgressions. Query's dreams compose biographical documentary material with evidence of his motives. In sum, the production of the case history as an object for examination by the reader is an irreducible dimension of the novel's investment in psychoanalytic ideas. Indeed, the space of the *léproserie* where (unlike Humbert) Query *redeems* himself through charitable action uncannily

resembles a psychoanalytic clinical space. It facilitates the review of his repressed past.¹³ The curious but overlooked presence of the titular concept of the “case” obviously gestures to this psychoanalytic context.

As Daniel Burston writes, “Though few of his readers were aware of the fact, evidently, Greene was fascinated by psychoanalysis” (“The Politics of Psychiatry” 357). In *A Burnt-Out Case*, a therapeutic style is constructed through psychoanalytic literary devices such as the flashback structure that provides evidence of the psychoanalytic motivations behind Querry’s actions. This flashback structure, encouraging a view of desire based in transference, suggests the fundamental clinical-psychoanalytic assumption: “the only idea of love operative in the clinic is that of *transferential* love” (Tupinambá 85; see also Borch-Jacobsen 53). Greene himself notes of the clinical importance of dreams, “The interest I always feel in dreams, not only my own dreams but the dreams of my characters, is probably the result of my having been psychoanalysed at the age of sixteen” (*In Search* 75n1). In *A Burnt-Out Case*, the function of the dream resembles Greene’s own idea of “[t]he method of psychoanalysis [that] is to bring the patient back to the idea which he is repressing: a long journey backwards without maps, catching a clue here and a clue there ... until one has to face the general idea, the pain or the memory” (*Journey* 92).

Consider the first dream narrated in the novel, which foreshadows the introduction of Rycker and his wife Marie. The mosquito net under which Querry sleeps

¹³ As Foucault elaborates in *Psychiatric Power*, “[T]he clinic is important because it consists not only in questioning the patient, but also in making the general anamnesis of the *case* [emphasis added] ... [T]he patient will see his own life unfolding before him.” In the case of Querry, the narrative is the arena where life is shown unfolding from the unconscious. The narrative figuratively mimics confession in which “the patient recognizes himself in a kind of identity constituted by certain episodes in his life” (159).

foregrounds the exclusionary mechanism of repression that holds, at a remove, not only the disease of malaria and the beauty of the stars, but also, figuratively, Query's traumatic memory of love and his unconscious reparative wishes:

[Query] lay on his back, staring up at where the stars ought to have been visible, but the gauze of the mosquito-net obscured them. ... He dreamt of a girl whom he had once known and thought he loved. She came to him in tears because she had broken a vase which she valued, and she became angry with him because he didn't share her suffering. She struck him in the face, but he felt the blow no more than a dab of butter against his cheek. He said, "I am so sorry, I am too far gone, I can't feel at all, I am a leper." (31)

The dream echoes the idea, perhaps first expressed by the physician Eryximachus in Plato's *Symposium*, that "there is one love [*eros*] in the healthy, and another in the diseased" (186b; translation modified).¹⁴ From the perspective of this dream-memory, Query's love is certainly diseased (as is conveyed in his status as an unfeeling or "burnt-out" leper). Yet the process of burn-out, as similarly conceived in the earlier *A Journey Without Maps*, involves Query's redeeming himself through achieving a love that is healthy. The dream outlines the transference path of this therapeutic psychological adventure: Query's redemption will rest with someone who resembles the girl of the painful memory.

The dream is particularly interesting as it showcases Greene's attempt to characterize Query's psychoanalytic motivation. As symbolized by the mosquito net under which Query sleeps, here too the dream has a censorship function. Drawing on Freud's method in "The Interpretation of Dreams," a few points about the significance of the dream should be noted. First, we cannot remain only at the level of the manifest content: the crying girl, her broken property, etc., all of which have passed through the

¹⁴ On the symbol of the vase in ancient philosophy, see Jacques Lacan 63-64.

ensorship function. The repressed elements (the dream's latent content) are specifically the biographical details of Query's past relation with Marie Morel (I)¹⁵—a girl whom the press (led by Parkinson) later speculates that he had abused. In this dream, the pictorial image of Marie holding her broken vase represents only what Query's ego finds tolerable about the past relationship—namely, that she herself might be responsible for her own suffering. In other words, the manifest content of the dream is subject to the “inversion of affect” that accompanies the censorship of dreams in Freud's theory. As Freud writes of this inversion of affect, “[I]ike every other displacement, this serves the purposes of the censorship, but it is often the work of wish-fulfilment, for wish-fulfilment consists in nothing more than the substitution of an unwelcome thing by its opposite” (410). For Query, what is unwelcome is that he would be responsible for the injury of the girl and thus guilty; the manifest content exhibits the wishful ideation, that the girl herself is responsible for her own suffering, and Query blameless. The latent wish is that Query preserves his moral rectitude—however, the effect is that the wish takes revenge in the manifest content, imputing to Marie a guilt that might instead be Query's. Thus, Marie is resurrected in the dream as a figure who mediates Query's unconscious psychic conflict. In psychoanalytic terms, she is a revenant figure.

The dream about Marie (I) importantly foreshadows the introduction and pivotal role of Marie Rycker (II), the childlike wife of the overbearing and obnoxious plantation owner, M. Rycker. As a double of Marie (I), Marie Rycker's presence in the narrative alludes to the character structure of *Lolita*, also organized by the concept of transference,

¹⁵ The term “Marie (I)” is used to denote the Marie of Query's memory. This helps to distinguish her from Marie Rycker, or “Marie (II),” who is the object of Query's transference desire.

in which “double relationships ... drive the plot” (Cooper 46). (In that novel, Lolita is a double of Annabel, who is the lost love of Humbert’s youth [11-13]). Yet in *A Burnt-Out Case*, this desire is desexualized; Query defends the Platonic relationship he develops with Marie Rycker in these terms: “I never went in for seducing children” (218). Certainly, Query seeks in Marie Rycker an opportunity to redeem his past failings regarding Marie (I), if only unconsciously. As the dream reveals Query’s unconscious wish to redeem himself, Marie’s double (Marie Rycker) materializes as a redemptive set piece. Marie (II) is a revenant-incarnate, occasioning Query’s wish-fulfillment. As if conjured by magic in order to satisfy Query’s unconscious wishes, the sudden appearance of Marie (II) literalizes the dictum of the unconscious as parroted by Freud in “The Interpretation”: “No one is irreplaceable. See, here are only revenants; all those whom one has lost return” (422). The first Marie may be lost, but she is resurrected in the second, Marie Rycker. Complementing this doubling, even M. Rycker is himself a double who resembles the cheated partner of Marie (I), “an architectural student whose name he [Query] couldn’t now remember—an ugly name like Hoghe” (149). Between Marie (I) and Marie (II), the faults of Greene’s intimacy are staged for therapeutic resolution according to the logic of the unconscious, that is, through the mechanics of transference and wish-fulfillment that play out while Query is confronted with the incarnated revenants. Indeed, in this respect the “*Doppelgänger* motif,” or “uncontrolled spawning of paired sets of characters,” as noted by Pendleton (63), is composed according to a psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious.

In its narration of the emotional trauma of intimacy and its plot of therapeutic redemption, the novel outlines some key aspects of the “therapeutic narrative” genre that

emerges through the popular acculturation of psychoanalytic thinking (as defined by Eva Illouz in *Saving the Modern Soul*). First, in the figurative use of leprosy, and particularly the non-communicative stage of burn-out (detailed below), to describe romantic and social relations, Greene's generalizing disease framework evidences the "medicalization of social life" encouraged by psychoanalytic discourse (Illouz 171). Further, the narrative draws on psychoanalytic "therapeutic narrative" conventions. As in therapeutic narrative, the "narrative is retrospectively emplotted" (173)—in this case, through the dream about Marie (I) that first conjures the novel's guiding revenants. And as it stages a process of ascetic conversion to fulfill an unconscious wish for redemption, the retrospective therapeutic narrative here also suggests "causes of a deficient relationship [with oneself and others] in a repressed or forgotten past" (176). As such, *A Burnt-Out Case* may be considered a literary precursor of the late-modern therapeutic emotional style that coalesces around *Heart of Darkness*.

The dream, with its partial revelation of some biographical details to be included in a case history, sets the tone of mystery for the psychological adventure. When read as censoring his own guilt, the dream of Marie (I) and her broken vase incriminates Query in the eyes of an examining judge. In this way, *the dream functions as evidence in a confessional hermeneutics*: it involuntarily reveals Query's truth. Through the content of the dream, which sets up the mystery of Query's romantic past, the reader is invited to participate in a kind of investigation. As a narrative device, the dream transposes the "narrative structure of Marlow's sleuthing [that] develops the metaphorical search in *Heart of Darkness* whereby an observer narrator 'seeks' an obscure protagonist" (Pendleton 34). In *A Burnt-Out Case*, Query's reticence and even evasiveness taunts any

would-be sleuth with some obscurity. Greene himself dismisses the idea of psycho-narration, writing that the novel “should not penetrate into the thoughts of any character—which must be indicated only in action and dialogue. This makes for the mood of mystery which I wish to catch” (*In Search* 20). As Kai Mikkonen notes, “Greene carries out his principle of mysterious indirection effectively by giving the reader very limited access to the protagonist’s mind” (*Narrative Paths* 106). Querry does not consciously elaborate on his intentions, and the *Doppelgänger* motif is even applied to Querry, rendering the psychology of his character ambiguous. For like Marie (I) of the repressed past, and Marie (II) of the reincarnated present, may we not also speak of Querry (I), who committed the repressed wrong-doing, and Querry (II), who now seeks moral redemption at the hospital? In this way, as Querry (I) occupies the position of an “obscure protagonist” that is mysteriously shadowed by Querry (II), the novel “adapts the thriller form to a psychopathological narrative” (Pendleton 49). Like the obscure protagonist of *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz, who is the object of Marlow’s searching confessions, the perversity of Querry (I), although revealed more indirectly, is juxtaposed against the confessional labors of Querry (II).

A sign of the novel’s contemporaneity, the ambiguity and even eclectic mixing of religious and psychoanalytic ideas by Greene underlines how the modern therapeutic regime of sexuality renovates the religious category of sin. For in the psychoanalytic domain, confession remains central as in religion. According to Michel Foucault, through the “medicalization of confession,” “[t]he obtaining of the confession and its effects were recodified as therapeutic operations” in the modern constitution of sexuality (*History* 67). Querry (I), fleeing from his transgressions, is in this sense a *pervert*, a dangerous

individual, and potentially even a criminal. This explains why other characters try to solicit confessions from Query. Consider Query's arrival at the *léproserie*: "While he [Dr. Colin] washed his hands in spirits he took a look at Query over his shoulder. ... He said, 'Are you wanted by the police? You needn't be afraid of telling me—or any of us'" (Case 29-30). The journalist Parkinson's sensational stories about Query's buried past are (in the jargon of the British press) called a "morgue" (135). "It's like a police persecution," Query recognizes in the course of the ensuing public examination (135). Such scenes highlight what Pendleton calls the "sleuthing" dynamic of the psychopathological-thriller background. Greene, in drafting the novel, even once characterized Query as "a fugitive from the police" (Waugh 594).¹⁶ Like a criminal under examination, an atmosphere of investigation accompanies the furtive attempts to learn of Query's repressed past.

Query's past transgressions in this sense foreshadow the therapeutic process that is displaced in the metaphor of leprosy. The metaphorization of leprous burn-out to describe the failure of his intimacy with Marie (I) is a naturalization, so to speak, of what Foucault recognizes as the translation of the religious concept of sin into the modern-medical language of disease, including the scientific categories of the normal and the pathological (Foucault, *History* 67). The confluence between disease and sin is exhibited in Greene's own approach to the scientific concept of leprosy. In Greene's notion of burn-out, what happens to the body is not just the result of bacteria; in Query's case, it is also a symptom of moral failure. *This is what has confused critics*: On the one

¹⁶ This vague sense of Query's fugitive criminality also echoes Greene's paranoid perception of being "relentlessly shadowed ... by a man (or maybe two) who traveled the world, seeming to slip into his identity and doing the wildest things in his name" (Iyer 36). See Greene, *Ways of Escape* 301-309.

hand, the notion of burn-out is scientific in its allusion to contagion theory, but on the other hand, it is religious in its application to the theological concept of the flesh. In this way, the older religious concept of sin is blended with the modern “technology of health and pathology” (Foucault, *History* 44). Canvassing both the scientific and religious register, Greene’s approach to leprosy symbolically reifies the idea of sexuality as “a medical and medicalizable object” that “one had try and detect [*sic*]” in the form of an examination, whether through verbal confession or “as a lesion, a dysfunction, or a symptom—in the depths of the organism, or *on the surface of the skin*” (Foucault, *History* 44; emphasis added). As the dream of the broken vase concludes with Query’s paraphrase, “I can’t feel at all, I am a leper,” a medical diagnosis is grafted onto a moral problem, cemented together in “burn-out.” The unfeeling status of the skin is a moral issue: lack of feeling prevents healthy communication; the deadening of the nerves is established as a sign of the perverse subject who is incapable of intimacy.

In sum, the metaphor of Query as a so-called burnt-out case, which is key to the dream of Marie, establishes continuity between the skin disease of leprosy and the idea of sin understood as a deep-seated infection by evil. Yet, despite the novel’s interest in modern contagion theory, the consequent connotation of leprosy as a form of evil has led some critics to dismiss Greene’s view as entirely outdated.

The Psychological Problem of the Patient

It is tempting to read Query’s burn-out as a sign of his stigma or exclusion, symptomatic of his perversity. Robert G. Cochrane, whom Greene consulted on

background research, faults Greene for depicting leprosy in anachronistic terms, in departure from modern scientific truth. Cochrane laments that the novel suffers from a “mediaeval” imagination of the disease, as it fails to incorporate the facts of modern science that overturn obsolete religious prescriptions of quarantine (Anna Rasokat “Literature’s Place” 249). If this is true, Greene’s conception of leprosy would land on the “ancient” side in the medical “quarrel between the ancients and the moderns” occurring in local hospitals at the time, as described by Michel Lechat (50). This quarrel divided those who drew on ideas about treatment from biblical sources, and those who drew on ideas about treatment from modern scientific sources. In light of the facts of modern science, the ancients appear to be irrational. According to the so-called moderns, the ancient fear of the leper should be dissolved by way of the modern epistemological thaw: following the scientific discovery of the bacterial basis of leprosy (henceforth classified as Hansen’s disease), infection is considered limited in transmissibility and manageable through sanitization and antibiotics (Lechat 46; Rasokat 249-250).¹⁷

Why then should the leper remain an object of taboo? The idea that leprosy requires the exclusion of the diseased from social community is indeed ancient, enshrined in the oldest ritual practices of purification. In antiquity, as recorded in the Old Testament, Hebrew proscriptions stigmatize a broad spectrum of skin disorders as *zara’at* (impurity, later translated as leprosy) (Kaplan, “Biblical Leprosy” 506). Leviticus 13 reads as a manual of leprous disorders, concluding that “all the days wherein the plague [of leprosy] shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone;

¹⁷ This is why the ancient model of exclusion contrasts, in Foucault’s account, with the modern method of “inclusion” (as in plague *quadrillage*) that subjects the individual to techniques of discipline and normalization.

without the camp shall his habitation be” (*King James Version*). The biblical proscriptions define how “[a]n unclean person was physically separated from other members of the community to prevent moral contamination” (Grzybowski and Nita, “Leprosy in the Bible” 3). These practices subsequently justify the early-medical model of quarantine. As McNeil writes, “by treating plague sufferers as though they were temporary lepers—forty days quarantine eventually became standard” in early-modern practice (181). The practice of exclusion culminates, in the high-imperialism of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, with the constructions of “camps” to segregate purportedly infectious native populations from anxious colonizers (Edmond 187-188).

How does Greene’s conception of leprosy fit within this framework? The therapeutic stage of burn-out provides Query with traits that are ultimately more like superpowers in his psychological quest. While Query’s lack of feeling may at first glance seem like a curse, it is actually what enables him to save both Deo Gratias and Marie Rycker. Echoing Augustine’s theological dismissal of Jewish law, Query’s heroism in fact disregards the letter of the Jewish-biblical taboos that stigmatize the sick; instead, Query acts with Christian spirit following the example of *charitable contact* as modeled in the ascetic conversion narrative of St. Francis. In this model, contact is not prohibited, but is rather encouraged; it facilitates the redemption of the afflicted. (One ultimate resource for this view may be the biblical scene of Christ’s healing the leper by touch in Mark 1:40-42.) Such intimacy overturns the rule of no-contact as proscribed by the Old Testament and rendered obsolete by modern science. Accordingly, the self-esteem of the sick person, who suffered from self-disgust, is repaired. The novel’s second epigraph, by the doctor R. V. Wardekar, should be read in light of this reparative

effect of intimacy: “In cases where he [the leper] has a deformity or abnormality, or develops it later, his own aesthetic sense revolts and he develops a sort of disgust towards himself. Though with time, he becomes reconciled to his deformities, it is only at the conscious level” (7). In contrast to Rycker, who is fearful of infection, Query’s willingness to socialize with the sick lands him closer to the category of “leprophil” (19). He acts as if cognisant of the scientific fact that “[t]he nature of the leper border has changed. Once the disease can be arrested, once it is recognised as having a very low contagion rate, crossing that border [of taboo] loses most of its danger” (Rod Edmond 240). As a burnt-out (non-contagious) case, Query’s charity toward others triumphs over any sense of danger.

As a kind of hero of the therapeutic style, Query acts in the name of mental health, seeking to improve not only the conditions of the local hospital through his architectural knowledge, but also the psychological well-being of the sick. Query exhibits a commitment to the psychological problem of the patient. Here lies the modernity of Greene’s concept of treatment.¹⁸ Not only is the physical disease curable; the psychological-emotional disease of self-disgust is also subject to an “ethics of care” (Rasokat 247). In this formula, Greene transposes, into the emotional domain, the

¹⁸ In *Plagues and Peoples*, McNeil describes the emergence of the modern paradigm as follows: “International organization supplemented urban and national measures aimed against infectious diseases, so that by the first decades of the twentieth century preventative medicine began to make a dent in the epidemiological experience of many populations globally. Success was sufficient so that by the second half of the century, professionals seriously proposed the global eradication of a number of mankind’s most formidable infections and thought it was a feasible goal for the near future (266; see also 10). Similarly, Richard Lewontin and Richard Levins describe the “commonsense position of public health” in the first half of the twentieth century: “infectious disease had been defeated in principle and was on the way out as an important cause of sickness and mortality” (17).

confidence of a scientific modernity whose “central premise [is] ... that all diseases can be cured.” (Sontag 677). Antibiotics may technically cure the physical disease, but another kind of care is required to treat remaining emotional disease:

Leprosy cases whose disease has been arrested and cured only after the loss of fingers or toes are known as burnt-out cases. This is the parallel I have been seeking between my character X [Querry] and the lepers. Psychologically and morally he has been burnt-out. Is it at that point that the cure is effected? (Greene, *In Search* 41-42).

Querry models and effects a treatment for the psychological problem of leprosy. In the instance of the physically mutilated (albeit “cured”) burnt-out case, “[t]reatment [is] for psychological reasons only” (84). In his later essay, “The Victor and the Victim,” Greene reiterates this notion of treatment in discussion of the Lambaréné hospital founded by Dr. Albert Schweitzer in French Equatorial Africa (now Gabon) (371). Refusing taboos or segregation, that hospital encouraged social contact, thereby exemplifying the necessary “sentimental” treatment (369) appropriate for the psychological problem of the patient.

This concern for the treatment of psychological-emotional problems may invite comparisons between the method of treatment envisioned in *A Burnt-Out Case* and the psychoanalytic-confessional method for mental health treatment, the talking cure. Indeed, one might hypothesize that in its approximation of a therapeutic emotional style, the many conversations between characters in *A Burnt-Out Case* signal the grafting of the idea of therapeutic confession onto Marlow’s storytelling—a formal possibility that is, after all, fully elaborated in the later context of post-Vietnam psychology (explored in Chapter 5). However, while Greene is interested in mental health, one categorical difference with respect to the psychoanalytic method remains: it is actions, not words, that form the nexus of healing in the novel.

The novel's misalignment with the psychoanalytic method, strictly speaking, may be better understood through its rendering of the theological principle of the truthful *logos* (word/logic).¹⁹ In *A Burnt-Out Case*, dialogue circumscribes the would-be place of the *logos*. Certainly, critics have observed the centrality of dramatic dialogue throughout the novel. V.S. Pritchett declares in his review, "*A Burnt-Out Case* is conceived as a play not as a novel. Querry would do well on the stage: an actor would give him life. The dialogue has the snap back-and-forth of a stage dialogue" (104; see also Hardwick "More Loveless Love" 115). With a similar emphasis on dialogue, Roger Gorham Davis writes, "The events ... are less important than the conversations" (290). The critics here form a consensus: that theatrical verbal exchange has replaced novelistic psycho-narration. However, while recognizing the centrality of dialogue, these critics do not consider how dialogue is rendered in a "decadent" fashion by Greene, undermining the traditional significance of dialogue as a means of communicating truth.

This is why dialogue in the novel cannot be interpreted as an expression of Christian theology. It neither functions according to the model of Scholastic disputation, in which truth passes from master to subject, nor according to the sublime form of the biblical face-to-face encounter between man and God. To a certain extent, the apocalyptic idea of a dialogic face-to-face encounter²⁰ is, in Greene's novel as in the original *Heart of Darkness* (pertaining to the "glass, darkly" metaphor, examined in Chapter 2), similarly

¹⁹ On the *logos* in the context of psychoanalytic practice, see Mikkel Borch-Jakobsen 76.

²⁰ This notion of apocalyptic dialogue derives from the "face-to-face" encounter between Moses and God (Exodus 33:11). In Christianity, the Jewish encounter with God is interpreted in neo-Platonic terms, involving a strict opposition between this world and an other. Thus for Augustine, the face-to-face encounter requires the purification of the flesh; only through mortification which anticipates death is the soul liberated from worldly corruption and initiated into truth.

transformed to convey some demonic, undesirable significance. In the instance of *A Burnt-Out Case*, the demonic valence of spoken dialogue represents the novel's divergence from the ethos of communication that is otherwise typical of the therapeutic style. In consideration of this problematic, let us turn to the novel's use of dialogue.

The logic of face-to-face speech may be analyzed as an inversion of the Christian theological principle of communication between divine spirit and material flesh. In *A Burnt-Out Case*, spirit does not seem to communicate with flesh through words. This amounts to a rejection of the orthodox theological position regarding the *logos*. The orthodox position maintains the essential homology between Christ and man in the doctrine of the hypostatic union of the Incarnation. Specifically, the notion of hypostatic union emphasizes the incarnation of the divine Word in man on the basis of the *communicatio idiomatum* (the mutual participation of human and divine nature in the same essence). Incarnated, Christ symbolizes the communication of the *logos* with the world, as is elaborated in the writings of neo-Platonic Christianity, such as Athanasius's *On the Incarnation*.

Contradicting this principle of communication, the novel depicts a world in which participation with the divine is not a given; hardly any trace of the homology between man and God is preserved when it comes to speech. Theological questions seem to have no answers, as if parodying the form of Scholastic disputation, and little interest remains, even among the priests themselves, for the conduct of the sacraments. Indeed, Noxon notes that "the embarrassing questions about Catholicism, about the Christian conception of existence, are not answered in *A Burnt-Out Case*, [and] are, in fact, presented by the author as being unanswerable" (Noxon 92). Such difficulties imply that the

communication between divine truth and humanity, as ensured by the theological arguments, has been severed.

Querry acts against the supreme value given to dialogue (as truthful communication) in the Christian tradition. He is not a man of dialogue; he is uncomfortable with speech; he certainly does not represent the ideal of *eloquentia* or “talking well” (*eu legein*) that flowers in the tradition of Christian humanism (Gadamer 18). In contrast to Rycker, whose self-aggrandizing taste for theological conversations parodies Christian spirituality (43-44), Querry disregards the seminary’s intellectual culture, and tends to frame his commitments only in terms of actions (116-117). In a verbal altercation with M. Rycker, the narrator observes, “He [Querry] had been trapped in words. A blow would have been simpler and better” (145).

These characteristics point to the novel’s formal *transvaluation of dialogue*. Dialogue no longer represents a means to truth or salvation. An insightful 1954 essay by Elizabeth Sewell on “decadence” in Greene’s writing illuminates the significance of the symbolism here. Sewell defines decadence in Greene’s novels as operating through a principle of symbolic “inversion, the ambivalence of attraction and repulsion, an inside-outness which gives ... a strange likeness to the Looking-Glass world” (Sewell 55). Greene’s transvaluation of dialogue in *A Burnt-Out Case* is a relevant instance of literary decadence in these terms. In what could be considered, following Sewell’s definition, Greene’s decadent inversion of the theological concept of dialogue, language is tied to its traditional inverse: the order of disease, rather than salvation. The *logos* shared in dialogue does not convey salvific truth, but is the source of corrupting infection. This decadent symbolism of the *logos* extends the demonic symbolism of divine

communication—the *obscured face*—that is central to Conrad’s original text. That dialogue conveys fear of infection further underlines the novel’s divergence from the domain of the psychoanalytic therapeutic process, despite the warm welcome the concept of burn-out would have in self-help literature. In calling into question the principal technique of psychoanalytic psychotherapy—that is, verbalization (Kirschner 58-59)—Greene throws a wrench into the practice and theory of the talking cure.

A specific disease metaphor underlies this rejection of communicative dialogue. In calling into question the lofty status of verbalization, Greene’s demonic representation of language resonates with an observation he recorded during his own travel to the Yonda settlement: “The fathers had an idea that contagion might be carried by the breath and always in the confessional box held a handkerchief between their mouth and the leper’s” (*In Search* 25 fn. 1).²¹ As a site of contagion, the mouth is suspect of corruption, and so, too, are the Christian concepts that may be associated with it: the spirit/breath (*pneuma*) and word/logic (*logos*). Indeed, Greene’s decadent conception of the mouth’s corruption (inverting the traditional association of communication with salvation) in this case recalls the biologicistic interpretation of confessional religion by his friend, Karl Stern, a psychiatrist, who writes in *The Third Revolution*, “In the life of the unconscious, on the purely natural plane *believing is an oral mechanism*” (284; emphasis added). Tying the

²¹ Is this idea simply a sign of the unscientific beliefs of the priests? As Arthur Albert St. M. Mouritz writes: “Leprosy cannot be conveyed by the breath of a leper, even if the contact is close” (24). Nonetheless, the mouth may remain a source of suspicion based on his view: “The mouth and its contained fluid, the saliva, is for all practical purposes, the source of contagion to the healthy” (25). That being said, McNeil stipulates that the precise mechanism of transmission “remains unsure even today” (186).

idea of belief to narcissistic orality, this supposition embarrasses the faithful with the implicit suggestion that religion is like a pacifier designed to soothe oneself.²²

Some of Greene's characters, like M. Rycker or Father Thomas, reflect such narcissistic traits, as if concerned with their own status or safety more than the efficacy of Christian love for the other. They seem compelled by what Roberto Esposito calls the "first immunitary trait of the religious phenomenon: religion is what keeps us, at once, safe and sound" (*Immunitas* 54). Consider the dialogue between Father Thomas and Query, in which the priest selfishly wants to have his own "faith fortified" in conversation (*Case* 114). The priest, concerned with his own status, is also paralyzed by fear of contact with the other. As if a parody of effective dialogue, the scene is replete with immunological symbols that inhibit communication. Consistent with Greene's characteristically decadent inversion of traditional religion, Christian symbols are in this scene reduced to prophylactic technologies; Father Thomas, mid-conversation, swallows bromide "like wine" and struggles with a mosquito-net that inhibits his speech (likened to a "bride's veil," alluding to the notion of Christ as bridegroom) (113-114). In such staging of (the breakdown of) dialogue, the novel desecrates the symbols that traditionally signify the homological communion between Christ and humanity. Communion is, instead, reorganized around the epidemiological problem of immunity, as the self seeks to protect itself from exposure to the other. Contrary to pious belief, the *pneuma* in this instance no longer represents the traditional idea of "transcendence in the form of opening up ... in

²² As Jung writes in "The Theory of Psychoanalysis," "introversion of sexual libido [as in the case of narcissism] leads to an investment of the ego ... which can produce the psychology of an ascetic anchorite" (121). On orality and narcissism, see Heinz Hartmann et al. 21; and Maria Grazia Spurio 3. For another discussion of religion and narcissism, see Robert Pfaller 204-206.

the relationship with the other” (Levinas 181). The *logos* of dialogue is not shared in common. “You are so very far from the truth,” Querry concludes their meeting (*Case* 116). Dialogue is here dichotomized—effectively, self-quarantined—and the practical result is that the two men share nothing of the truth.

Intellectual conversation is reduced to a critique of wisdom, as in the Pauline critique of philosophy, derived from apocalyptic passages such as Isaiah 29:14: “the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.” Greene’s novel, echoing St. Paul’s critique, directs us toward the Christian emphasis on charitable action: “my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:4). The positive, even apocalyptic valence of action overwrites the deprecated symbol of speech-as-dialogue. Ascetic virtue demonstrated in action obtains priority over the hollow wisdom of words.

Heroic Asceticism as a Bourgeois Ideology

In practice, Querry demonstrates virtue, whereas others like Rycker only speak of it. This dynamic illustrates how in Greene’s fiction “most values are discovered to be hollow but there is always someone’s love that remains sound” (Atkins 63).

Symbolically, Querry’s self-sacrifice deconstructs the self-interested ego in a movement of love for the other. Consider the important scene of Querry’s saving Deo Gratis, a character plausibly modeled on Marlow’s helmsman in *Heart of Darkness*. The scene marks a turning-point in Querry’s quest, indicating an important shift in his psychology.

The chapter begins with Query noticing that “the mosquito-net had not been drawn down” in Deo Gratias room, foreshadowing Query’s exposure to the other through the act of love. As it is revealed that Deo Gratias has fled beyond the limits of the *leproserie*, further into the wilderness, Query, sensing an emergency, risks his own life seeking the lost Deo Gratias in the dense nighttime bush. As Query ventures outside the limits of the village, Greene writes, “He went on, while the mosquitoes droned to the attack. There was no point in waving them away. He trained himself to submit” (*Case 65*). This *training to submit* recalls the athletic notion of Christian asceticism, endurance in the face of suffering. Query’s submission gestures toward his ascetic self-transformation: their bites are no longer “discomforts to our ego,” as is said later in the novel (157). In this sense, Query’s love for the other has steeled his commitment to virtuous action and has enabled his indifference to the threat of exposure.

Eventually recovering Deo Gratias from a grave-like crevasse along an ancient bridge, the scene stages the symbolic ego-death of Query in his coming to the selfless assistance of the fallen. Notable is that the contact between these two burnt-out cases (one figuratively, one literally) revolves around the action of careful touch, paradoxically conditioned by the motif of *impaired communicability* that is a symptom of burn-out. Query’s psychological incapacity to feel and Deo Gratias’s physical mutilations (his lack of fingers) mirror each other. Greene writes: “He [Query] took Deo Gratias’s hand to reassure him, or rather laid his own hand down beside it; you cannot ‘take’ a fingerless hand. Deo Gratias grunted twice, and then uttered a word. It sounded like ‘Pendelé.’ In the darkness the knuckles felt like a rock that has been eroded for years by the weather”

(Case 66). Touch, even in this paradoxically impaired form,²³ exercises a therapeutic function by reestablishing intimacy with the excluded other; it is a treatment for the psychological problem of the patient. The scene of the flesh evacuated of feeling is an allegory for the mortification of the flesh, premised on the experience of “Pendelé” (i.e., paradise), a place of enjoyment without suffering (67). The scene indicates how Query’s burn-out is bound to an apocalyptic salvation logic that conveys a sense of the soul’s epectasy, or active striving toward the good.²⁴ On the one hand, with the loss of sensory receptivity through nerve damage, the image of the leprous body recalls the locked prison of the Platonic soul, isolated from effective communication with the world and yearning for its reunion with heaven. On the other hand, Query, harnessing the superpower of this unfeeling state, has saved Deo Gratias lost in pursuit of this utopia and has thereby demonstrated his ethical progress on the way to moral redemption.

In *A Burnt-Out Case*, the key motif of *impaired communication* culminates in the romance between Query and Marie (II) and the ensuing duel between Query and Rycker that results from Marie’s lying about their affair. In its parodying the Incarnation through the Virgin Mary, the non-sexual affair between Query and Marie again rests on a decadent symbolism (in Sewell’s definition) that inverts religious tradition: Rycker turns Joseph into an abusive husband; the lying Marie is a substitute for Mary the God-mother

²³ Burn-out, as a figure of unfeeling, seems irrevocably tied to what St. Augustine considers the spiritual virtuosity of *apatheia*, which “will only come to pass when there is no sin in man” (qtd. in Brooke, *Philosophical Pride* 8). Echoing the ancient idea of ascetic apathy, Maslach, too, praises the detached concern of the therapeutic practitioner, in terms of a special combination of “distance” and “closeness” (*Burnout* 241).

²⁴ Iyer observes, “‘Perhaps in Paradise,’ Greene wrote in a private notebook, ‘we are given the power to help the living. I picture Paradise as a place of activity’” (28).

(*theotokos*); and the exhausted Query takes on, in his inadvertent victimhood, something of a Christ crucified.²⁵

This triangular situation is the ironic outcome of Query's ascetic touch. The sequence of his aiding the pregnant young girl restages the conflict with Marie (I) and provides an opportunity to measure the moral progress that Query has made by responding to the needs of others. It is here that the psychic tension expressed in the initial dream is resolved, as his ambition to help Marie Rycker satisfies his unconscious wishes and signals the end of a psychological quest. Consider the scene of rising action, Query's purported "sleeping" with Marie Rycker. What reappears is the motif of impaired communication between Query and Deo Gratias. Query listens to Marie's preparation for bed from the wall of the adjoining hotel room, as if spatializing the monadic geometry of the body as prison of the lover's soul:

Every movement was audible from the neighbouring room, and Query could follow every stage of the girl's retirement—the zipping of the all-night bag, the clatter of a coat-hanger, the tinkle of a glass bottle on a porcelain basin. Shoes were dropped on bare boards, and water ran. He sat and wondered what he ought to do to comfort her if the doctor told her in the morning that she was pregnant. He was reminded of his long night's vigil with Deo Gratias. (193)

The spatial organization of the two adjoining rooms further allude to the monadic geometry of subjects, as is meant in the association between Marie and Deo Gratias in Query's memory. The motif of *impaired communication* unites the two scenes of Query's saving the other. In this respect, the staging resolves the deficiencies of his wreckless past, represented in the dream of the broken vase. The two walls of the adjoining rooms keep the lovers at bay, like imprisoned souls. Their impaired contact doubles as a generic obstacle to romance. In the case of Deo Gratias and Marie,

²⁵ See Paula Martín Salván 311 for a reading of this sacrifice in Girardian terms.

everything revolves around the miscommunication of subjects nonetheless redeemed by an act of ascetic contact; dialogue may fail, but charitable action demonstrates the power of love and evidences Querry's moral renewal through a sort of desexualization.

Borrowing a phrase from Lewis, we might say that with this motive, "charitable love transcend[s]" the "purely erotic" (230).

It is precisely in its representation of ascetic romance that the novel reflects its most complicated relation to the discourse of psychoanalysis. Love, an emotion that had been particularly vulnerable to Freudian "dehumanization" in its association with instincts such as aggression (Rorty 182), is resurrected to once again perform a classically humanist drama of salvation. Yet, Greene's valorization of love does participate in the popular psychoanalytic thinking of the time, reflecting the revisionist discourse of ego psychology that prevailed contemporaneously. In its therapeutic optimism about the adjustment of the self to society (as for example in the work of Karen Horney, explored in Chapter 3), such revisionist discourse diverges from Freud's more pessimistic interpretation of the instincts' fundamental incompatibility with civilization. On this basis, T.W. Adorno indicts revisionist psychoanalysis for betraying Freud's theory of the instincts in favor of the "bourgeois moralistic view of sexuality," writing, "The revisionists' eager defense of tender love against Freud's idea that such love has its origin in sexuality shows that the bourgeois moralistic view of sexuality has more influence on them than on Freud" ("Revisionist Psychoanalysis" 320). Ultimately, *A Burnt-Out Case* echoes the "bourgeois moralistic view" held by revisionist psychoanalysis. The themes of religion and ascetic conversion are transmuted by Greene into a narrative of psychoanalytic self-help therapy. The redemption of Querry's pathological sexuality

through a new, “de-sexed” love (Sternlicht 17) with Marie Rycker is thus psychologically significant beyond the arcana of Catholicism.

The novel is psychologically interesting insofar as it problematizes sexuality and desire through the ideas of revisionist psychoanalysis. As Sanford Sternlicht writes, in the language of Freudian psychoanalysis, “Psychologically, Query is a castrated man” (18). The employment of the unconscious that functions through transference is the guardrail of Query’s ascetic psychology (optimistically revising the idea of Marlow’s own asceticism, as examined in Chapter 2). These aspects also reflect the revisionist fate of psychoanalysis in popular culture: “castrated by its conventionalization: sexual motives, partly disavowed and partly approved, are made totally harmless but also totally insignificant” (Adorno, *Minima Moralia* 66). Characteristic of the style of revisionist psychoanalysis, “the asexual nature of the love is glorified” (Adorno, “Revisionist Psychoanalysis” 336). Query, in recovery, is virtually harmless, even castrated, as a character whose asceticism is emblematic of the bourgeois-moralistic view of romance.

The romantic plot analogizes the myth of passionate separation in romance to the psychological problem of the isolated patient in medical practice. The idea of a therapeutic process is remodeled in the praxis of harmless intimacy. It is the act of love, rather than that of giving confession, that organizes the (Conradian) psychological revelation structuring the adventure plot, culminating in Query’s demonstration of his capacity for love through sacrifice.

The motif of impaired communication through burn-out represents Greene’s medicalized updating of the convention for asceticism that is central to the romance

plot.²⁶ This novelistic plot, in Denis de Rougemont's view, originates in the Christian myth of courtly love elaborated from the background tradition of Christian asceticism. In burn-out, which prevents feeling, the notion of the noncommunicable certainly satisfies the romantic convention to narrate "love delayed in its happy fulfillment by some obstruction" (Rougemont 52). The convention for romantic obstruction, which in the myth of romance is abstracted from its basis in the ascetic virtue of chastity, shapes novelistic situations in which "feeling becomes exaggerated to the point of asceticism," as Eric Kahler had written in his interpretation of the romance plot (32). (As Madame de Clèves says to Monsieur de Nemours in *The Princess of Cleves*, "I believe obstacles preserved your love for me" [qtd. in Kahler 33]). In *A Burnt-Out Case*, Query's incapacity for feeling is worked into the device of a romantic obstacle; burn-out sustains the romantic plot of "unhappy mutual love" (Rougemont 50) that must be inevitably obstructed. Burn-out leads to the point of asceticism, where the *noncommunicable* effectively functions as a romantic obstacle that keeps yearning lovers separate.

If only we follow the metaphorical significance of burn-out to its conclusion, we can see how the romance plot of asceticism fits into the bourgeois-moralistic view of sexuality in *A Burnt-Out Case*. Query's romantic navigation of love magnifies the effective cause of the romance myth: only obstacles exist; burn-out prevents satisfying contact; the body is obstructed in communicative feeling; in sum, the world has been subject to an absolute renunciation. These obstacles facilitate the demonstration of Query's chivalrous romantic virtue. Does not the mortification of the body by leprosy and the various associated symbols for noncommunication serve as figures for "the

²⁶ Signaling his chastity, Query's impassible disposition would also resemble that of the psychoanalyst, in Borch-Jacobsen's view (53).

intensification of love [which] must be at the same time a lover's askesis, whereby he will eventually escape out of life" (Rougemont 70)? So Query achieves a romantic escape out of life not only figuratively, in his numbness, but also literally, in ironically dying for the "de-sexed" love of Marie Rycker. In this respect, leprosy—by introducing so many obstacles through the motif of the *impaired communication in burn-out*—functions like a generic machine for the manufacture of the romantic relation. Non-feeling guarantees obstacles that can be instrumentalized to test, and prove, one's love from a distance. It is on this basis that the figure of the leper resembles, within the text, the figure of an ascetic—both dramatize the virtues of self-renunciation, suffering for love, and chastity; the romantic lovers are like two quarantined souls passionately yearning for impossible satisfaction. Is it really the case, then, that Query's death functions as a "happy ending," as Dr. Colin asks (253)? His death is the wanted escape from life presaged by the separation of the lovers' souls. The Superior understands the ascetic wish: Query "always wanted to go a bit further" (254)—further into his renunciation. The state of unfeeling that functioned as a therapeutic superpower in the last stage of his life is finally perfected in the apocalyptic ascent of the soul toward heaven, signifying his complete liberation from the domain of the flesh. In light of the ascetic virtue demonstrated through his self-sacrifice, the Superior thus judges Query redeemed: "I really think he was [cured]. ... He'd learned to serve other people ... [finding] a reason for living" (263).

Ambiguities on the Way to a Therapeutic Style

As a romantic novel about the power of love, informed by a psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious, *A Burnt-Out Case* occupies an ambiguous position within a genealogy of the therapeutic stylization of *Heart of Darkness*. On the one hand, it uses psychoanalytic ideas in orbit of the bourgeois-moralistic view of sexuality, here transformed into romance. Yet, casting religious symbols of dialogue in decadent terms, Greene's eclecticism refuses to endorse the kind of ethos of communication that inhabits the fully-fledged therapeutic emotional style.

As disease is transformed into a vector for the narrative's apocalyptic resolution, the therapeutic "cure" consists in an ascetic mortification of the flesh symbolized by burn-out. Informing the resolution of the romantic quest plot, unfeeling is elevated to a moral ideal. The novel stakes itself on the psychoanalytic side of contemporaneous cultural debates "about the desirability or necessity of a disciplinary inner control system for the sake of insuring moral conduct" (Horney, *Neurosis* 14). In its focus on Query's past transgressions, the novel suggests the desirability of control over a human nature (sexuality) that is thought to be sinful; in the plot's apocalyptic resolution, through Query's self-sacrifice and redemption, it reads as a parable about self-change. The mutilation of feeling becomes a productive and ethical *mutation*, a fundamental advance in the morality of human conduct. Thus, in the style of revisionist psychoanalysis, Greene's novel charts what Horney calls the "morality of evolution" (15) through therapeutic self-change.

The demonic symbolism of communicable infection, together with the transvaluation of disease (once cured) into a new positive quality of the self, functions as a complex instance of the therapeutic narrative's renegotiation of traditional religious

symbolism. As Illouz writes, “A demonic narrative situates the source of suffering in an evil principle that is outside the subject, whether Satan or a traumatic event. This form of evil is characterized by its ability to insidiously get inside the person” (196). While the infection of leprosy and the sense of its contamination appear to be irreducibly demonic symbols for some characters in the novel, in the case of Query the demonic is purified through love, providing the sense of an optimistic and symbolically apocalyptic conclusion. As burnt-out, Query has sublated the evil principle of disease into the basis for charitable action to save the other. His conduct demonstrates therapeutic self-change *in actu*. As Illouz writes, “[s]elf-change is ... the keystone of the large therapeutic culture edifice” (196). Query’s self-change allows him to triumph over the demonic through the action of the purified heart, reintroducing the notion of an effective cure into a universe that is significantly disburdened of Conrad’s “astrophysical pessimism” (Watt 152-154).

The ascetic narrative works to accommodate *Heart of Darkness* into a therapeutic style. In the therapeutic narrative of *A Burnt-Out Case*, the figure of the ascetic furnishes the grammar for self-change and resolves the plot of the novel by providing Query with the apocalyptic satisfaction of a repressed, but slowly unfolded, unconscious wish to love. In the context of the novel’s confessional hermeneutics, this act certifies Query’s psychological purification. The ascetic contact with Deo Gratias and Marie Rycker amounts to a specifically *dramaturgical* performance of a “confession [which] is central to the purification process” in therapeutic narrative (Illouz 177-178). In the successful performance of love by the prevailing heart, resolving his wish for redemption, Query becomes one of the rare “unconscious agents of the Living God” (Ketchum 86).

4. The Postmodern Economy of Paule Constant's *White Spirit*, a "Gendered Rewriting" of *Heart of Darkness*

In the world of Paule Constant's *White Spirit* (1989), the steamboat journey of Marlow's quest after Kurtz is reimagined through the historicity of a new economic formation, that of the postmodern. Conrad's infamous Kurtz, bent on accumulating power and resources, indexes in *Heart of Darkness* the distress of colonialism during the nineteenth-century "Scramble for Africa," exposing the injurious greed of European industrial capitalism. The original narrative speaks to the world-economy of the early twentieth century, in which "the area [of southern Africa] as a whole rapidly became a classic peripheral area, specializing in the export of minerals and agricultural products" (Wallerstein 15). Yet, how could Conrad's novel maintain relevance beyond this era? For as the century progressed, the relations between Africa and the West would be reorganized according to a changing world-system. Indeed, Constant's 1989 novel updates *Heart of Darkness* to represent such changes and is instructive for understanding the postmodernization of the textual tradition.

White Spirit indexes this new postmodern world-system, with its shift in emphasis regarding the nature of work and society. Three interrelated locations of interest map the dynamics of the economy: the warehouse, African Resource, which sells largely useless overstock goods; the theater/brothel, Sunset Boulevard, whose performing women are the center of local commerce; and Devil's Plantation, which farms bananas despite complete lack of demand. On the one hand, the logic of industrial capitalism still haunts the narrative, albeit in the signs of the obsolescence of industrial production—most pointedly symbolized by the store, the African Resource, stuffed with discarded goods and clerked

by the hapless Victor, who without prospects for employment at home has answered a help-wanted advertisement to work for the African Branch of an import-export company. On the other hand, a new style of postindustrial or “immaterial” labor occupies the economy of the locale, reflected in the discipline of the novel’s enterprising women, such as Lola and Queen Mab, who as characters gesture to the reformulation of labor according to therapeutic-emotional values. In a process of self-help empowerment, Lola, who has been imported into the country to liaison with the local boss, César, begins to whiten her skin to increase her sexual capital so that she may gain employment at Sunset Boulevard. Meanwhile, a surprising market emerges for the toxic chemical, the titular cleaning product, white spirit, that is available for sale at the Resource; its caustic effects on the skin ironically make it an ideal product for masking the purported impurities of blackness. In the novel’s grand finale, ironizing the therapeutic self-help idea of empowerment, Queen Mab, with the help of Brother Emmanuel, organizes a populist revolution and exodus that culminates in the plantation workers’ use of the chemical in a tragic ritual of purification/mass-suicide.

With its emphasis on therapeutic purification—not only physical but also mental—in the context of the local economy, the novel imaginatively connects the therapeutic-psychological ideas of empowerment and trauma to the sociological concepts of postmodernization and immaterial labor. In doing so, it offers a new way to understand the historical constitution of the postmodern literary genre, as involved with the conventions of the therapeutic emotional style as I hypothesize in this chapter’s conclusion.

Of course, since Alain Robbe-Grillet's conception of the "New Novel," scholars of French literature have been accustomed to theoretical connections between avant-garde writing and the economy of capitalism. *Heart of Darkness* as well sits at the pre-history of these connections. The novel's exemplary literary status had been established by *La Nouvelle Revue Française (NRF)*, for whom "Conrad's novels were of the highest priority" (Leander 88). For the *NRF*, Conrad's work helped to define "the adventure genre and its colonial aspect" (87). "Conrad's oeuvre was ... appropriated by the *NRF*," in a process that culminated in "1924 with a special issue at Conrad's death in which *Heart of Darkness* at last appeared in French" (88). André Gide, who had also engaged in correspondence with Conrad (see Vidan), aimed to reproduce Conrad's spirit of adventure in his own journalistic writings about Africa (Warehime 457). Importantly, he brought to public attention the horrific conditions of labor in French-colonial territories in his anti-colonial essay, "Détresse de notre Afrique-équatoriale." There, his descriptions of "the deplorable conditions of the Congolese workers as well as the unscrupulous forestry in the region, caused an outcry in the [French] metropolis and elicited further scrutiny into the allegations of the systematic use of forced labor" (Leander 95). In the eyes of his contemporary Félicien Challaye, Gide's literary intervention (echoing Conrad's) contributed to the notion that "[l]a colonisation n'est pas ... une entreprise généreuse, civilisatrice, humanitaire: c'est, essentiellement, une institution d'origine militaire et d'ordre économique" (557; "colonization is not ... a generous, civilizing, humanitarian enterprise: it is essentially an institution of military origin and of economic order"; translation mine).

For Robbe-Grillet, who published reflections on the “New Novel” in the *NRF*, the historic effects of capitalism are embedded in avant-garde narrative form. *Jealousy* (1957), exemplary of his idea of the “New Novel,” echoes *Heart of Darkness* in its colonial setting and ascetic observer-narrator—a jealous husband—but domesticates the adventure in its focus on the meticulous surveillance of that husband’s wife, A, and a man, Franck. Indeed, the narrator even alludes to *Heart of Darkness* in his description of Franck’s nighttime reading. Discussing his nighttime reading to A, “Franck’s sentence ends in ‘take apart’ or ‘take a part’ or ‘break apart,’ ‘break a heart,’ ‘heart of darkness,’ or something of the kind” (Robbe-Grillet, *Jealousy* 127). Ihab Hassan theorizes the above scene this way: “Descriptions of a novel that Franck and A are presumed to read lend themselves to blatant self-contradictions in parody of the novel we ourselves are reading” (*The Dismemberment of Orpheus* 175). As the book becomes a fragment resisting clarification, the narrative’s “bitter comedy of exhaustive enumeration” amounts to “a travesty of surveillance, depiction, and ratiocination” (175). In her study of French culture, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, Kristin Ross underlines how narratorial surveillance reflects the rationality of capitalism. In her view, the narratorial style of *Jealousy*, defined by “the activity of inspection, of obsessive visual surveillance,” is symptomatic of “the surge in French consumption and modernization,” that extends to the “disciplining” surveillance of the household (75-77). Taking this surveillance to its extreme, Robbe-Grillet’s *Jealousy* continues, in its own way, the Conradian deconstruction of modern reason. The former’s avant-garde project extends Conrad’s depiction of “the increasing fragmentation both of the rationalized external world and of the colonized psyche alike” in modernity (Jameson, *Political* 225). In this light, Conrad’s pessimism

anticipates the broader dissolution of conventional narrative categories (such as character and temporality), foreshadowing the disintegrated subject of the postmodern text (207).

In his 1957 essay (originally published in *France Observateur*¹), “On Several Obsolete Notions,” Robbe-Grillet justifies the avant-garde narrative perspective of the “New Novel” on the basis of historic changes to subjectivity, connecting the modern fragmentation of individuality to the obsolescence of the traditional (realist) idea of character and the need to experiment with new forms of characterization, as had already been attempted, for example, by Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett. Traditionally, character is understood as representing at once a biographical singularity as well as a “human type” (27). “He [the character] must have enough individuality to remain irreplaceable, and enough generality to remain universal” (28). Avant-garde novels transgress this conventional mandate regarding character—imagining instead individuals without proper names or who represent no ordinary human type. According to Robbe-Grillet, the shift from traditional to avant-garde literary models of character registers the disintegration of the cult of individuality in bourgeois society and the subsequent advance of scientific management. In this historic transformation, the charismatic qualities of individuality are replaced by the anonymous rationality of administration. “The novel of characters belongs entirely to the past, it describes a period: that which marked the apogee of the individual. ... [I]t is evident that the present period is rather one of administrative numbers,” he writes (28-29). In conclusion—unraveling the consequence of this disintegration of individuality—he asserts, “The novel seems to

¹ For a helpful discussion of the origins of the essays now collected in the standard *For a New Novel*, see Galia Yanoshevsky.

stagger, having lost what was once its best prop, the hero. If it does not manage to right itself, it is because its life was linked to that of a society now passed” (29).

Placing emphasis on “administrative numbers” overwriting individuality, Robbe-Grillet’s discourse is committed to a picture of partitioned human subjectivity dominated by information, as if mechanically reduced to the schema of a factory supervised by engineers. His emphasis on materiality and surveillance, which recalls not only the format of a factory but more generally the “materialist Marxist” view of commodities (Illouz, “Introduction” 12), however occludes attention to other important trends in late-modernity that were occurring just as the birth of the avant-garde novel was announced: namely, the “construction of the consumer as an emotional entity” (12). Such post-Fordist trends involve the “dematerialization” of the commodity-form, most notably with the prominent rise of “immaterial labor,” as has been conceptualized by Michael Hardt and others² (Illouz, “Introduction” 12-16). The transformation of production and consumption in this era led to the refashioning of capitalism through a new appeal to the emotions. Prefigured by “Freudian views of the psyche” that served as a “justification for the idea that commodities had to appeal to emotions,” in this era the rise of “advertising and marketing deliberately opted for strategies which increased the emotional and symbolic values of goods” (12). This appeal to the emotions seems to be overlooked in Robbe-Grillet’s materialist reduction of the problem of individuality to the abstract form of numerical data. His philosophy of the “New Novel,”³ like much of mid-century

² The concept was first popularized by Italian philosophy; see Maurizio Lazzarato.

³ Despite naming his novel *Jealousy* (thus alluding to the emotions), in that novel the content is largely devoid of interest in psychological interiority, or how the subject takes itself for-itself. The novel is rather concerned with the Sartrean ontological mode of being in-itself (Waters 154-155), thus meshing flat descriptions of bodies with diagrammatic

materialist theory, is more interested in the quantitative content of the commodity rather than the affective quality of the emerging, “emotionally performative” dimension of late-capitalism and its “experience economy” (13). Nonetheless, it is still possible to preserve the spirit of Robbe-Grillet’s vision by updating the idea of the avant-garde novel in theoretical connection with these overlooked trends of late-capitalism.

As *White Spirit* shows, the disintegration of individuality may also be linked to the standardization of ideals of emotional selfhood in late-capitalism. In Constant’s avant-garde novel, the profusion of spectacular relationships informing women’s sexual capital and the cult of therapeutic self-help lead to an alienating deadlock that, in my view, is deliberately connected to the immaterial labor of the postmodern economy surrounding the vaguely-named coastal hub, F., Africa (nicknamed Port Banane). In this way, the disintegration of individuality subject to the forces of late-modern capitalism may also be recognized as crucially part of Constant’s lauded “subtle representations of female subjectivity” (Edwards 73).

The Economics of Postmodernization

In general, the issue of economic postmodernization is embedded in the historic problems of decolonization. Historically, the stranglehold of Western economic imperialism gave way only through the post-war process of decolonization, which was supported by both the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. during the latter half of the twentieth century (Wallerstein 46). The impetus to decolonization crystallized suddenly in the 1960s: with

architectural details. (Of course, in Sartre’s writings, such as *The Transcendence of the Ego*, the ego is ontologically a nothingness.)

the “Year of Africa,” including the decolonization of the Congo in 1960 (47), and with the global rise of revolutionary antisystemic movements in 1968 galvanizing resistance against imperial hegemony in the Third World (49). These antisystemic movements against world superpowers came to pass just as the economic base of American manufacturing waned.

Social and political enthusiasm notwithstanding, the era of decolonization would be marred by the shadow of the massive economic downturn of the post-1970 period that amounted to a global crisis of industrial capitalism. Partially induced by excessive American spending during the Vietnam War, this period originated the regional term for American decline, in the figure of the “Rustbelt,” and was landmarked by the 1970s OPEC crisis and the 1980s sovereign-debt crisis, altogether signaling the decline of the former system of industrial production spearheaded by the industrially-revolutionized global North (50). The economic landslide, beginning in the American economy, ushered in the distinctive climate of late-modern, or postmodern, capitalism, which, according to Wallerstein, was characterized instead by “reduction of production and [increasing] unemployment in the *loci* of leading sectors; consequently in the reduction of purchases of raw material imports coming from peripheral zones ... and a significant shift of investors from seeking profits in production to seeking profits in financial (speculative) activities” (50). Motivating the historic transition from industrial to postindustrial capitalism, the downturn made “more legitimate the laying-off of industrial workers” (51) and cleared new space for the *subsumption* of so-called “immaterial labor” into new circuits of economic exchange (discussed more below). At first, initial attempts by Western banks to stimulate the global economy took the form of loans to

economically-struggling countries that “in turn helped the Western countries by counteracting the inability of the rest of the world to purchase their exports” (53). This moment represented an important reversal in trade dynamics: formerly compelled to give up their resources to the engines of the global North, now the global South was called upon to buy imports from the waning producers. As countries struggled to repay these loans that momentarily afforded them access to mass-produced commodities, however, the industrial mode of production had reached an important point of near-total saturation. Emotionally and culturally, a new kind of “pessimism”⁴ would attend the formerly progressive idea of capitalist “markets,” which now could neither easily expand to subsume new demand nor sustain the developmental aspirations of modernizing states (58-60).

In *White Spirit*, traces of this new, pessimistic spirit of postindustrial capitalism abound, with a Kafkaesque sense of characters who are “powerless in a world of institutions” (Bernstein 248), magnifying and satirizing key features of economic postmodernization. Signaling the obsolescence of industry, the African Resource

did not, as you might have expected, obey the laws of supply and demand The things they’d seen go by! Irregulars, insane contraptions, odd gadgets, nightmarish good ideas, not counting the relics of past fashions, colors that didn’t catch on, obsolete shapes, banned material, inflammable toys, irradiated milk.

It all came in ridiculous quantities, a truckload of carcinogenic undershirts for babies, a crate of large-toothed metal zippers that had briefly been the equipment of choice for men’s flies but were now already rusty, a truckload of bluing to whiten whites, a truckload of something red to whiten teeth. Here people had to make do with the abundance they were sent.⁵ (Constant 63-64)

⁴ See also Lauren Berlant 2-7, discussing “cruel optimism” in relation to this period of economic downturn, where Wallerstein locates the crystallization of market-pessimism.

⁵ “[N]’obéissait pas, comme on aurait pu le penser, à la loi de l’offre et de la demande On en avait vu passer, des objets biscornus, des trucs fous, des gadgets bizarres, des bonnes idées de cauchemar, sans compter les reliquats de modes passées, les couleurs qui n’avaient pas pris, les formes obsolètes, les matières interdites, les jouets inflammables, le

These object-oriented descriptions of the obsolete goods economy that is organized around the African Resource are complemented by the affective and emotional language found in contrasting descriptions of the sexual experience economy formed around Sunset Boulevard. Like the African Resource, the Sunset Boulevard also specializes in importing certain commodities—but in this case, the imported commodity is the white woman’s body, disciplined in erotic arts and trained to imitate standardized images. Mothered by Ysée, who spent her “glory days” (“moment de sa gloire”; 30/526⁶) in Hollywood, the women of the Boulevard act as “Barbie dolls” (“poupées Barbie”; 31/527) resembling popular, typically blonde, American movie stars, such as Marilyn Monroe and Brigitte Bardot (30-35). Their labor is that of self-presentation and interpersonal service by using their bodies.

Ysée required her girls to be white, classy, and distinguished, with false eyelashes and gowns trimmed in swansdown at the hem. A hairdresser came every morning to put their hair up in stiff black chignons resembling Iroquois headdresses, Amazon helmets. He spread vast quantities of blond hair over their shoulders

Ysée had *tremendous ambition* for her girls, as she said. A girl with no regard for perfection, without the insatiable will to advance, to learn, was lost. Consequently, the initiation was harsh and threw some doubt on many of the clichés about the slovenliness of this sort of house where anything goes.⁷ (30-31)

lait irradié. Tout ça arrivait en quantités insensées, un camion des brassières cancérigènes, un cadre de fermetures Éclair à grosses dents de fer déjà rouillées, qui le temps d’une mode avaient armé les braguettes occidentales, un camion de bleu pour blanchir le blanc, un camion de rouge pour blanchir les dents. Ici l’abondance organisait la pénurie” (Constant, “White Spirit” 549).

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, references in English are to the translation of *White Spirit* by Betsy Wing, and in French, to “White Spirit” as included in *Mes Afriques: Romans*.

⁷ “Ysée exigeait de ses filles blancheur, classe et distinction, faux cils et robes ourlées de cygne. Un coiffeur venait chaque matin monter des chignons noirs et raides qui évoquaient des coiffures iroquoises, des casques d’amazone. Il épandait sur les épaules d’énormes masses de cheveux blonds Pour ses filles, Ysée avait comme elle disait UNE AMBITION ÉNORME. Une fille sans souci de perfection, sans la volonté insatiable d’évoluer, d’apprendre, était perdue. Aussi l’initiation était-elle rude et

The ideals of their service are enshrined in “the book of advice and memories of a former makeup artist, Miss Priddy, the lady who made them all blonde, thin, long, glamorous, and nasty” (“[l]e livre de conseils et de souvenirs d’une ancienne maquilleuse, Miss Priddy, celle qui les avait toutes faites blondes, minces, longues, glamourieuses et vachardes”; 37/530). Like acting, this labor requires sentimental emotionality, as is modeled by Ysée’s matronly expressiveness: “Ah! that’s better, said Ysée, you scared me, and she brought forth both hands up to her breast to pretend her emotion was so strong that her heart was going to come right out through her bosom” (“Ah! J’aime mieux ça, dit Ysée, tu m’as fait peur, et elle appliquait ses deux mains sur sa poitrine pour jouer une forte émotion, comme si le cœur allait lui sortir du corsage”; 33/528). However, Constant, in the figure of Lola, also focuses on the negative affects of shame and humiliation that result from Ysée’s insistence on the ideals of perfection (see Duffy 41). The ideals contribute to an atmosphere of humiliation that permeates the brothel and painfully affects Lola, who wishes to gain admittance to work at the brothel but is impeded because of her ambiguous racial identity. Yet, the element of Miss Priddy’s “book of advice” is not only meant to be a commentary on oppressive racialization: the painful regime of beautification is emphasized as a universal part of the “diabolical” experience of being a woman. Constant writes of Miss Priddy’s disciplinary beauty practices, “When examined in detail the program to shape up, tone up, and beautify was quite simply diabolical, and the complexity of it gave you some idea of what a handicap it was to be a woman” (“Vu dans le détail, le programme de mise en forme, de mise en train, de mise en beauté, était

secouait-elle bien des idées reçues sur le laisser-aller des maisons de tolérance” (Constant, “White Spirit” 527).

tout simplement infernal et l'on mesurait à sa complexité le handicap d'être femme"; 79/561). In its absurdity, the advice regarding women's labor over the ideal echoes the style of mid-century *self-help* for women that, in its emphasis on their ability to soothe male anxiety through the craft of beauty, drew on popular Freudian views about the importance of men's emotional needs (Illouz, *Saving* 55-56). Thus, the women's labor for the men involves a therapeutic sensibility channeled through interpersonal relations, using their own bodies, gestures, and speech as commodities in an emotional/affective exchange package.

Constant's Representation of Female Subjectivity

The suffering of Constant's laboring women provides ample opportunity for psychologizing, but such a route is inadequate to understand Constant's more sociological focus. Consider Natalie Edwards's essay, "The Perversity of Whiteness," a powerful argument for understanding women's experience as central to the *White Spirit*. Edwards emphasizes the biologicistic category of "perversity" (naturalizing the idea of a sexual instinct) in her trauma-centered reading. According to Edwards, the novel is a testimony (in Caruth's sense, noted in Chapter 1) to women's trauma at the hands of perverse men, and the economy of colonialism as a whole is reduced to a parable about male unreason. Assuming a therapeutic style in advocating for the female "voice" that testifies to the nature of sexuality, Edwards does not discretely consider how certain therapeutic conventions—such as the idea of therapeutic self-esteem or empowerment—are ironized

in Constant's representation of the local economy. The populist revolution that is premised on white spirit as an ironic therapeutic device is entirely bypassed.

As Edwards writes, "[i]n Constant's novel, ... female characters are foregrounded and issues of gender and sexuality are central to the drama" (74). Edwards argues that the novel is a "gendered" rewriting of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, problematizing sexuality and representing sexual trauma as an effect of the colonial power structure. According to Edwards, Constant's novel reveals the "sexually sordid aspect of empire" (73). This sordid aspect revolves around the brothel Sunset Boulevard, which attracts the labor of the company store, the African Resource. Edwards writes, "The fact of including a brothel in the novel is an important departure from *Heart of Darkness*, in which the male colonialist's sexual desire is not overtly discussed" (73). The brothel codifies gendered relationships as between "heavily symbolic female characters" and their perverse male clients (73). The brothel concretizes the critical rewriting of Conrad's novel: in Edwards's view, the emphasis on sexuality in *White Spirit* is meant to reveal a gendered distribution of physical and emotional suffering, in which women bear the (sexual) trauma of colonization (73). Although tragic in its emphasis on suffering, comically absurd elements contribute to the novel's parody of the administrative "business of imperialism" and the genre of traditionally masculinist adventure tales (73).

Let us flesh out the logic of Edwards's reading a bit. First, consider the opening characterization of Victor and his grandmother, exemplary of Constant's foregrounding female characters. Edwards writes of the juxtaposition of Victor and his grandmother: "We learn on the first page of her resourcefulness and power compared to his [Victor's] inaction" (74). Prior to his journey, the grandmother ushers Victor around town,

provisioning on his behalf. Constant writes, “The whole way there she had listed the things she’d buy and untangled the thread of fate for him. ... She acknowledged the world’s order and accepted heaven’s; consequently she was able to discover the signs of a divine plan everywhere and in everything. He liked how she told him his life the way people read lives in cards” (“Pendant le trajet, elle détaillait ses achats, elle démêlait pour lui le fil de la destinée. ... Elle reconnaissait l’ordre du monde et acceptait celui du ciel, aussi savait-elle déceler en tout et partout les signes d’un projet divin. Il aimait qu’elle lui dît sa vie comme on lit dans les cartes; 1-2/507). This characterization of the grandmother’s divinatory powers, in contrast to Victor’s passive adoration, provides some sense of what is involved in Constant’s typical representation of women. In foregrounding powerful women responsible for powerless men, there is an obviously gendered redistribution of power. The grandmother has wisdom; the dependent grandson, only immaturity and ignorance. This schematic relation between controlling mother and dependent male child is generalized throughout the novel, as a sort of general archetype of relations between women and men. The parent-child schema underlines the polarity of active-woman/passive-boy that is the motor of the world of *White Spirit*.

In this regard, it is significant that Victor’s grandmother is also the first to christen the titular cleaning product, white spirit. It shows us that Constant conceives of active power in terms of the use of language. Edwards’s own interpretation of this scene belies a critical interest in isolating the role of the female “voice” (but does not consider why what is spoken, about the cleaning product, is also praised for being a cultural marker of Americanness). The grandmother lists various cleaning products to the African

Resource's "director of this and president of that" ("*directeur de ceci, président de cela*"), Monsieur Beretti, as Beretti hopes she may be able to help identify a product in stock:

Well, you, Madame, certainly ought to know what it is. Something for washing, for cleaning, for bleaching. Clorox? replied the grandmother No, there's the word white in it. ... Salt, the grandmother went on frantically. Epsom salts, smelling salts, spirit of salt ... No, no, frowned Beretti ... White spirit? said the grandmother in a sudden burst of inspiration. That's it! he said, pointing at her as if to fix the word right there in her mouth, that's it: *white spirit*, anything American works great over there.⁸ (7-8)

As Edwards interprets this scene: "Constant's work thus opens not just with an image of a strong woman compared to a weak male, but with *a woman with a voice* compared to a mute male" (74-75, emphasis added). While the grandmother has knowledge and power expressed through language (and specifically an act of naming), neither Victor nor Beretti finds himself similarly empowered, as reflected in their bumbling, often confused or hesitant discourse.

At a more complex level, formal and symbolic elements also point to the empowerment of female subjectivity in *White Spirit*. Edwards emphasizes how the novel adopts the form of an "omniscient third person narrator" whose "point of view frequently changes" (75). According to Edwards, these narrative changes are typically tied to a female character's point of view (75). Consider the free indirect style in the case of the narrator's description of the earlier, apocryphal Mess Kit Rebellion: "The rations had everything required but they didn't want to know about that. At least, if only (and it was

⁸ "Beretti haussa les épaules, vous devez bien connaître ça, vous, Mâdame, c'est un truc qui lave, qui décape, qui blanchit. Eau de Javel? Répondit la grand-mère Non, y a blanc dedans. ... Sel, sel d'Angleterre, sel d'argent, esprit de sel ..., non, non, faisait Beretti en fronçant les sourcils ... White spirit? Dit la grand-mère subitement inspirée. C'est ça, répondit-il en pointant le doigt vers elle comme pour lui fixer le mot dans la bouche, c'est ça, *WHITE SPIRIT*, l'américain c'est ce qui marche le mieux là-bas" (Constant, "White Spirit" 511).

Ysée who said this) they had added a bit of banana to what they ate” (“Il y avait dans les rations tout ce qu’il leur fallait, mais ils ne voulaient pas les savoir. Si au moins, et c’était Ysée qui le disait, ils avaient ajouté à leur nourriture un peu de banane”; 65/550). Such a technique provides the impression that, like the grandmother’s control of Victor, so too the narrative point of view is informed and controlled by the implicit authority of powerful women such as Ysée. When in doubt, women provide clarity in the narrative through verbalizing their knowledge; their contribution supplements what the men lack.

As Edwards argues, these various features of women’s presence stand in marked contrast to prominent elements of the original *Heart of Darkness*, notably regarding Marlow’s discursive exclusion of women. Think of that novel’s final scene, where he abruptly interrupts, silences, and continues to hide the truth from Kurtz’s Intended. In comparison, Constant’s elevation of female characters to positions of authority carves out a position for women in the novel’s colonial setting. *White Spirit* reclaims the colonial narrative “from a woman’s point of view and in a woman’s voice, highlighting this crucial absence [of women] in the former text” (75). Moments in which women speak “in the place of a man” and inhabit the (traditionally masculine) narrative voice subvert the colonial-novel trope of the “stereotypically impoverished, inferior, silenced woman” (75). In this way, Constant’s novel rewrites the “mythic binary of the heroic male colonizer and the obedient wife,” and updates the colonial novel to include post-feminist subjectivity (83). On this basis, *White Spirit* also carries political stakes as a gendered rewriting of Conrad, for it shows how authority is not without its basis in a power struggle.

As part of its problematization of post-feminist politics, the novel not only considers women’s authority, but also offers an astute evaluation of the forces that

condition female subjectivity in a colonial context. In Edwards's view, these forces consist in the sexual instinct of frenzied men. Lola, Victor's partner or double, so to speak, is impacted by these forces in striking ways. Like Victor, Lola has answered a classified ad to act as a courtesan to César. In Edwards's view, Lola's character illustrates the injurious, exploitative sexual routines of colonialism. Her character provides terrain for a feminist critique of subjectivity based on a theory of (colonial) sexuality (77). In this line of interpretation, the power that female characters obtain must be won as a triumph that maintains traces of a power struggle.

The Gendered Distribution of Suffering

Seeking to gain the affections of the local men, Lola personifies the gendered distribution of suffering that, following Edwards's logic, occupies *White Spirit*. (The implicit links between the suffering of self-transformation and immaterial labor will be unraveled later.) Edwards explains the concept of a gendered distribution of suffering this way: "[B]oth characters [Victor and Lola] suffer in order to attain the final destination in their respective journeys, but Constant emphasizes the harshness of the woman's suffering compared to the man's, and links this explicitly to her female body" (77). Through Lola, that is, Constant links suffering to the sexual objectification of the female body. In her occupation at the brothel, Lola bears the brunt of the "sexually sordid" relations that, according to Edwards, underwrite the enterprise of colonialism. Indeed, colonization in this formula becomes simply an extension of perverse male sexuality.

Whereas Conrad might have depicted, between the metropole and its colonies, the psychological cost of colonization in terms of greed, Constant specifies that the psychological cost is here an effect of lust. This latter vision rests on “an important distinction between the ways in which the sexually sordid ex-colony impacts upon male and female subjects” (79). Such a theory of colonial sexuality casts men as hedonists who epitomize a will to power over women. As Edwards writes, “The men in *White Spirit* have become obsessed with sex, and erotic pleasure takes precedence over all other activity” (78). The violence of colonization is thereby coterminous with the unleashing of a dangerous sexuality from the otherwise repressive constraints of civilization. In this reading, colonialism causes women’s acute suffering by liberating the unreason of the male sexual instinct. Edwards writes,

From the moment they [the men] arrive in the belly of the ship and behave like caged beasts when imagining Lola’s naked body, and the way in which they run in a frenzy to the brothel upon arrival, sex is presented as the dangerous element that may lead to their psychological unhinging. ... the fact that the colonial society is based upon sexual desire, which often becomes a perverse sexual desire, is presented as the reason for the madness. (78)

The brothel is the primary locus of this madness as it spatializes the gendered distribution of suffering, imagining emotional suffering as a laborious responsibility borne by the women in service of the men who descend from the disheveled sites of (male) colonial power, the African Resource and Devil’s Plantation.

While the white men in power yearn for pleasure, the women who gather around the brothel, including women imported into the country, suffer painfully as is required by the sexual economy, to the point of self-hatred. As Edwards explains, “the European women in the brothel go mad trying to model themselves in the correct image” (79). The

trajectory of Lola, from tragic mulatto to object of collective adoration, models this fate.

After being first gifted Miss Priddy's beauty manual and ridiculed for her apparent

blackness, Lola decides to model herself in the ideal image of a blonde:

The ideal was to be blond, a brunette never looked neat So then, who's to keep you from becoming blond? A bit of work and good dye, just so long as you're careful about roots

Lola, in front of her mirror, assessed how much work lay ahead of her; not only was she not blond, she was black—still, maybe not entirely so

She turned to the next chapter: bleaching

... Miss Priddy recommended every sort of cleanser, every sort of disinfectant, every sort of bleach, every sort of eraser⁹ (81)

So begins Lola's intensive process to become like Marilyn Monroe, in conformity with Hollywood's ideal image of the sexy female. After trying some homeopathic concoctions, and then bleach, with no success, Lola finally discovers white spirit at the African Resource. Seeing the product already whitening the hands of Victor's assistants, B and B, Lola remarks, "I know, it's white spirit, and she recited the advice given by Miss Priddy" ("je sais, c'est du white spirit et elle récita les conseils de Miss Priddy" 85/564). Lola's consequent self-transformation culminates in her identification as "the white woman" ("la blanche") who is won by Victor in a prize lottery drawing (171/629). In the context of Lola's sexualization as an object of desire, the "metaphor of white spirit [serves] to highlight the erotic aspect of imperialism" (Edwards 82). (However, here emphasis on Lola's sexualization sidesteps the issue that white spirit is more than an erotic metaphor as it is also used in Queen Mab's millenarian movement.)

⁹ "L'idéal était d'être blonde, une brune ne faisait jamais net Et alors, qui vous empêche de devenir blonde? Un peu de travail et une bonne teinture, à condition d'être vigilante sur les racines Devant sa glace, Lola mesura l'ampleur du travail qui l'attendait; non seulement elle n'était pas blonde, mais elle était noire, peut-être pas tout à fait cependant Elle passa au chapitre suivant: la décoloration. ... Miss Priddy recommandait tout ce qui nettoie, tout ce qui désinfecte, tout ce qui blanchit, tout ce qui nettoie, tout ce qui efface" (Constant, "White Spirit" 562-563).

Edwards emphasizes the physical and affective trauma of Lola's self-transformation, involving not only the burning of her skin but also an acute sense of racial humiliation. With a flashback to a primal scene from Lola's childhood, Constant implies that her suffering pertains to a key part of her identity. The flashback reveals the significance of a black stain (of chocolate) on a white robe given to her by her godmother—a metaphor for miscegenation.

At twelve Lola was still the princess, but, as her godmother said: Princess Caca. Which Lola demonstrated soon enough. Her godmother ... had given her a white wool bathrobe lined in fake satin, like a movie star's. The first morning, first breakfast, the cup of chocolate spilled. Filthy! but stylish! The words stuck as firmly as the chocolate puke that wouldn't come off the front of the garment ...¹⁰ (118)

This primal scene of humiliation conditions Lola's sense of self, in its association of blackness with dirt. It speaks to the core of Lola's self-hatred that motivates an ascetic routine of self-transformation in order to more closely embody the supposed ideal of white beauty. The painful scenes of Lola's self-transformation (79-82), and the surrounding affects of shame and desire that motivate it (including her attempts to win the desire of the colonial other), convey a sense of the fundamentally gendered distribution of suffering that is central to the novel's representation of female subjectivity, according to Edwards.¹¹

¹⁰ "À douze ans, elle était toujours princesse, mais comme disait la marraine: Princess Caca. Elle en fit bientôt la démonstration. ... [L]a marraine ... lui avait offert une robe de chambre de laine blanche avec des parements de faux satin comme en portent les stars. Premier matin, premier petit déjeuner, le bol de chocolat se renversa ... Sale, mais coquette! La devise lui colla à la peau comme le dégueulis de chocolat, ineffaçable sur le devant du vêtement" (Constant, "White Spirit" 589).

¹¹ Nonetheless, *contra* Edwards, this dynamic might be described more specifically as *anatomized* instead of broadly gendered; indeed, the anatomy of the young white girl seems especially relevant—perhaps recalling the Lolita archetype, of "confused female, of homeless little slut," that is described by Simone de Beauvoir in *Bridgette Bardot and*

In this reading, Constant's focus on female subjectivity, testifying to a gendered distribution of suffering, amounts to a reparative revision of the colonial-novel tradition. The form and content of the novel is a "response to the traditional silencing of women" as found in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (75). Placing women at the center of the frenzied economy of colonial-sexual desire, Constant isolates the particularly "acute loss" and "deeper psychological scar" that the "female feels" in colonial society (81). Scarring is produced by the dangerous sexuality of men who are set loose to act without restraint. In a word, the form of colonial power in this case is imagined through the metaphor of a traumatic sexual assault. Constant's fiction testifies to the "uneasy conflation between colonial penetration and sexual penetration" (83).

Edwards's emphasis on sexual violence in Constant's fiction indicates that her reading is premised on literary trauma theory, directing us to the idea of a wound expressed in narrative testimony. Yet, this view has its unrecognized limits: focusing only on the sexual plot about Lola, Edwards's reading fails to fully explain the novel's satirizing of the postindustrial economy, as in Queen Mab's staging of a populist rebellion that incorporates white spirit in a symbolic ritual of rebirth. Applying a reductive, popularized Freudian view of sexuality to explain the oppression of women in colonial society, Edwards sees colonialism as patterned on an originary male sexual instinct that victimizes women. The economic structures of the empire are merely reflections of this dangerous sexual base. This, however, is not how Constant herself sees it: in a 2019 introduction to the *Quarto* edition of *White Spirit*, she clarifies that her interest in female subjectivity is "loin de la victimisation qui était à l'époque la doxa des universités

the Lolita Syndrome (30-32). "Lola" is, of course, a name that may be read as an allusion to Nabokov's titular character.

américaines que je fréquentais” (“White Spirit” 501; “far from that of victimization which was at the time the doxa of the American universities that I spent time in”; translation mine). By insisting on victimization, hence, Edwards’s account has to leave some crucial elements of postcolonial historicity as depicted in Constant’s novel undertheorized. Is it possible to expand the frame of reference beyond the psychologizing language of sexual trauma, to give discrete interpretative focus instead to the socio-cultural horizon of America and the economics of postmodernization? After all, it is around these elements that the entire business of the African Resource and the spectacles of Sunset Boulevard have been constructed.

Lola and Neurotic Submission

Complementing Edwards’s psychoanalytic theory of *White Spirit*, Margot Miller’s study of Constant’s fiction, *In Search of Shelter*, helps to bridge Edwards’s psychological interest with attention to the socio-cultural elements at the novel’s core, such as Hollywood, through emphasis on the role of collective “admittance.” The process of admittance in the postcolonial setting is interpreted by extending aspects of Karen Horney’s psychoanalytic ego psychology, particularly her emphasis on the socio-cultural mediation of self-growth. In her ego-psychological writings, Horney divorced Freud’s psychology from its biologicistic foundations; in the course of her occasional foray into the topic of feminine psychology, she stresses instead how the burden of socio-cultural ideals for women might explain the perception of feminine masochism (Horney, *New Ways* 112-115). In Miller’s Horneyan interpretation of the novel, Lola’s self-growth is inhibited

by structures of admittance that force her into a masochistic self-relationship in order to embody beauty ideals.

In drawing attention to self-growth, Miller's interpretation of *White Spirit* elaborates a positive and teleological model of selfhood (predicated on an idea of the "real" or authentic self) that supplants Edwards's psychoanalytic emphasis on the negative and vertiginous dimension of sexual trauma. This shift in theoretical framing ultimately leads to a surprising difference in interpretation. In the ego-psychological framework (such as Miller's), *White Spirit* becomes a drama about the neurotic self and its fraught integration with a collective. The rational problem of self-realization replaces the unreason of perversion. The fundamental category of female subjectivity in *White Spirit* is thus no longer the female victim; instead, it is the female bully, who finds a rational but neurotic solution (in aggression) to the socio-cultural problem of self-realization.

At its most basic level, Miller's ego-psychological reading of *White Spirit* is premised on an axiom drawn from Horney's psychoanalytic ego psychology: the self is driven to personal and emotional growth, understood as an organic expression of the "real self." The trope of the journey narrative is interpreted as the symbolic correlate of self-growth: the return journey (leading home) symbolizes the achievement of a shelter for self-growth. The trope of the exile narrative (of homelessness) symbolizes the self's having lost both its way and its capacity for growth and self-realization. *White Spirit* is, according to this reading, typical of Constant's use of exile narrative: "the colonial and postcolonial settings in which Constant's novels take place are the quintessential location(s) of existential anxiety. ... [A]ll of them are places of exile" (4). Miller

highlights how the trope of exile is linked to a frustrated process of collective “admittance” (into a socio-cultural community) that results from an individual’s unsuccessful negotiation of differences between the real and the ideal self, the latter prescribed from the outside, so to speak, by the community.

In isolating the frustrated process of admittance, Miller’s psychoanalytic theory of Constant’s literature extends Horney’s insights about neurosis and the formation of neurotic solutions. Instead of the Freudian model, in which neurosis is triggered by a conflict of *instincts*, Horney’s ego psychoanalytic model proposes that neurosis is produced by a conflict in *personality*. A conflict in personality exists when an individual fails to reconcile the real self with the socio-culturally “idealized self” (Horney, *Neurosis* 17-22). Neurosis develops when attempts at so-called authentic self-realization fail and the lack of possible real growth must be compensated for by self-idealization. On the basis of such a discrepancy between the real and the ideal, neurotic conflicts are characterized by an interdependent spiral of self-idealization and self-hate.

As in Miller’s interpretation, this dynamic of neurosis may be used as a grid for the interpretation of postcolonial society. It is simple to see, in theory, how the generic polarity of the colonist-colonized relationship produces neurotic conflict. Socio-cultural structures of colonial power, which seed ideological models of selfhood, obstruct the self-realization of the colonized. Indeed, Miller’s theoretical reading of Constant’s fiction locates a variety of Horneyan neurotic conflicts and solutions. In Miller’s words, neurotic “movements” of identity formation (toward or away from the collective) are produced through “efforts to create an ‘ideal’ self that would replace a presupposed ‘real’ self. This effort results in an exiled mixture of the two selves, which ... [Horney] notes is often

perceived as a *'hated self'*" (2, emphasis added). Similar to Edwards's interpretation of emotional suffering, so too in Miller's account of neurosis, the character of Lola is foregrounded. Her dedication to Miss Priddy's beautification self-help regime amounts to a case study in the neurotic solution of masochistic self-idealization and self-hatred. In this respect, Miller's ego-psychological interpretation of Lola within the context of postcolonial society in *White Spirit* is corroborated by the landmark text of postcolonial theory by Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, that, in the spirit of revisionist psychoanalysis, emphasizes how socio-cultural forces affect the ego-formation of the colonized.

In that important work by Fanon, neurosis is described through the figure of the "mask," understood in the Jungian sense,¹² as a role played by the self but constituted by the collective. Fanon describes how the colonized resort to practices of masking in order to hide one's individuality behind an artificial facade of collective acceptability, as in the case of masking blackness to appear white. With this manner of conduct in mind, Fanon writes, "The Negro's behavior makes him akin to an obsessive neurotic type" (60). In psychoanalytic language, the practice of masking involves an "ambivalent identification" (Bhabha xxii) that initiates a Horneyan spiral of self-hatred. As Hussein Bulhan writes, Fanon's use of the mask signifies how "the oppressed learn to wear masks for different occasion [*sic*], ... to learn to present acceptable public behaviors while repressing many incongruent private feelings" (123 qtd. in Miller 27). In sum, the Fanonian mask describes a strategy of survival through repressing the real self under the racist powers of colonial society.

¹² See Eric Kahler, *The Tower and the Abyss* 5.

If we follow the logic of self-transformation behind Fanon's use of the concept, it is clear that masking functions in terms that Foucault would later define as an ascetic technique of the self: as a practice of self-transformation organized by an ideal of perfection (discussed in Chapter 1). Noting the practice of masking in black women's resistance to dating black men in the Antilles, Fanon writes, "For, in a word, the race must be whitened; every woman in Martinique knows this, says it, repeats it. Whiten the race, save the race" (Fanon 47 qtd. in Chow 61). Fanon's ironic remarks are perspicacious in that they connect the technique of masking to its final cause, revealing the teleology of immanent *salvation* through self-transformation that underwrites the exercise of whitening. This exercise is not simply cosmetic, since it extends into the eugenic preference for miscegenation through sexual reproduction with white men. The practice of whitening "save[s] the race," to recall the above formula, not only by effecting a white mask that may be worn in public, but also by ensuring, through miscegenation, a redemptive future in the child who is purified of blackness.¹³ The black self is effectively sacrificed in the name of whiteness. The biopolitical combination of racism and self-sacrifice in the ritual of whitening is a striking instance of a neurotic solution to the problem of collective admittance, as premised on the kind of ambivalent psychic identification common in postcolonial society.

As Miller sees it, *White Spirit's* surveying of the psychological dilemmas of colonization through the psychoanalytic grid of neurosis may thus be brought to bear on what Rey Chow has labeled the postcolonial "politics of identification" (57). Constant's novel makes use of the ego-psychoanalytic concept of identification that has been widely

¹³ In sum, whitening is a symbolic life/death ritual, to borrow Sylvia Wynter's terminology (Wynter and McKittrick 33).

applied by postcolonial theorists of race, including Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, and Judith Butler.¹⁴ Depicting the frustration of self-growth by colonial structures of power, the novel highlights the complex issue of “admittance” that organizes the self’s relation to collective ideals with which it ambivalently identifies. In her reading of Fanon, Chow emphasizes how the politics of identification involves the practice of admittance (in both the regulatory and confessional sense), understood to be the “principle that regulates community formation” (58). In Chow’s words, theoretical focus on “the psychic mutabilities of the postcolonial subject alone” is insufficient; it is further “necessary to reintroduce the structural problems of community formation that are always implied in the articulations of the subject, even when they are not explicitly stated as such. ... [T]here is no community formation without the implicit understanding of who is and who is not to be admitted” (57-58). *White Spirit* makes apparent the collective forces of exclusion and strategies of admittance with which the self must contend in order to integrate with the socio-cultural milieu of colonization, including the economy of images (such as the movie stars, like Marilyn Monroe) that circulate intensely as ideals. Specifically, the locals’ use of white spirit as a masking self-help practice—or technology of the self—to produce ideal whiteness dramatizes the tortuous and spectacular process of admittance, in which cultural images expropriate subjects of their real individuality. Miller’s reading of the novel highlights the so-called collective dimension of admittance through *colonial masking* within the broader tradition of postcolonial theory.

Yet, it would be a mistake to rest with the idea of whitening as simply a cosmetic practice or strategy for eugenic sexual reproduction: Above all, the trope channels a logic

¹⁴ See Wynter and Katherine McKittrick 18-19, 55-56; and Butler 180.

of spiritual purification that indicates how masking is embedded within a therapeutic emotional style. Staged with elaborate religious symbolism—including that of sacrifice—the novel’s titular cleaning product, white spirit, is meant to cleanse the self through the process of masking and thereby saving the race, as if blackness were a demonic principle capable of being therapeutically exorcized (on the purification of the demonic, see Chapter 1). At some level, the use of masking may be read as an absurdist allegory of the collective ideals of racial hygiene that, as Ross shows, had been an ideological feature of the “generalized postwar atmosphere of moral purification” (76).

Miller emphasizes the hygienic-moral significance of Lola’s neurotic masking practice:

Lola decides to purify herself, to clean herself up, in order to cross the border of acceptability Lola is convinced and sets about doing whatever it takes to become white, to erase the ‘chocolate stain’ of her not-black-but-not-white skin. She adopts the neurotic ‘*should*,’ to use Horney’s term for the cultural stereotype that says to be accepted one must be white. (25-26)

Lola’s racial self-change, guided by this neurotic “should,” produces an aesthetic, moral, and salvific effect through purification. This is why Miss Priddy’s beauty manual is given the religious name of “the bible of feminine success” (“la bible de la réussite féminine”; 79/561), highlighting the continuity between the religious idea of purification and therapeutic self-change. Masking makes Lola beautiful and pure, according to the moral ideal of perfect whiteness—thereby facilitating her redemption and securing her admittance into the blessed colonial community.

In this interpretation, Miller’s insistence on the socio-cultural structuration of the *personality* diverges from Edwards’s theoretical investment in the perverse, effectively biological origins of colonial power in the sexual instinct. The Freudian question of sexuality and the perversion of instinct is, in this case, replaced by the ego-psychological

issue of a socio-cultural structure that frustrates self-realization and prescribes alienating ideals. Lola's self-transformation is "based on a cultural demand for the conformity and sameness of whiteness that is conflated with 'purity' and 'cleanliness'": in service of this demand, Lola must repress her "real self" in order to gain "admittance to the community" (26). Miller continues: "Lola's skin-whitening and her own refusal of her sexuality ... are masks of acceptability that repress the incongruent color/sex of her 'real self' and give new meaning to the term 'self-destruction'" (27). In contrast to Edwards's language of victimization, the language of masking foregrounds a rational or strategic agency of the self, albeit distorted in the form of a neurotic solution. Here, masking is a way to get ahead, premised on an adaptive logic of self-adjustment—even a provisional tactic for empowerment. Horney's ego-psychological emphasis on the importance of self-esteem encourages the conception of masking in these terms. In Miller's view, neurotic submission to cultural standards of admittance amounts to a "strategy for protection and survival" (27). Paradoxically, however, though Lola's neurotic submission to racist ideals enables her to survive, it simultaneously leads to her "self-destruction." Might her neurotic submission be thus read as an involution of aggression, in the form of masochistic self-hatred? In this case, self-destruction is pursued in the service of the ideals of the collective.

The "Female Bully": Queen Mab and Neurotic Aggression

The topic of aggression leads us to Queen Mab, who becomes, in Miller's interpretation, the most illustrative example of Constant's representation of female

subjectivity, in a significant departure from Edwards. As the leader of a millenarian-populist revolution, organizing plantation laborers with her own strategy of admittance that refashions white spirit for use in a baptismal ritual, Queen Mab's plot lays bare the ironic religious-therapeutic symbolism of death/life that Constant places at the heart of the masking process.

After her takeover of the African Resource and discovery of the valuable white spirit, Queen Mab organizes the plantation workers' exodus and climactic ritual suicide, extending, in a larger scale, the theme of "auto-genocidal mimeticism" (to borrow Wynter's phrase¹⁵) that Miller points us to in the case of Lola. While Lola shows the path of neurotic submission, Queen Mab rather illuminates the path of neurotic aggression. Her aggression is first displayed as she bullies Victor out of managing the warehouse in order to achieve its takeover (60-72). As Miller writes of this development,

The threat of danger at any moment keeps him [Victor] within the boundaries set by Reine Mab, and the store becomes for him a space of exile, a trap, in which he cannot succeed and from which he cannot escape. Significantly, this entrapment is an inversion of the typical colonial situation in which the white man encloses the black and limits his movement. In this case, the oppressor is a black woman (31)

In Miller's view, Queen Mab, as a "female bully," represents Constant's most important contribution to the postcolonial representation of female subjectivity. In comparison with Edwards's feminist emphasis on the female victim in Constant's novels, Miller's psychological emphasis on the characteristic significance of the female bully is striking. How are we to understand this difference? Consider how Miller explains the phenomenon of the female bully as reflective of a historic transformation in the structures that motivate submission:

¹⁵ Wynter and McKittrick 53.

A bully is always someone who feels inferior, who wants a place of greater recognition, and who feels unable to achieve the desired recognition through merit, but who feels he or she deserves it nonetheless. Bullies are people who would have been submissive in a hierarchical world but who, in our postcolonial world, have begun to challenge assumptions about place because of the possibilities in increasingly democratic society. (86)

The bully is someone who would have been a victim (of traditional hierarchy) in a prior colonial era, but “in our postcolonial world” neurotic submission to hierarchy is no longer structurally necessary. The “traditional hierarchical” (and masculinist) “rules of social place” have been dismantled in the postcolonial context (6). As Miller writes, “It is the behavior of Constant’s female bullies ... that is the most indicative of [this postcolonial] societal change” (6). Putting it differently, hierarchical submission to socio-cultural conventions is, in the democratic context, transformed by the individualist pursuit of self-realization and power. Queen Mab most clearly models this structural transformation; she elbows her way through postcolonial society in the name of entrepreneurialism: “She wanted to be *the* big businesswoman in Africa” (“Elle voulait être LA grande commerçante de l’Afrique”; 138/605). Although not without irony, the female bully in *White Spirit* symbolizes the emergence of this alternate form of female power in the new postcolonial social organization.

Queen Mab’s status as oppressor, or bearer of this new social power of the bully, is predicated on her performative and emotional skills. Like other examples of the novel’s powerful women, “Reine Mab’s power is in her omnipotent command of speech. She believes in the performative power of her voice” (Miller 69). Recalling the child-parent relation between Victor and his grandmother, so too Queen Mab possesses an authority and expertise upon which her partner, Brother Emmanuel, depends: “Queen Mab’s

gigantic size stood between Emmanuel and the world; any information he received came through her. Sounds, smells, colors—she translated them all for him. And, in the other direction, she was the interpreter of his archaic desires” (“Le gigantisme de Reine Mab s’interposait entre Emmanuel et le monde, il ne recevait d’informations qu’à travers elle. Les sons, les odeurs, les couleurs, elle lui traduisait tout. Et par un mouvement inverse elle était l’interprète de ses désirs archaïques”; Constant 88/568). Yet her power also derives from her therapeutic abilities, as she organizes healing rituals, “cur[ing] the sick” (“guérissaient les malades”; 109/582). As an entrepreneur, she inadvertently discovers a market for white spirit as it is used as a sacerdotal supplement for purification.

Her powerful voice, “cut out for letting the Word pass through” her audience (“taillée pour laisser passer la Parole”; Constant 136/604), motivates the climax of the novel—the millenarian revolution organized around the therapeutic ritual of purification. Mobilizing the local population through her religious sermons, based on the salvific equation, “*white spirit, holy spirit*” (“*WHITE SPIRIT, ESPRIT SAINT*”; 89/568)—parodying communion—she ultimately shepherds the revolutionary movement to its own cult suicide as crowds revolt in exodus from Devil’s Plantation. This sequence takes the neurotic aggression of self-hatred to an absurd extreme. On this basis, the novel showcases how collective admittance remains under the control of symbolic-religious ideas about submission to authority, purity, and self-sacrifice.

Consider how Queen Mab’s power is amplified in her joining forces with the lapsed Christian (and criminal) Brother Emmanuel, who is the first patient, so to speak, who she redeems using the white spirit taken from the African Resource (Constant 89-90). Indeed, by incorporating elaborate Christian symbolism in the baptismal ritual of

white spirit that the two innovate together, the plot places a spotlight on the ascetic structures of submission and authority that motivate the self-purifying act of masking. Of Queen Mab's significance to Emmanuel, Constant writes, "She was his mother and his father, she was his priest and his apostle ... —she would hold him to her belly and he came back to life. ... It was his ambition to form a Priest-couple with her, a Pope-couple, a God-couple" ("Elle était sa mère et son père, elle était son prêtre et son apôtre ... —elle le prenait sur son ventre, et il renaissait. ... Il ambitionnait de former avec elle un couple Prêtre, un couple Pape, un couple Dieu"; 108/581-582). The pair attract a local cult following based on their performance of miracles and Queen Mab's inspiring sermons.

Queen Mab's sermons make use of Hebraic themes about exodus and return which have often been adopted by black millenarian movements (Walzer 3-5), and of Christian ideas about the mortification of the flesh in the ritual of white spirit.¹⁶ Brother Emmanuel leads the converted group in their exodus across the desert beyond the local territory (Constant 151-153), which Queen Mab announces in her ultimate sermon.

Take us into good land, Queen Mab began to sing in her beautiful voice—resonant, so warm, so ardent that sweat sprayed in their faces, a land of torrents, springs and streams bubbling up in the valleys and on the mountains. We shall go to the promised land, the crowd repeated. And, to put more power into her voice, Queen Mab closed her eyes: We shall go through the great forest, we shall go through the vast river. We shall take the road to paradise, the crowd shouted in a single voice, we shall find the land of our birth. We shall break our chains, we shall break the shackles on our voices. ... The faithful came forward one after the other, silent, calm, and serene; they put out their hands and Emmanuel gave them the white powder; they crossed themselves and put everything they owned—crumpled bills, flimsy little coins, gold fragments—into Queen Mab's vast skirt, between her spread thighs.¹⁷ (144-145)

¹⁶ For a reading of these elements in terms of a genealogy of the present, see Foucault, "*Omnes et Singulatim*" 301-310.

¹⁷ "Fais-nous entrer dans un bon pays, entonnait Reine Mab de sa belle voix vibrante et si chaude que la sueur leur giclait à la face, pays de torrents, de sources et de flots qui jaillissent dans la vallée et sur la montagne. Nous irons vers la terre promise, reprenait la

Here Queen Mab's powerful voice betrays a significant departure from Edwards's idea of women's victimization by male sexuality; rather, her tragic empowerment of the locals' revolution recalls the horror of Kurtz more than the mournful testimony of Marlow. In the religious-therapeutic ritual she organizes, the followers exorcize themselves of their impurities in preparation for their exodus and return to the promised land—not only by renouncing their worldly possessions, but also by mortifying their bodies through the dose of white spirit that they plan to consume at the final point of their journey. The ritual reads as an extreme version of the allegorical Christian-ascetic practice of dying to the world—indeed, the practice is literalized into absurdity when the consumption of the product by the 800 farm workers of the millenarian troop becomes, in effect, their mass suicide (157, 166).

As Miller observes, “This depiction of misguided obsessive submission demands reexamination of the culture of religion” (6). Indeed, as Miller helpfully notes, the climactic cult suicide “calls to mind Jim Jones, who actually did lead his followers to commit suicide in Guyana in 1978” (84). In depicting the apocalyptic combination of religious symbolism and self-idealization, the collective suicide-by-white-spirit “presents an unmistakable message about misbegotten religion: the entire drama of so-called ‘Christian martyrdom’ is a misunderstanding of what is meant [in Horneyan psychology]

foule. Et Reine Mab pour donner plus de puissance à sa voix fermait les yeux, nous irons par la grande forêt, nous irons par le fleuve immense. Nous prendrons la route du paradis, clamait la foule d'une seule voix, nous retrouverons la terre natale. Nous briserons nos chaînes, nous briserons l'entrave de nos voix. ... Les fidèles avançaient à la queue leu leu, silencieux, calmes et sereins, ils tendaient la main, Emmanuel leur donnait la poudre balance, ils se signaient et ils déposaient tout ce qu'ils possédaient, billets froissés, piécettes légères, débris d'or, dans la vaste jupe de Reine Mab, entre les cuisses écartées.” (Constant, “White Spirit” 609-610).

by moving toward others in positive ways” (84). One does not need to isolate the extreme case of the Jim Jones cult to understand Constant’s point here. Nor is this a point about the ethical systems of culture’s past, as might be read in Miller’s allusion to martyrdom. The mimetic desire for idealized whiteness, rendered equivalent to salvation, amplifies the self-hatred of the racialized “real” self and sustains the sacrificial logic that provides access to the ideal. The therapeutic assumption of ego psychology, taken for granted by the critics and internalized by the so-called banana men who are led to their death, is brought to *reductio ad absurdum*: blackness, inhibiting self-esteem, is eliminated.¹⁸ In this instance, whether beginning in submission or motivated by aggression, the self-idealization that motivates racial masking is presented as informing a neurotic and finally self-destructive solution to the politics of identification that underlie the problem of collective admittance.

In underscoring the role of neurotic solutions, Miller provides an updated interpretation of female subjectivity that links the rise of female power to an emerging socio-culture structure. Queen Mab effectively communicates to the plantation laborers what critics do not shy from saying in the case of Lola: their admittance (into paradise, so to speak) requires the genocidal destruction of their race. This is why the symbolic significance of white spirit does not end with Lola; it finds ultimate symbolic expression in the collective suicide-by-purification. The character of Queen Mab takes on new significance as the female bully whose powers derive from the virtuosity of her performative and emotional skills in organizing the laborers. In this process, Queen

¹⁸ Fanon writes, “The black is a black man; that is; as the result of a series of aberrations of affect, he is rooted at the core of a universe from which he must be extricated” (10). (I owe this reference to Randall Johnson.) On the topic of self-esteem in race-therapy, see Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn 200-210.

Mab's ascendance is similar to the situation of other powerful women around the African Resource, such as Ysée, the matriarch of Sunset Boulevard, who organizes the women at the brothel. Both are masters of interpersonal situations, indexing a new type of virtuosity that is tied to the ideology of postindustrial labor. Thus, in my view, the representation of female power in Constant's novels needs to be complexified by attending to the concept of labor. As I will show in the next section, a more deliberate turn to the notion of immaterial labor and the postindustrial-economic horizon of the novel will also shed significant light on Constant's male characters, who are effectively sidelined by Edwards and Miller.¹⁹

“Hollywood” and Postindustrial Society

In general, psychoanalytic readings (Edwards and Miller) approach only indirectly the apparent connections made by Constant between selfhood and the economic mode of production and consumption. Is it really negligible that, as Miller notes in passing, the African Resource “receives only leftover overstock, dumped on the African market from Europe and elsewhere” (Miller 13)? And what are we to make of the local economy of banana plantations around F., that never manage to find a real market for their agricultural production?

Faced with the vast banana plantations, the world was like a diner who at the end of the meal can't bring himself to start on dessert. There were too many of them. Too rich, too copious, sickeningly sweet. The banana stayed on the shores of

¹⁹ The only critic to primarily focus on Victor is Mireille Revol Cappelletti, who considers his character to be an allegory for the triumph of desire in negotiating the Oedipal triangle. In my view, with its biologicistic emphasis on the Freudian sexual instinct, this reading overlooks the socio-cultural dimension of the novel in similar ways as Edwards's.

Africa while the West amused itself with other goodies. The dockworkers pushed the banana back into the sea. But the world went on blindly producing them. Banana Men disgorged them by the thousands of tons; they chose the best land, the most productive. They had eliminated the biennial pig-banana in favor of the anytime-anywhere banana that grew everywhere no matter what season, bananas galore—a banana anarchy, a banana menace, throwing the ecology, the economy, and society into disarray. More and more bananas. No season no earth no sky, just bananas, *bananas, bananas*, nothing else. The Banana Men didn't give a damn; caught in a vicious spiral, they didn't want to know that over there nobody wanted any more bananas. They'd had enough.²⁰ (23)

The absurd situation satirizes the tectonic global shift to a postindustrial economy that began roughly a decade or two prior to the novel's publication. Industrial production is *no longer a productive activity*, in the sense of generating profit. Instead, Constant likens it to waste, and the locale, F., to a wasteland. Consider Constant's description of Victor's employment at the warehouse stocked with useless goods: "He was at the end of the chain, the indispensable link completing the cycle of production; at the end of the world he was the drainpipe at the bottom of the sea" ("Il était au bout de la chaîne le maillon indispensable qui bouclait la boucle, il était au bout du monde la bouche de l'égout au fond de la mer"; 86/566). However, what Constant also explores is how *the industrial wasteland gives way to a new economic mode of production: that of the postindustrial*.

This new mode of production is organized around the Sunset Boulevard. Part brothel,

²⁰ "Devant les immenses bananeraies, le monde était comme un dîneur qui, à la fin du repas, ne se résout pas à entamer le dessert. Il y en avait trop. Trop riche, trop copieux, écoeurant. La banane restait sur les bords de l'Afrique pendant que l'Occident s'amusait avec d'autres gâteries. Les dockers repoussaient la banane dans la mer. Mais le monde la produisait aveuglément. Les Bananiers la déversaient par milliers de tonnes, ils sélectionnaient les meilleurs plans, les plus productifs. Ils avaient éliminé la banane-cochon bisannuelle, au profit de la banane tout-saison-tout-terrain qui poussait partout, n'importe quand, banane à gogo, banane anarchique, banane menaçante, désorganisatrice de l'équilibre écologique, économique, sociologique. De plus en plus de bananes. Ni saison ni terre ni ciel, de la banane, DE LA BANANE, DE LA BANANE, rien d'autre. Les Bananiers s'en foutaient, ils étaient dans une spirale infernale, ils ne voulaient pas savoir que, là bas, on n'en voulait plus, on n'en pouvait plus" (Constant, "White Spirit" 522).

part cabaret, bar and restaurant, staging theatrical recreations of *Cleopatra* and selling women to the exhausted laborers, Sunset Boulevard represents the new productive activities of a postindustrial “experience economy,”²¹ in contrast to an industrial goods economy. This is why Constant emphasizes the economic dimension of the enterprise organized by Ysée: “These cinemato-historical recreations [produced by Sunset Boulevard] required an incredible expenditure of energy, a tireless imagination, and more than the usual financial means” (“Ces reconstitutions historico-cinématographiques demandaient un dépense d’énergie incroyable, une imagination infatigable des moyens financiers hors du commun”; 36/530). In the juxtaposition of the obsolete goods economy of the African Resource and Devil’s Plantation, with the bustling experience economy around Sunset Boulevard, Constant symbolizes the historic shift from industrial to postindustrial production.

The theory of this historic transition has been elaborated in a number of socio-economic studies that may further assist in the interpretation of *White Spirit*. In economic theory, such as Daniel Bell’s *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973), the shift to postindustrial society is described historically as an epochal transition from industrial manufacturing to the provision of interpersonal services, beginning in America but expanding globally. There, Bell writes, “The fact that individuals now talk to other individuals, rather than interact with a machine, is the fundamental fact about work in the post-industrial society” (Bell 163 qtd. in Hochschild 9). In her summary of Bell’s text, Arlie Russell Hochschild focuses on how “the growth of the service sector means that ‘communication’ and ‘encounter’—the response of ego to alter and back—is the central

²¹ On this concept, see Illouz, “Introduction” 13-14.

work relationship today” (9). This focus informs Hochschild’s own study of emotional labor as a communicative interpersonal activity in her work *The Managed Heart*.

For Hochschild, it is emotional labor that organizes postindustrial commercial exchange. In terms that strikingly resemble our discussion of masks, Hochschild defines emotional labor as: “requir[ing] one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the *outward countenance* that produces the proper state of mind in others”; “mean[ing] the management of feeling to create a publicly observable *facial and bodily display*” (7, emphases added). The shift to postindustrial society has also been narrated in terms of the postmodernization of labor by Michael Hardt in his essay “Affective Labor.” Hardt agrees that the postmodernization of labor (here synonymous with postindustrialization) consists in a productive somatic and corporeal exchange, instead of an exchange of material goods. His concept of “affective” labor stresses “productive communication” (94) and its immaterial dimension. “We might define the labor involved in this production as *immaterial labor*—that is, labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, knowledge, or communication” (94). As Eva Illouz has detailed in *Saving the Modern Soul*, this kind of labor reifies the social *ideal* of the feminine power of therapeutic communication and emotional intelligence (Chapter 1; see also Hochschild 164-170).

Certainly, as might be signaled in its allusion to America, Sunset Boulevard has specialized in this postindustrial form of emotional or affective labor by capitalizing on the social ideal of women as communicative and emotionally-intelligent. Consider the gendered exchange that Sunset Boulevard produces, in its simulation of “Hollywood”:

The girls, conforming to the fantastic discipline of 20th Century Fox, learned to sing and dance and act. They took lessons in deportment. Ysée taught them to sit with their legs together. She showed them how to hold their purses just like the

Queen of England and many, many other things necessary to life in society. She told them: You are Princesses, never forget it. Be that as it may, when cocktail hour rolled around, the Princesses rested their hairsprayed heads and their good manners against their bolsters and delivered their bodies, stripped of swansdown, to the rough assaults of Banana Men.²² (31)

In this scene of performativity, the object of exchange is obviously not a durable good in the traditional sense but rather the pliable, sculpted, and disciplined female body, consumed by men in an affectively charged experience. The exchange, requiring the emotional immaterial labor of the displayed and performing women, provides an affective and erotic experience for the male consumer. This is the reason Hollywood means so much to the universe of *White Spirit*: by branding themselves in the image of celebrities, the women illustrate how “sexuality belongs to the sphere of immaterial labor, the set of intangible skills and competences actors bring to the workplace and that in some cases even define the work position” (Illouz, *End* 105). That is to say, the historicity of postindustrial labor determines the form of this sexual economy (whose traumas had preoccupied Edwards) and the entrepreneurial ambitions of the women (as are highlighted by Miller). Importantly, such emphasis on immaterial labor is premised on the antithesis of Miller’s biologicistic framework, suggesting in this instance that Constant’s imagination of female colonial selfhood might be better understood instead through a sociological frame.

²² “Selon la terrible discipline de la Fox, les filles savaient jouer la comédie, chanter, danser. Elles prenaient des leçons de maintien. Ysée leur apprenait à s’asseoir en serrant les jambes. Elle leur indiquait comment tenir leur sac à la façon de la reine d’Angleterre et bien d’autres choses encore, nécessaires à la vie en société. Elle leur disait: Vous êtes des Princesses, ne l’oubliez jamais. En attendant, à l’heure du whisky, les Princesses calaient leur tête raidie de laque et leurs bonnes manières contre leur traversin et livraient leur corps dépouillé du duvet de cygne aux rudes assauts des Bananiers” (Constant, “White Spirit” 527).

At one level, the dynamic of the exchange indeed seems to model the gendered relations of power that have been identified by Laura Mulvey in her influential, psychoanalytic-political interpretation of traditional narrative (Hollywood) cinema. To put it simply, Mulvey's thesis is that visual pleasure derives from screen objectifications of women based on phallogentrism. Such visual pleasure reflects and is underwritten by the "socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle" (803). Specifically, sexual difference is imagined in the binary split of "active/male and passive/female" (803). For Mulvey, this socially established interpretative frame is essentially that of the "patriarchal order" (805). The popularity of Mulvey's thesis notwithstanding,²³ Constant's sense of social organization in *White Spirit*, especially as it stages the rise of female social power, cannot simply be reduced to an understanding of traditional patriarchal order.

The difference between Mulvey's and Constant's idea of the Hollywood image economy, and thereby the power relations it involves, is exemplified in the scene of Victor and Lola's first meeting aboard *The Will of God*. Here, the scopic dynamics involving "Woman as Image" and "Man as Bearer of the Look" (to borrow Mulvey's terms) is at first glance entirely recognizable, though it is quickly deconstructed. The scene of the two characters' meeting reads as a figurative extension of Victor and his fellow passengers' interest in the fantastic "porthole looking out to nothing," that is drawn on the wall by another traveler confined to the berth (11). The imaginary porthole

²³ Indeed, in a 2011 interview, Mulvey acknowledges that the "passive" female of 1950s cinema, on which she based her original theory of voyeurism, has been superseded by the "ultra-active female heroine" of contemporary film (Sassatelli 131). In her activity, Lola reflects this change.

functions as a screen onto which fantasies are projected; Victor's viewing of it initiates him into the active scopic position, as "Bearer of the Look."

As Constant describes it, the "porthole looking out to nothing" foreshadows Victor's encounter with Lola. In addition to looking at fantasies drawn on the wall, at night the men also sneak out and look "[t]hrough real windows, on screens as luminous as movies" ("sur des écrans lumineux comme au cinéma"; 12-13/534). These activities anticipate the cinematic appearance of Lola, whom Victor voyeurs in the course of his gazing around the ship's deck:

Through the window where he lay in wait he saw a couple. He could make out that their bodies were naked, which held his attention. They were on opposite sides of the cabin. The man was staring at the woman, who was partly stretched out on her bunk with her legs spread. Then he swung his head and torso heavily in that obstinate way bulls have when they are about to charge. He took three pounding steps, shaking the mirrors, and went for her. He got back up immediately and did it again. Then he lay there, crushed, motionless, exhausted. The woman slowly crawled free of him and then, before Victor could realize what was happening, she stood there next to him, outside on the deck.²⁴ (13-14)

In this first show, numerous elements point to the active/male, passive/female binary as defined by Mulvey. This binary is present both in the description of intercourse, in which Lola appears as a victim, and in the implicit relation between the lurking subject (Victor) and the objectified girl. However, the power in the former binary layout is soon reversed in the course of the couple's sex. Although the man is described as a large, powerful

²⁴ "À travers la fenêtre derrière laquelle il s'était mis à l'affût, il remarqua un couple. Il put distinguer leurs corps nus et cela retint son attention. Ils se tenaient de part et d'autre de la cabine. L'homme fixait la femme qui était à demi allongée sur sa couchette, les jambes écartées. Puis il encensait de la tête et du torse, avec ces mouvements lourds et obstinés des taureaux qui vont charger. Il prenait son élan, martelait trois pas qui ébranlaient les glaces et tombait sur elle. Il se relevait aussitôt pour retomber encore. Et puis il restait écrasé, immobile, épuisé. En lentes reptations, la femme se dégagea et, avant que Victor ne l'eût compris, elle se trouva dehors sur le pont, près de lui" (Constant, "White Spirit" 515).

animal (a charging bull), and the woman as helplessly immobilized, he quickly exerts himself in six “pounding steps,” and is left “crushed, motionless, exhausted,” to then fall asleep. The girl escapes with finesse—not only without awakening the man, but also without the voyeur, Victor, having noticed. Thus Victor, first the controlling voyeur, is ultimately ambushed, like fearful prey:

She was naked, slender, with very dark, very long hair hiding her face and breasts. So close that he could have touched her. Mute with fear, curiosity, and astonishment, he said nothing. He heard her breathing heavily, she was out of breath. He began to breathe irregularly out of sympathy. He was panting. Blinded by the darkness, she had not yet seen him, but she could feel his presence because of his breath and his odor. Not moving a muscle, not afraid, not ashamed, in an oddly weary voice, with the burnt-out gesture of a streetwalker, she asked him for a cigarette.²⁵ (14)

The girl looms poised like a predator tracking Victor’s scent. He seems prepared to submit to her request, but is unhelpful:

Victor had never seen a naked woman—moreover he didn’t smoke. He was certainly sorry. ... She turned her back on the rail, shook her head, her hair; he saw her breasts and he choked up, he went all weak just above his knees and his hands were cold. She went toward the door to her cabin. She looked at him; he lowered his eyes. The door closed; he felt relieved.²⁶ (14-15)

The encounter is rich with significance, as it works to revise the power structure of the conventional male-female scopical relationship that is described by Mulvey. “She

²⁵ “Elle était nue, gracile, avec des cheveux très bruns, très longs, qui cachaient son visage et son buste. Si proche qu’il aurait pu la toucher. Muet d’effroi de curiosité et d’émerveillement, il se taisait. Il l’entendit qui respirait fort, elle était essoufflée. Par sympathie, sa respiration se déranger. Il haletait. Aveuglée par la nuit, elle ne l’avait pas encore aperçu, mais elle sentit sa présence à son souffle. Sans un geste, sans effroi, sans pudeur, d’une voix étrangement lasse, faisant de la main un geste usé, un geste de trottoir, elle lui demanda une cigarette” (Constant, “White Spirit” 515).

²⁶ “Victor n’avait jamais vu une femme nue, il ne fumait pas non plus. Il en fut désolé. ... Elle se détacha de la rambarde, secoua la tête et les cheveux, il vit ses seins et cela lui serra la gorge, une défaillance le saisit au-dessus des genoux et ses mains devinrent froides. Elle se dirigea vers la porte de sa cabine. Elle le regarda, il baissa les yeux. La porte se referma, il se sentit soulagé” (Constant, “White Spirit” 515).

looked at him; he lowered his eyes”; the confidence of her nude look is enough for Victor to feel scared; and the scene concludes with Lola established as the controlling agent of both Victor’s space and affect (closing/opening the door, providing Victor with relief). Edwards writes insightfully of this scene, “Lola has turned from a fetishized sex object preyed upon by an animal to an assertive, controlling woman” (76). The scopic dynamics are inflected by Constant’s portrayal of female power, personified by Lola, who is the master of the encounter. Her empowerment extends further into the emotional labor of racial masking (self-whitening) that, by mimicking collective ideals, is supposed to empower her with ideal beauty. It is thus no coincidence that Hollywood functions in the novel as a sort of master signifier—Lola masks herself, but in the same way that an actor impersonates their assigned role. As Illouz writes in *The End of Love*, “Consumer culture has transformed the ontology of sexuality into a theater of the self” (104). As an entrepreneur of her self, Lola’s immaterial labor consists in the theatrical production of a magnetizing image that is presumed to compel a positive visceral response from the men.

In contrast to Lola who rises to power through immaterial labor, the decline of male power is a recurring theme. The initial image of virility, that gives way in the above scene to the gendered reversal of active and passive subject-positions, is especially ironic in the next chapter, “César.” Here, the reader is privy to the doctor’s examination of the impotent big boss, César Di Marino. Constant writes of the doctor’s diagnosis: “César Di Marino’s sexual potency was in decline. Specialists were very pessimistic and predicted it would be a more or less long-term disability” (“La puissance sexuelle de César Di Marino déclinait. Très pessimistes, les spécialistes prévoyaient l’invalidité à plus ou moins long terme”; 16/517). This diagnosis echoes the earlier description of the young

Victor, whose “manhood was particularly lacking in great occasions” (“L’âge viril fut particulièrement pauvre en grands événements”; 5/509). These scenes speak to a gendered distribution of power, with the men rendered passive or incapable of what might be otherwise normally expected.

To recall Edwards’s earlier description, we are presented with “an image of a strong woman compared to a weak male.” The men are weak especially in their relative incapacity to engage in communication. Victor is characteristically mute, often silent. This muteness is of course conspicuous relative to the usually active, more expressive conduct of the women, whether it be Lola, Ysée, or Queen Mab. Victor, taking on this negative aspect in relation to the women, personifies the absence of “interpersonal connective tissue” that Miller sees as part of Constant’s imagination of the social (5). Tending to refuse communication that might embed him in the social world, Victor also echoes the defining aspect of the imperial personality as understood by Edward Said; such a character-type rejects the other in an anti-social process of exclusion. In *White Spirit*, the most extreme example of this imperial personality may be found in the patriarchal papa of the Resource. Upon Victor’s arrival, Beretti greets the papa who has been encased in a small immunological habitat, as if quarantined from the surrounding society. Constant narrates this meeting:

Beretti walked over to a glass cube that rather resembled the ones in museums where ancient artifacts are kept. The master of the house, the papa of the Resource, sat enthroned inside, fantastically obese, sheltered from the noise and heat and watching the comings and goings of his business. He was in a refrigerated box. His vast flesh stuck to the glass, making pink patches adhering here and there, wherever his body touched, as if he were held inside his body by

suction cups. ... He didn't want to move anymore; he didn't want to be touched.²⁷
(27)

The papa and his apparatus embody the imperial personality, in the form of a sealed chamber or force field that represses the outside world in the name of protecting the ego (see Chapter 2).

Although not to such an extreme, Victor exemplifies the imperial personality's exclusion of/from the social world, too. In short, whereas Lola tends to seek communion with the customs of the collective—as in the case of her troubled attempts to find shelter in an ideal self, that of beautiful whiteness—Victor is a creature of dissonance, who neither fits in nor finds comfort in society. Innumerable details point to Victor's powerlessness in performing productive communication, in comparison to the exaggerated powers of the women. First, as already noted, he tends to be relatively silent, which Constant connects later in the novel to the peculiar idea of his “disability” (“infirmité”; 151/614). He is not confident verbalizing his thoughts, as evident in his ongoing hesitancy to write to his grandmother (40, 99) and his awkwardness in courting Lola (85). Importantly, Victor has trouble interpreting the words of others, as in the instance of the narrator's highlighting Victor's dissonant lack of subtle comprehension in conversation with Guastavin: “He [Guastavin] meant Victor to understand that he would be done with it” (“Il laissait entendre qu'il en finirait”; 48/538). Such details suggest Victor is an outcast when it comes to the social routine of communication. He is

²⁷ “Beretti se dirigea vers un cube de verre assez semblable à ceux des musées dans lesquels on enferme les antiquités. La maître de céans, le Papa de LA RESSOURCE, terrible obèse, y trônait à l'abri du bruit et de la chaleur, en surveillant les va-et-vient de son entreprise. Il était dans une boîte réfrigérée, ses chairs énormes collaient au verre, cela faisait des plaques roses qui adhéraient ça et là, où le corps touchait, comme s'il avait eu des ventouses qui le fixaient dans sa boîte” (Constant, “White Spirit 524).

described by the papa of the Resource as “twenty years that didn’t know how to talk” (“vingt ans qui ne savaient pas parler”; 29/525). Moreover, he is rarely, if ever, the subject of consonant psycho-narration. Is the absence of evidence of Victor’s interiority indeed evidence of his lacking emotional-therapeutic self-knowledge? If he knows that he desires Lola, he certainly does not communicate his wishes or intentions through dialogue or in the narrative discourse; instead, the surprising plot-mechanism of a random lottery is responsible for their ultimate and effectively non-intentional “Happy End” coupling (165-172). Finally, in his pivotal fathering of the baby monkey, Alexis (literally, “without language”), the laconic Victor is analogized to an animal that cannot speak, in ways that conclusively incarnate his “disability” (151). Victor’s affinity with, and his analogical resemblance to, this non-speaking creature recalls a kind of autistic communication style that “differ[s] from normate human language use” (Carlson 2-5; the notion of Victor’s autism is discussed further below²⁸). As the father-son pair are ridiculed in public, the novel suggests that Victor’s divergent communicative style places him outside the conventional limits of normality (150). Here, normality is understood in terms of the value of emotionally-intelligent communication in postindustrial society—as is touted by the military men that Victor encounters in Mégalo (who have come to control the plantation rebellion). These men, evidently trained in a therapeutic style, “believed in communication and used psychology” (“il croyait à la communication et faisait de la psychologie”; 148/612). (The therapeutic culture of the “new man” of the post-Vietnam military is explored further in Chapter 5).

²⁸ Indeed, Victor’s name may be read as an allusion to the famous case of Victor of Aveyron in French psychiatry.

The motif of Victor's incommunicability culminates in the final scene of his leaving Alexis at the zoo. Victor struggles to translate the affective states of the monkey into a framework that is meaningful for the expert zookeeper, in a scene that underlines the dissonance of Victor's emotional intelligence:

Panic stricken, Alexis peed. The urine ran down his legs; he peed and peed. And only afterward did he howl because the director had dropped him. Alexis cried like a baby; standing upright on his legs with his arms stretched out, he cried as hard as his lips would cry. Victor rushed over to pick him up again. Leave him, said the director, an adult will adopt him, and Victor saw a big male monkey, disturbed by the shrieks, get up and run full tilt to throw himself on Alexis and carry him off. He's going to kill him, Victor cried in horror. No, on the contrary; that's a good sign. You wanted him to be happy. And Victor, who could still hear Alexis crying, wondered if your first experience of happiness came screaming like that.²⁹ (165)

Victor senses the "horror," but it is really a misrecognition of the scene. He does not know that the big male monkey will provide Alexis with happiness, as the zookeeper maintains. He fears that Alexis will be a victim, but the baby monkey's crying solicits the care of the adult. Even in the case of Victor's apparent empathy for Alexis, therefore, Constant returns to the theme of Victor's fundamentally dissonant communication style. In all of this, Miller's offhand description about Victor rings true: he is "nothing more than a naïve symbol of the substitution for being able to engage authentically with others" (32). His sentimental relation with Alexis is a compensation for his powerlessness in

²⁹ "Pris de panique, Alexis pissait. L'urine giclait entre ses jambes, il pissait, pissait. Et seulement après, comme le directeur l'avait lâché, il hurla. Alexis criait comme un enfant; dressé sur ses jambes, les bras tendus, il criait de toutes ses lèvres. Victor se précipita pour le reprendre. Laissez-le, dit le directeur, un adulte va l'adopter, et Victor vit un grand signe que le cri avait dérangé se lever, arriver à fond de train, se jeter sur Alexis et l'emporter. Il va le tuer, Victor s'affolait. Mais non, au contraire, c'est bon signe. Vous vouliez qu'il soit heureux. Et Victor, qui entendait toujours les cris, se demandait si l'on faisait l'apprentissage du bonheur en hurlant de la sorte" (Constant, "White Spirit" 624).

human society, but even this compensation is untenable since he lacks the ability to carefully pick up on Alexis's communication signals.

The Postmodernization of Literary Form

The male imperial personality is, in this register, the logical antithesis of the sociable female laborer: incapable of communication and therefore deprived of social intimacy. For this reason, the imperial characters in Constant's universe are described as obsolete or relegated to dusty warehouses, like the papa, discussed above, who is stored in a box that "resembled the ones in museums where ancient artifacts are kept." Obviously, these men are not heroes, least of all heroes of a therapeutic emotional style: to recall Robbe-Grillet's comment in an updated fashion, such a notion of the hero has become entirely obsolete in this historic context. In the postindustrial age, there is no longer a market demand for the dutiful, mechanical labor that Marlow had performed aboard the Company's steamboat. As Michael Sayeau argues in his economic interpretation of *Heart of Darkness*, the working man of duty that Marlow personified in 1899 has become unemployable in the twentieth century (339). In *White Spirit*, however, it is not *man* whose labor is replaced by a machine, as Marlow's sailing had once been replaced by the steamboat. In Constant's novel, the man-machine relation rather gives way to a new relation, of woman-communication affect. The women excite, satisfy, interpret, comfort, and lead, while the men are caged, reclusive, reticent—perhaps even no longer fit for human society—like Alexis, animals that might be better off in a zoological refuge, or, like the papa, encased in a historical museum. How does this

novelistic complication of gender dynamics shape Constant's text, specifically as a postmodern rewriting of *Heart of Darkness*?

First, the gendered differences in characterization reflect the ideology of labor value in a postmodernizing economy. In contrast to Mulvey's interpretation of traditional Hollywood, in the postmodern context, such references to Hollywood belie a fundamental transformation: sexual difference is now imagined, or mediated, through the gendered split of communicative-female and noncommunicative-male. As in the case of Ysée and Queen Mab, the communicative female is the one who best exercises social power on the basis of her mastery of the postindustrial interpersonal encounter, whether through appearance, gesture, or voice. Hence, the novel is not simply a reparative study celebrating women who have been excluded from the colonial-novel tradition (as Edwards has argued). In my view, it functions as a cognitive mapping of the postindustrial structures of value, revealing the new economic determination of the communicative female and woman-of-color, who share (and often compete) in the demand to labor over an ideal role—the role of being the master of interpersonal communication³⁰.

This does not mean, by any means, that one is required to abandon the issue of emotional suffering; in fact, communicative norms explain why emotional suffering, together with the idea of the voice as testimony, is foregrounded in the novel. My reading argues rather for a shift in diagnostic understanding, one that pinpoints the emergence of ambivalence, shame, and self-hatred within the economy of visual images produced by

³⁰ As Illouz writes, "If it is indeed frequently the case that women (and perhaps minorities in general) develop the skill of tuning into the emotional needs of others, of managing social relations in a nonconfrontational fashion, and of monitoring their verbal and emotional behavior, they should score high on EI tests" (*Saving* 205).

Hollywood, as part of the affective-psychological impact of “scopic capitalism” (Illouz, *End* 100-109).³¹ Bernard Stiegler’s theorization of the psychic effects of the image economy is highly suggestive: seduced into identification with the ideological self-images that circulate in contemporary film and television, postindustrial subjects have altogether lost the healthful “primordial narcissism” that is necessary for enabling real self-love (84), which might be understood as the basis for self-growth. Such an insight is moreover consistent with Jameson’s hypothesis that in late capitalism, the unconscious has been “penetrated and colonized” by the “media and the advertising industry” (“Postmodernism” 78)—implying, literally, an overwriting of biological instincts with the patterns of cultural spectacle. *White Spirit*, with its emphasis on spectacular female subjectivity, warns of the postmodern image- and media-driven dynamics of “self-production and self-presentation [that] always reflect the dominant economic and cultural interests of the time” (Illouz, *End* 101). In the novel, the capture of women, in particular, by therapeutic standards of self-esteem that motivate the copying of popular culture, amounts to an avant-garde critique of the idea of the person-qua-singularity, in ways that bring Robbe-Grillet’s conception of changes in novelistic conventions (as outlined in the introduction above) up to date.

Second, this theory of gendered value may further help to untangle some of the analytic concepts used in the theorization of postmodern literature more generally. In Ihab Hassan’s canonical *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*, which is haunted by the figure

³¹ On Hollywood in the context of French “Anti-Americanism,” see Richard Kuisel 10-11. Kuisel writes, “Hollywood appeared to be the quintessential expression of American culture. The French tended to attack American film-making as an ‘industry’ that produced meters of banal celluloid escapism for profit. ... [T]he cinema was but one of many forces that ‘standardized’ people. Just look ... at how women in Los Angeles imitated the appearance of movie stars” (11).

of the imperial personality, norms of emotional communication inform judgments about the idea of the literary postmodern.³² Consider, for instance, how the imperial personality, echoed in Constant's characterization of the papa and Victor, informs Hassan's influential theoretical concept of negativity in postmodern literature. Hassan isolates, in particular, the negative trait of *silence* or *anti-language* and elaborates it in terms of a marker of the postmodern style that he names (literary) *autism*. As Hassan writes, "The crucial cluster in this outline of negativity refers to an autistic consciousness, imperial in its isolation, avid for the void" (14). Hassan further ventures that such imperial "negativity" represents a universal "process of reduction or exclusion fundamental to the sentient self, a process that always ends by placing the self outside of Being" (14). By invoking autism as a literary category, Hassan plays with the idea of the clinical concept of a linguistic disorder, as have other literary scholars of his era.³³ Matei Călinescu distills what attracts the scholars:

the three areas always affected by autism were *language, imagination, and socialization* The central disability in autism consists of an individual's lack, or impaired perception, of a whole range of signals tacitly communicated by body language, gestures, and facial expressions, that enable social interaction and a proper understanding of linguistic communication. (84-85).

³² In my view, Edward Said's negative review (1972) of Hassan's study, which initiated a polemic between the two authors, is still palpable in Said's *Culture of Imperialism*, which might be read as historicizing Hassan's metaphysical account of the imperial personality. See Said, "Eclecticism and Orthodoxy in Criticism," and Hassan, "Polemic." Said highlights the naivete of Hassan's theological language (4-5, 7). Later, Hayden White allies with Said in an attack against Hassan's theologizing, noting the latter's thinking "bears more similarities to ancient gnosticism than he is inclined to admit" (58).

³³ As in Jameson's writings on postmodernism, the notion of a disorder may be otherwise addressed through the popular (Deleuzian) category of schizophrenia. For an interpretation of autism as a form of schizophrenia in the Deleuzian tradition, see Hans A. Skott-Myhre and Christina Taylor.

However, it is important to add that Constant's novel actually works against the grain of Hassan's metaphysical conception of autism in postmodern literature, precisely by drawing attention to the historical determination of subjectivity by the economic mode of production. Unlike in Hassan's work, Victor's autism in *White Spirit* is *not* characterized as a universal drama of consciousness or subjectivity—rather, it is *historicized*, indexing a historically-specific economic configuration of racialized gender and labor. If Victor is associated with autism, it is in light of the historic norms of interpersonal communication in postindustrial society that operate in the novel, norms that are assumed by the critics, such as Edwards, who stress the importance of communication in the novel (the “voice”), and thereby misconceive of its signification. *The voice is not opposite to the forces of postindustrial capitalism—as a resource for communication, it is one of its most valuable products.* Victor's lack of a voice, so to speak, allows him to be neglected—and his relevance missed—by such critical attention.

Although Victor has been more or less brushed aside by Edwards and Miller, his silence becomes symbolically significant when tied to the postindustrial ideology of labor. Victor is not only silent; his inner thoughts are rarely expressed or narrated. While Victor may be inaccessible to the gaze or any clarification through free indirect discourse, this does not mean that his inaccessibility is meaningless in the context of the novel. Putting it boldly, his silence serves to negate the logic of communication and emotionally-intelligent encounter, and thus reveals an important critical dimension to the novel's construction.

In literary terms, we can see Victor's autism as an anti-psychological stance in novelistic form. As theorists such as Dorrit Cohn have suggested (78), psycho-narration,

especially in the free-indirect style, is the literary correlative to modern psychological introspection: as we come to know ourselves through self-examination of thoughts and feelings, so too does the narrator reveal to us the interiority of characters by surveying this mental content. Victor's autistic inaccessibility to narration and his characteristic refusal of communication amount to a kind of immanent counter-conduct against the novelistic techniques of psychological introspection. His interiority remains invisible to narratorial surveillance, as if he were a subject evading what Franco Moretti calls the "stylistic Panopticon" of modern psycho-narration aiming to illuminate the bourgeois soul (99). To this extent, Victor is an anti-hero of the postindustrial therapeutic style. As an avant-garde character (in Robbe-Grillet's sense), he fails to adhere to the conventional human-type of the therapeutic new man. His non-reflexive character occupies a dissonant position with respect to the "feminization of emotional culture" that encourages oneself to "reflect on one's feelings, express them, and understand them" (Illouz, *Saving* 124). Accordingly, Hassan's marker of literary postmodernism—autism—is found in Constant's avant-garde response to the historic rise of therapeutic discourse. Literary autism, as I have just described it, may thus be understood as a novelistic subversion of that discourse's communicative norms. In the character of Victor, who seems unmistakably autistic, Constant has introduced nothing short of a negation of the "reigning therapeutic ethos" that pathologizes the traditionally masculine value of "silence" (Illouz, *Saving* 231).

In this framework, *White Spirit* provides illumination not only of the determination of female subjectivity by the globalized structures of postindustrial society; it also details the interrelated obsolescence of the industrial age and, with it, the markers

of a laboring masculinity, now overwritten by the rise of female communicative power. This does not, however, mean that the women of *White Spirit* reclaim the splendor of the hero. In the novel, the politics of identification and the mimetic desire for popular-spectacular images clearly bring about the destruction of female personhood. The anti-hero, Victor, too, is equally displaced, as an anti-type of the therapeutic emotional style. In these ways, *White Spirit's* avant-garde engagement with the historic trends of the postmodernizing economy makes it a quite visionary experiment among postmodern literary works.

5. Conclusion: Post-Vietnam *Heart of Darkness*: The Therapeutic Style of Veterans' War Novels



Figure 1: *Apocalypse Now* Concept Art. (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. *Mapping Apocalypse*. 2014)¹

¹ The concept art (fig. 1) of Captain Willard's journey in *Apocalypse Now*, produced by the film's art director Dean Tavoularis, does not "actually depict the physical movements of the cast and crew. After all, they were shooting in the Philippines, not in Vietnam. The map is rather a picture of the story itself: a concrete representation of a journey that was already a harrowing mental trip" (Academy). The map of the physical land, representing the mental "story itself," is overwritten by script notes that transpose symbols of *Heart of Darkness* onto the territory. Colonized by the narrative, the map showcases how Conrad's novel is key to the "constitutive imagination" of the post-Vietnam period. In Paul Veyne's terminology, this amounts to a "rare" instance of "using a text to illustrate the reality to which it [purportedly] refers" (Veyne 109).

Internal changes in psychological theory alone, such as the emergence of therapeutic discourse, could not have sustained the institutionalization and popularization of Conrad's cosmologically-pessimistic novel. The ascendance of *Heart of Darkness* as a metaphor for imperial subjectivity occurred rather at a precise moment, and with specific reason—as a cultural response to a global event: the Vietnam War. This event provided a historic occasion for the global traveling of Conrad's narrative, involving a process of social and cultural translation to the American perspective, as importantly informed by the discourse of psychoanalysis. The American construction of therapeutic narratives about the war blended the imperialist adventure story with a new, psychological concern for the traumas of young military men. In this context, the ascendance of the therapeutic stylization of Conrad's novel must be read alongside rising social concern for “post-Vietnam syndrome,” later christened by experts as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). By the end of the century, that Conrad's novel could be metaphorized to represent the experience and limits of contemporary American power was well understood by Edward Said in his monumental *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), which updated Marlow's vision for the Cold War era; but, practically, this metaphor was conventionalized well before, as American cultural memory of the war had made foundational use of the demonic journey format in popular narratives of soldiering in the foreign (formerly French) ex-colony of Vietnam—most iconically, perhaps, in the 1979 film, *Apocalypse Now*.

Novels, too, replicated the model of the literary confession of horrors that had been invented by *Heart of Darkness*. Three novelistic accounts of the Vietnam War by American veterans of the war demonstrate the appeal of Conrad's confessional novel to

therapeutic discourse: Philip Caputo's memoir, *A Rumor of War* (1977), that seized on the war as a public controversy; Tim O'Brien's novelistic collection of stories, *The Things They Carried* (1990), that mourns the bonds of a platoon; and the postmodern tome of phoenix aspiration, *Matterhorn* (2009) by Karl Marlantes. The American return to Conrad functioned with reparative aspirations regarding the psychological problems of the veteran. The popular logic of therapeutic salvation, crystallizing years after the War's end in the concept of a psychoanalytic-narrative treatment for PTSD, incited the confession of brutalities committed and traumas suffered abroad, organizing the formation of a post-Vietnam literary tradition around *Heart of Darkness*.²

Of course, critics have recognized that Conrad served as a forerunner to a modernist tradition that mourned the loss of the voice through warfare, beginning with the First World War. As Adam Engel writes of this context, attributing to Conrad an almost prophetic vision:

By forecasting the catastrophic violation of subjectivity wrought by the Great War, Conrad demonstrates that the urgent need to restore a meaningful voice to the body—a voice that can communicate experience after semantic expression is

² A cross-cultural comparison with novels of the war written from a North Vietnamese perspective elucidates the specificity of the American therapeutic style. Proximity to one's native soil—as in the case of North Vietnamese soldiers fighting for their homeland—enables physical mourning, whereas the American experience is confined to alienated mental mourning. Consider Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* (1990): the protagonist Kien is tasked with collecting physical remains of comrades for burial, suggesting *collectivism* as part of the communist legacy. (There is, to my knowledge, no analogous scene in the American novels examined here.) In the collectivist confessional style, what is disclosed is political allegiance with the people, rather than the self's experience of suffering. Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* (2015) ironizes this kind of collectivist confession, however with cognizance of the "Americentric" conventions (Caputo, "Apocalypse Then" 1) encapsulated by the *Heart of Darkness* tradition. Bernardo Bertolucci's film, *The Last Emperor* (1987), also dramatizes collectivist confession, although it too is linked to the conventions of *Heart of Darkness* via its cinematographer, Vittorio Storaro, who worked on *Apocalypse Now*. (I owe this last point to Roberto Dainatto.)

no longer possible—had its impetus before World War I. The war, rather than a sudden, unprecedented shock, may have instead been a final catalyst for a reaction already in progress, a growing anticipation and fear of disembodiment sparked by the technological advancements of the late nineteenth century. (22)

In practice, however, the logic is more complex than Engel's language might suggest, both in general historiographical terms, and when applied to later tradition of Vietnam War novels. First, participatory models of therapy (such as psychoanalytic talk therapy) were neither accepted by, nor widespread in, the military medical establishment during World War I. There, psychoanalytic thinking favored the model of *hypnosis* (Leys 83), and the popularity of hypnosis in that context may be seen as reflected in contemporaneous avant-garde fascination with the irrational. However, with the post-Vietnam shift in institutional discourse in favor of participatory models of therapy, therapeutic narratives of war realized the literary potential of Freudian psychoanalysis—in terms of an ethos of rational communication.³ For post-Vietnam American culture, in which a therapeutic emotional style flowered, war was not simply a negative, destructive, or irrational force that repressed the voice; rather, war provided formative occasions for the therapeutic stylization of the confessional voice, granting authority to memory and rationality to emotional life.

In the history of the therapeutic style, the Vietnam War in particular helped to pave the way for the narrative emplotment of therapeutic selfhood. Instead of through the popular terms of a repressive hypothesis that opposes the violence of war to the purity of the voice, then, let us consider the relation between war and the voice in constructivist terms⁴ that account for the historic origination of a new, socially- and culturally-dominant

³ On the notion of rationality here, see Illouz, *Saving* 136-142.

⁴ On the notion of constructivism in the history of emotions theory, see Plamper 5-7. As Illouz writes, “the therapeutic ethos appears to be a cultural resource that helps actors

way of narrating war experience. How did the period of the Vietnam War transform literary engagement with combat experience? In the post-Vietnam era, the reorganization of psychological knowledge in the military medical establishment renovated confessional practice by tying it to a logic of salvation and therapeutic narrative that, while first emerging in the U.S. context through grassroots veteran-activist movements, now finds a global audience through pop-cultural circulation.

At its origin, *Heart of Darkness* certainly existed in a transitional zone, between two cultures of confession, so to speak: one waning and one just emerging; that of religious confession, and a newer therapeutic culture of psychology. Perhaps this ambiguity sustains the text's longevity. As Martin Bock writes of Conrad's so-called "psychological" style, "the novel is used to narrate personal medical history at a point in time when English culture makes a transition from a pre-Freudian to a Freudian world" (198). In this context, *Heart of Darkness* may represent an early example of modernist confessional literature, particularly in the form of an "allegorical confession" of abnormal "medical history" (199). My earlier chapter (Chapter 2) considers how Marlow's confession might be understood as a purification of demonic symbolism (as Albert Guerard had recognized in his idea of the "night journey"). Arthur Symons, in somewhat lively words, similarly highlights Conrad's reputation for having presented evil nature to the modern reader:

Conrad created by some inexplicable, by some mysterious, by some occult form of mesmerism, worlds unknown, unimaginable, monstrous and most perilous; and, having created and judged them, I imagine him, squatting like some Satanical spider in his web, in some corner; stealthily hidden away from view,

reach forms of well-being *as they are socially and historically constructed*" (*Saving* 224). See also Shay, *Achilles* 53-54 for a brief discussion of the universalist vs. constructivist debates as pertaining to an anthropology of mourning.

throwing out ... tentacles into the darkness. (7-8 qtd. in *The Metaphysics of Darkness* 24)

Problematizing the purification of the demonic from the self, the confessional dimension of the novel is renovated and substantially transformed with the ascendance of therapeutic discourse in American culture; in short, *the confessional text is rewritten as a therapeutic text.*

From the American standpoint, it may be said that *Heart of Darkness*, and particularly its confessional format, had in fact served as a key schema for the interpretation of wartime horror in Vietnam. From the battlefield, to the medical clinic, to the *therapeutic narrative* in culture, confession had been transformed into a therapeutic ritual through the interpretative model of PTSD that was elaborated in the crucial decades following the Vietnam War. In something of an empathetic turn toward the psychological problems of the veterans, new therapeutic ideas were formalized in expert discourse and diffused in American culture. In a constructive fashion, the successful organization of therapeutic veterans' self-help groups in American society was a determining factor in the therapeutic stylization of *Heart of Darkness* in post-Vietnam culture.

The “Psychological Problems”⁵ of Veterans and a New Emotional Style

As conceived by psychological experts faced with the pleas of soldier's struggling to adjust after homecoming, the suffering veteran would soon become the subject and object of a new therapeutic emotional style in post-Vietnam culture.

⁵ For a survey of these problems, see John Ingram Walker, “The Psychological Problems of Vietnam Veterans.”

From America's perspective, the war had been perceived as particularly "brutal," which contributed to the psychological problems of the war's veterans. "The Vietnam war was unique. It was fought against an indigenous revolutionary army ... that overwhelmed the Americans with a sense of hopelessness; that hopelessness, in part, led to brutal behavior" (Walker 381). Unlike veterans of World War II, the veterans of the brutal war were not as readily lauded by the public. In the colorful language of veteran and novelist Karl Marlantes: whereas "[o]ur boys in uniform" heroically defeated "Japanese militarism" and "Nazi brutality" in the Second World War, veterans of Vietnam were "portrayed as dope-shooting, coke-snuffing, baby-killing mercenaries" of the American empire (87). In the 1996 "Postscript" to *A Rumor of War*, Caputo recalls a similar sentiment: "in the eyes of the antiwar movement, each soldier was the incarnation of what it considered criminal policy" (348). In the eyes of the antiwar public, the veterans were condemned as part of the American empire's war machine. The social and political situation was affectively polarized long until the war's detente in the mid '70s.

Public perception of the veterans radically shifted as their suffering was translated into a social movement and a psychological language. The therapeutic ambitions of grassroots movements in civil society were relayed through psychological experts and popular media. Already in 1970, the psychological problem of veterans' suffering had become a national conversation, as "the US Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs convened a hearing to examine 'the psychological predicament of the Vietnam veteran,' where psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton ... testified to a 'psychic numbing' that soldiers were undergoing" (Roston). Lifton's work on "psychic numbing" (a form of cognitive and emotional repression) built on the small but growing school of psychoanalytic thinking

within the American military medical establishment, that in practice tended to favor participatory over non-participatory (or behaviorist) methods of treatment for disorders related to combat stress.

Around the same time, social networks in civil society formed around self-help “group rap” sessions that sought to redress veterans’ suffering outside the traditional clinical setting. The group rap sessions attracted the attention, in particular, of Chaim F. Shatan, M.D., who, as Associate Professor and Clinical Co-Director of NYU’s psychoanalytic training program (“The Grief of Soldiers” 640), helped to codify and legitimize the psychological problems of the veterans. In 1975, Shatan founded the Vietnam Veterans Working Group, considered pivotal “in the development of the [clinical] diagnosis” of PTSD that was formally recognized in 1980 (Recarte 40). In his various apologetic writings addressed to the psychoanalytic community and the general public, Shatan’s regular invocations of Freud are instructive: They reveal the hypothesis that the veterans’ psychological problems may positively respond to psychoanalytic therapy.⁶ In his 1972 *New York Times* address to the public,⁷ Shatan thus did not doubt that Freud had already envisioned what would be required to treat what was then still called “post-Vietnam syndrome”:

During World War I, Freud elucidated the role grief plays in helping the mourner let go of a missing part of life, and acknowledging that it exists only in the

⁶ Even though this idea has been challenged by psychiatrists such as Shay: “In the early days of the current era of PTSD treatment, mental health professionals shared the folk belief that simply ‘getting it all out’ would result in safety, sobriety, and self-care. The consequences ... were catastrophic, resulting in many suicides, according to veterans in our program” (187).

⁷ Roston reads the article as a response to a public tragedy, when “a Vietnam veteran, Sergeant Dwight ‘Skip’ Howard, was shot dead when he tried to rob a store in Detroit. Howard, who had been diagnosed with ‘depression caused by post-Vietnam adjustment problems,’ appeared to want to be killed by the store owner.”

memory. The post-Vietnam syndrome confronts us with the unconsummated grief of soldiers—‘impacted grief’ in which an encapsulated, never-ending past deprives the present of meaning. (Shatan, “Post-Vietnam Syndrome” 35)

Shatan’s concept of psychoanalytic treatment for veterans funneled their problems into the mainstream of psychoanalytic discourse in American culture and society, with its broad mid-century “romanc[ing]” of Freudian psychology (Illouz 51). In an impassioned essay that further represented the ambitions of veterans’ group therapy, Shatan highlights the inadequacies of available institutional treatment for veterans’ psychological problems, and frames the emerging grassroots self-help movement as a “counter-VA” [Veterans Administration] composed of “group meetings on their own ‘turf,’ store-front clinics, and therapeutic communes In these intimate peer settings, veterans find a closeness unavailable in society at large or at the VA, a companionship and support much like that which people in mourning expect from their families” (“Grief” 649).

In a later and more formal theory of the group-therapy praxis, as official channels began to accommodate the grassroots’ demands, VA psychiatrists John Ingram Walker and James L. Nash describe how the group sessions work according to the logic of therapeutic confession. In their view, therapeutic confession in the group setting ameliorates the emotional alienation of the veteran and relieves suffering. Confession is a cathartic abreaction solicited in the presence of peers. In their 1983 review of the group therapy methods, the VA psychiatrists write,

The group process helps the patient effectively *work through the guilt* associated with the war. Group members *confess*, experience emotional pain, and gradually clarify their roles in the war. The group gives social support that somehow renders each member’s suffering meaningful. In addition, members of the group help each other gradually understand that self-inflicted pain must stop, that they must get on with the process of daily living. *As the member’s guilt lifts, his self-esteem*

improves, and he once again begins to love and work effectively. (“Group Therapy” 388; emphases added)

With such emphasis on the curative powers of confession, the group raps exemplify the self-help ethos of the therapeutic emotional style in American culture that borrowed liberally from concepts in psychoanalysis. While alluding to Freud, the task of mourning, as a kind of self-help, would *neither* be confined to the clinic, *nor* to its specific relations of psychological authority; instead, mourning would be distributed horizontally, not only immediately among peers in the self-help groups, but also more diffusely in the popular culture of a new therapeutic emotional style that coalesced after the war’s end.

Hoping to facilitate reparation, Shatan asked the public for empathy regarding the veterans’ paradoxical psychological situation: for they were “executioners,” admittedly, but they were also “victims.” Shatan writes in his appeal to the public, that in a way gives voice to empathy just as much as it seeks to produce it, “Atrocities perpetrated upon the Vietnamese while saving them from Communism are now almost as well known as those of Hitler’s extermination camps. Less obvious, however, is that Vietnam veterans are themselves victims of atrocity, as well as being former executioners” (“The Grief of Soldiers” 640). Shatan’s plea exhibits a new demand placed on the public to attend, empathetically, to the horrors suffered by the war. This demand would find new urgency as Shatan’s work “helped coin the diagnosis ‘post-traumatic stress disorder,’ which was added to the DSM-III in 1980” (69). The July 13, 1981 issue of *Time*—on “Viet Nam Vets: Fighting For Their Rights”—represents the gravity of the historic achievement of the formal recognition of PTSD, not simply institutionally, but also socially and culturally. In the concept of PTSD, psychoanalytic therapy had contributed the

conceptual grammar for empathetic communication between veterans and the American public. Narratives of the war could function as object lessons in therapeutic culture. Even as the invasion of the Gulf War was broadcast to the world and geopolitical tensions shifted to the Middle East,⁸ this school of therapeutic rationality, crystallized through the American experience in Vietnam, remained in session. The first tidal wave of post-Vietnam therapeutic discourse was just cresting, and therapeutic ideas about trauma and its cure, derived from the veterans' movement, flowed into the collective consciousness of the cultural mainstream.⁹

The demand for empathy from the public was well met. As Roston writes, "The new diagnosis [of PTSD] gave a new name to the psychological problems ... [a]nd it dovetailed with a new popular perception of the Vietnam soldier as traumatized, especially on the big screen." The image of the monstrous veteran, as in *Taxi Driver* (1976), gave way to the more pathetic image of the haunted and traumatized veteran, as in *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), *Jacob's Ladder* (1990), and *Forrest Gump* (1994). Indeed, films provided a popular access point for the public to gain an empathetic perspective on the psychological problems of veterans that were highlighted through the discourse around PTSD. In "Forgotten Memories: Re-Constructing the Vietnam War in Films," Thuc Uyen K Ngo writes of the long tradition of

Hollywood films [that] continued to dwell on the trauma of Vietnam. In the early 1990s, films about the Vietnam War often concentrated on the war's aftermath, especially stories about veterans coming home and the psychological and physical

⁸ On this new imperialism, see Said's comments on "American Ascendancy" (*Culture* 282ff). For a history of this ascendancy, see Wight. The rhetoric of primitivism remains in the American context; regarding the war in Iraq, in 2006 President Bush described a "struggle for civilization" (The Oval Office). See also Tanja Collet.

⁹ For a cross-cultural comparison of PTSD discourse in civil society, see the work of Emily Hoge.

scars they brought with them. ... [N]arratives portrayed American soldiers' psychological aftermath Into the 1990s, American public memory of the Vietnam War gently substituted a new narrative that focused on healing the haunted past and trauma from violent war experience. (Thuc Uyen K Ngo, "Forgotten Memories: Re-Constructing the Vietnam War in Films" 8)

The objectification of the veteran's psychological problems through therapeutic and self-help discourse was reflected in films' new focus on the emotional problems of veterans and the possibility of healing.

For this cultural turn, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* was a vital source text, in both film and literature. Marlow's testimony about Kurtz apparently fascinates the artworks of the post-Vietnam period.¹⁰ Almost immediately, Conrad's novel was forming a web around the period's aesthetic imagination. In the journalistic *Dispatches* (1968), Michael Herr defers to Marlow's vision of Kurtz's temptation, "address[ing] his own guilt and that of others for finding the war both fascinating and exciting" (Gabel 23). Consider also Francis Ford Coppola's monumental *Apocalypse Now* (1979), reimagining the journey as a spy plot, the strained production of which, also involving Herr, had frustrated the directorial ambitions of George Lucas a decade earlier before making *Star Wars* (1977). And in literature, from Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War* (1977), to Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990), and Karl Marlantes's *Matterhorn* (2009), Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has remained a paradigmatic model for narrative writing about the young American soldier's experience abroad. The force of the tradition is conveyed in Matt Steinglass's post-Vietnam idea that the "central theme in American culture [is] the 'heart

¹⁰ Prior attempts to modernize *Heart of Darkness* had already occurred, but without the same cultural impact. See Jonathan Rosenbaum for a discussion of Orson Welles's screenplay and radio adaptation(s) of *Heart of Darkness*; see also Guerard's forgotten novelization of the Second World War, *Night Journey* (1950).

of darkness' story: the descent of innocents into savagery."¹¹ Certainly, the extensive influence of the work in this context raises the question: what motivates the incessant allusions to Conrad's novel in the American context of the Vietnam War?

If the psychological problems of the veteran had indeed seeded the ground for a new genre of post-Vietnam therapeutic narrative, why was Conrad's novel central to this form? In the case of novels, as in the case of film, the post-Vietnam moment seized on *Heart of Darkness* as a model of retrospective narration that could be characteristically read as enacting the ritual of therapeutic confession, that is, by putting into narrative discourse guilt or grief that shades a repressed trauma. Thus it is not only the madness of the jungle journey that the post-Vietnam narratives draw from Conrad; more fundamentally, they draw inspiration from the confessional format that enables interfacing with the therapeutic culture of self-help.

The Confession of Horrors

Consider Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War* (1977), a memoir-novel that is part of the first generation of Vietnam War novels that adopted a standpoint regarding the ethics of confession. Amidst the national reckoning with the figure of the traumatized veteran, the novel reads as if incited by therapeutic discourse to confess to the horrors of Vietnam,

¹¹ This idea speaks of the willingness of critics to equate the *Heart of Darkness* story with the American frontier myth. As Fluck writes of the efficacy of this equation, "The familiar genre patterns provide structures of meaning but only at the cost of forcing Vietnam into the interpretative model of civilization vs. savagery. In applying this interpretative frame, we already 'know' what Vietnam is: lawless and savage in the case of the Western, 'primitive' and pre-civilizational in the case of the Conradian journey into the heart of darkness" (367-368). For an interpretation of the frontier myth in Vietnam War films, see John Hellman.

testifying to some of the bloodiest combat of the war, the early 1965 campaign in Da Nang. For Caputo, this confession is masked through parallels with Conrad's narrative, which culminates in the condemnation of the colonial-imperial project. Caputo is—despite being an executioner—also effectively *a victim of the imperial abuse of power*. The central conceit is the soldier's descent into savagery due to the traumatic stress of the journey into the primitive jungle of Vietnam. In Caputo's own words:

It was the dawn of creation in the Indochina bush, an ethical as well as geographical wilderness. Out there, lacking restraints, sanctioned to kill, confronted by a hostile country and a relentless enemy, we sank into a brutish state. The descent could be checked only by the net of a man's inner moral values There were a few ... who had no net and plunged all the way down, discovering in their bottommost depths a capacity for malice they probably never suspected was there. ("Prologue" xxviii)

Literary critic Toby Herzog describes the influence at the level of form:

Caputo engages in a conscious or unconscious retelling of a journey into a literal and metaphysical darkness The book is complete with Kurtz and Marlow figures who merge into one—the narrator; the actions of Caputo the combat soldier are related and commented upon by Caputo the survivor who has recognized the senselessness of the war, actively opposes it, but remains both fascinated and repelled by his experiences. (Toby Herzog, "Writing About Vietnam" 689)

Through his retrospective narration, Caputo confesses to his *becoming-Kurtz*, understood to mean a senseless and dangerous soldier without any moral restraint. Over the course of Caputo's narration, the reader finally learns of his devastating a local village (301-303¹²) that is soon followed by more evil, the revenge killing of two Vietnamese non-combatants (314-316). With the fragmentation of continuity and detail surrounding the disastrous events that occur simultaneous to Caputo's dissociation from experience

¹² "Then it happened. The platoon exploded. It was a collective emotional detonation of men who had been pushed to the extremity of endurance. [...] The change in us, from disciplined soldiers to unrestrained savages and back to soldiers, had been so swift and profound as to lend a dreamlike quality to the last part of the battle" (302-303)

(310¹³), as well as his ironic skepticism regarding his capacity to truthfully confess (319-329), *A Rumor of War* makes a case for the psychic numbing of the soldier who has inhumanly been turned into a killing machine on behalf of American military interests.

In this way, Caputo actually anticipates the new empathetic image of the veteran as elaborated by the concerned psychoanalysts: in Caputo's view, too, the soldier is depicted as not only an executioner *but also* a victim of the war machine. His novel is not only an account of what the soldiers did, but is also a testimony regarding what "the war had done to us" (311). In his 1977 review for *Newsweek*, Peter Prescott summarizes the message of *A Rumor of War* with a revealing formula that speaks to the intertextual relationship established with Conrad, who from the rising waters of therapeutic discourse about Vietnam emerges as a prophetic seer of the disaster:

the war was wrongheaded, an unspeakable waste of men which consumed all who fought in it; and that the war reduced all combatants to a state of savage frenzy in which atrocities became not only possible but desirable—as seemingly rational extensions of the general horror and futility. This is news that goes beyond what the journalists brought us, news from the *Heart of Darkness*. (86)

Of course, we are dealing with the primitivist trope of savage madness. However, the intertextual relationship also implies and anticipates another regular element of the post-Vietnam novel tradition, understood as a means for truth-telling, amplifying the idea of an uncensored testimony that is embedded in Prescott's allusion to "journalists." In what may be called the tradition's specifically literary hypothesis, Marlow's *storytelling* is implicitly positioned as a privileged form for addressing the psychological problems of combat veterans, including the horror of events and resulting guilt and grief.

¹³ "The month that followed the attack in the Vu Gia valley had itself been a bad dream. I can only recall snatches of that time; fragmentary scenes flicker on my mental screen like excerpts from a film" (310).

Representing the disaster of the war, but prior to the formal concept of PTSD, the confessional tone that attempts to make sense of the transgressions committed, in this instance, still reproduces something of Marlow's cosmological pessimism. The cynical tone recalls the perspective of the anti-war movement that attracted Caputo while writing the novel after his deployment. In the book's penultimate chapter, Caputo narrates the process of his false confession to the local Vietnamese authorities (at the direction of American officials) and notes his disillusionment with the prospect of justice, which he feels he has cheated (320-329). The events are like a distorted version of Marlow's upholding the honor of Kurtz before the Intended, albeit with the journalistic pacing of Hemingway. Ironically, Caputo is acquitted by the local government for his role in the murder of the two non-combatant boys. "Conrad would consider the darkness triumphant," Herzog writes of the conclusion (690).

Philosophizing about his experience, Caputo's conclusions are bleak. He writes, "[N]o one was guaranteed immunity against the moral bacteria spawned by the war. If such cruelty existed in ordinary men it logically existed in the others, and they would have to face the truth that they, too, harbored a capacity for evil. But no one wanted to make that recognition. No one wanted to confront his devil" (Caputo 329). The theological-biological language of facing evil contagion recalls the Freudian repressive hypothesis: as in *Heart of Darkness*, man's instinct is represented in the jungle symbolizing the unconscious of savagery. Like Marlow affronted with Kurtz, Caputo focuses on moral transgression in his shocking portrait of war as a denuding of human subjectivity. Even if pessimistic in tone, this psychoanalytic language still appealed to the therapeutic interests of the American public tasked with granting the soldier empathy.

The problem of making repressed evil conscious is psychoanalytic. Centering on the *confession of horrors* as the climatic point of its retrospective narrative, *A Rumor of War* thus reflects the introspective habits of the therapeutic style in culture.

Further, the cultural event of Caputo's published confessions, released soon after the Vietnam War, illustrates the contradictions that *Heart of Darkness* could formally resolve. Indeed, the ways in which *Heart of Darkness* founds Caputo's novel—the first instance of what was soon to become a new novel tradition—speaks to the dilemma of existing popular narrative formulas, such as the frontier myth, when brought to bear on the American experience of Vietnam. As Winfried Fluck writes, “In its moral ambiguity, the Vietnam War undermined narrative formulas of heroism” (365).¹⁴ Could the masculine heroism of the adventure genre, or the Western frontier myth, really give form to the Vietnam War novel? Fluck writes, “Now, new narratives and metaphors had to be found for the war experience. ... A search set in for narratives and metaphors that might make the unpopular Vietnam War” formally meaningful (365). Surprisingly, the *Heart of Darkness* tradition did in fact help to make the war meaningful, by way of guiding subsequent novels' therapeutic stylization of Marlow's confessions.

A new narrative model of *heroic speech about trauma* was substituted for obsolete models of heroic conduct under fire. Amidst the social and cultural reckoning with the figure of the traumatized veteran, therapeutic discourse incited the confession of horrors and informed a nascent literary tradition—the post-Vietnam *Heart of Darkness* novel—that worked as a popular forum to talk about, and maybe even exorcize, the war's

¹⁴ See also Maria Bonn, discussing this issue as it surfaces in O'Brien's first novel-memoir: “O'Brien also begins to doubt the applicability of works written about other wars to his positions in Vietnam. ... O'Brien finds his reliance upon texts inadequate to create an ethical system suitable for Vietnam” (7).

evils from the hearts of American soldiers. Indeed, in the 1996 “Postscript,” Caputo recognizes how his novel participated in the new emotional style of the period that saw the reconstruction of the hero in therapeutic discourse: “Though I didn’t write *A Rumor of War* as personal therapy, I think that it and the best of the other books about the war have been therapeutic for a wounded nation” (352). In this context, Caputo lauds Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* as the ideal resource for the construction of the post-Vietnam tradition (354). For the generations of writers following Caputo, Conrad’s text remained vital.

O’Brien and the Emotional Bond of the Platoon

Regarded as the “leading exponent of platoon fiction,” notably for *Going After Cacciato* (1978) and *The Things They Carried* (1990), Tim O’Brien stylizes the *Heart of Darkness* story by following a therapeutic outlook that, as in the theory of Shatan, adopts a psychoanalytic perspective on mourning. Here, the platoon becomes a privileged subject for therapeutic discourse as it stages the emotional bond of men under combat stress and dealing with traumatic loss. In this context, Marlow’s storytelling is updated as a therapeutic art of memory and melancholy, giving literary form to psychoanalytic ideas that, in the decades after the war, were increasingly common not only in the military medical establishment but also in American intellectual culture writ large. O’Brien’s Vietnam writing rose to prominence amidst the critical backdrop of Lifton’s ego-psychological interpretation of neo-modernist literature, understood as a tradition of cultural symbolization providing therapeutic means to reclaim power and establish immortality, so to speak, over destructive forces of death.¹⁵

¹⁵ In the 1990s, Lifton’s ideas about modernist literature, articulated in “The Survivor as Creator,” grounded the humanities on a therapeutic basis: They were crucial for literary

In the collection *The Things They Carried*, the mnemonic-literary motif of “carrying” unites a series of stories about the absurdities and sentimentalities of soldiering in Vietnam. The activity of carrying is thematized in the famous, lengthy beginning monologue that recalls Marlow’s own monologizing habits.¹⁶ The monologue indicates that, for O’Brien, the activity of carrying is best understood as a therapeutic practice of mourning. As a psychological metaphor, the weight of the things “carried” points to the endurance of the soldier who honorably performs his duties under extreme stress. “They shared the weight of memory. They took up what others could no longer bear. Often, they carried each other, the wounded or the weak,” O’Brien writes, implying that remembering loss is part of the soldier’s responsibility to care for the wounded (14). Even more succinctly, O’Brien writes of the stress of carrying: “They carried all the emotional baggage of men who might die” (21). This monologue exemplifies the characteristic emotionality of the novel, structured around the issues of trauma, memory and mourning.¹⁷

studies, via Cathy Caruth’s reading of modern literature in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), and art history, via Kristine Stiles’s account of neo-modernist destruction art, e.g. in “Survival Ethos and Destruction Art” (1992).

¹⁶ Caputo had already used this natural metaphor in reference to guilt. After the destruction of the local village, Caputo remembers, “Looking at the embers below, at the skeletons of the houses, a guilt weighed down on me as heavily as the heaviest pack I had ever carried” (*Rumors* 303).

¹⁷ In an interview, O’Brien elucidates the meaning of carrying as a practice of mourning: Even when I was writing it [*The Things They Carried*], it seemed to be a book about storytelling and the burdens we all accumulate through our lives, our moms and dads and backyards, teachers, which I mean, my dad died ... four years ago, and he is as gone as anybody I knew in Vietnam. But like the ghosts of Vietnam, all I need [to] do is, you know, close my eyes a moment and there he is throwing me a baseball. And there’s something about carrying the image of him, the symbol, the emblem of carrying that, at least in my experience, is pretty important to being human. (O’Brien, “*Things ...*, 20 Years On”; my emphasis).

Chapters such as “How to Tell a True War Story” and “Good Form” show the emotional bond of the platoon forged through a series of disturbing events subject to melancholic narration. In a setting that recalls the heavily-mined southeastern coastland where O’Brien’s Army unit was tasked with catch-22 patrols,¹⁸ the platoon is, above all, haunted by malingering traumatic stress. A typical passage describing the jungle reads, “We called the enemy ghosts. ... The countryside itself seemed spooky—shadows and tunnels and incense burning in the dark. The land was haunted” (202). The spectral diction and imagery, such as “incense burning in the dark” that recalls the atmosphere of Kurtz’s hut, further exemplifies the emerging literary consensus: that the horrors of *Heart of Darkness* should be interpreted through the discursive-psychological category of combat stress. In O’Brien’s jungle, the ghosts include not only enemies lurking in the bush, but also the ghostly memories of the men that are killed in his platoon.

On this level, O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* (similar to his earlier *Going after Cacciato*) works with a surrealism that twists around the symbolist aspects of *Heart of Darkness*. A sense of magic and madness dramatizes the inner experience of the soldier’s traumatic journey. In a review, Marine de Tilly writes, “Fragments of life and death, courage and cowardice, madness and reason, this hallucinated novel is (just after Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*) the most gripping voyage” (my translation; “Fragments de vie et de mort, de courage et de lâcheté, de folie et de raison, de passé et de présent, ce roman halluciné est (juste après celui de Conrad, *Au coeur des ténèbres*) le plus saisissant des voyages”). The narrator’s nearly anthropological penchant for cataloging superstition evidences the dissociation of the psyche that reaches out to the spiritual in situations of

¹⁸ This particular locale was also the site of the 1968 Mỹ Lai massacre, committed by American forces just prior to O’Brien’s deployment.

extreme stress. The characteristic figure of the ghost conveys a sense of O'Brien's vigil for the dead whose spirits linger in memory. Barbara Kowalczyk theorizes that *The Things They Carried* "deals with haunting, in the geographical, spatial and psychological sense of the term. ... [I]ndividuals are haunted by disquietude, loss or the side effects of traumatization" (6). In this way, the Conradian storyteller of *The Things They Carried* is a symbolic conduit for combat trauma and a shepherd of the platoon's ghosts.

Consider the storyteller of *Heart of Darkness* at work in the example of "The Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong" chapter in *The Things They Carried*. Here, the legend of the "Sweetheart" is introduced through an embedded narrative format, as Rat Kiley (like Marlow) tells the primary narrator a fascinating story "that will last forever" (89). The reader is presented with a tale that amounts to a journey through a heart of darkness: a young American soldier, Fossie, smuggles his innocent hometown girlfriend, Mary Anne Bell, into Vietnam and inadvertently turns her into a highly committed killer, redolent of Kurtz's descent into savagery. O'Brien writes,

The way Rat told it, she came in by helicopter along with the daily resupply shipment out of Chu Lai. A tall, big-boned blonde. At best, Rat said, she was seventeen years old, fresh out of Cleveland Heights Senior High. ... On the first night they set up house in one of the bunkers along the perimeter, near the Special Forces hootch, and over the next two weeks they stuck together like a pair of high school steadies. (93-95)

Soon, however, Mary becomes interested in the band of Special Forces attached to the platoon; they regularly take her on secretive night journeys into the jungle. When she does appear, Fossie no longer recognizes her: "She wore a bush hat and filthy green fatigues; she carried the standard M-16 automatic assault rifle; her face was black with

charcoal” (102). Finally fed up with her waywardness, the boyfriend storms the hootch and stumbles on the scene of this would-be Kurtz’s horrors:

Across the room a dozen candles were burning on the floor near the open window. The place seemed to echo with a weird deep-wilderness sound—tribal music—bamboo flutes and drum and chimes. ... The background music came from a tape deck near the circle of candles, but the high voice was Mary Anne’s. ... Quietly then, she stepped out of the shadows. ... There was no emotion in her stare, no sense of the person behind it. (109-110)

Fossie realizes, now that she has mastered the art of murder, the Sweetheart will never be able to love *him* again. “What happened to her, Rat said, was what happened to all of them. You come over clean and you get dirty and then afterward it’s never the same” (14). Folded into the traumatic fate of the platoon, the story of the girlfriend’s psychic numbing from a dissociating descent into savagery is an allegory for the emotional alienation of the soldier subject to traumatic stress.

O’Brien says of this story, “[I]t was intentionally structured to be the other hemisphere of *Heart of Darkness*. Because Kurtz is a man, because Marlow’s a man, and because virtually every character in the story is a man, the whole structure of my story is meant to be a female flip of it. In a way, I was trying to put a woman in a man’s boots and see if she behaves much differently or feels other things than a man might feel.” (“An Interview”) Thus presenting a girl in Kurtz/Marlow’s “boots, ” so to speak, O’Brien creates the “female flip” of the *Heart of Darkness* story by subjecting Mary Anne to combat stress. In doing so, the Conradian psychological adventure story is rewritten in terms of the bias of therapeutic discourse; in fact, therapeutic discourse encourages the androgyny implied in O’Brien’s figure of speech. Although the story may be read as a woman put into a man’s boots, the concerned soldier Fossie is equally put into the

woman's: the interest in the communication of emotion, transgressed by Mary Anne's numbness, belies the feminization, so to speak, of the hegemonic masculinity common in traditional military culture. Illouz identifies the pattern of feminization as producing "gender-blind" therapeutic discourse (*Saving* 239), an aspect which may be perceived in O'Brien's effectively universalizing gesture of the "female flip."

Therapeutic discourse further informs O'Brien's ethos of narrative practice as an art of mourning—that is, a kind of emotional communication at the level of form. As if a shaman communicating between two realms, the living and the dead, O'Brien's narration consists in maintaining a sort of supernatural connection with lost souls whose presence after death is commemorated through the imagination of the narrator. In this way, for O'Brien, narrative has a special power to save memory from oblivion.¹⁹ In "The Lives of the Dead," he states, "[S]tories can save us" (225). Actually, this points us to the optimistic dimension of O'Brien's literary style. Salvation is accomplished through the magical powers of narrative: storytelling is a "kind of dreaming," so that in storytelling, "the dead sometimes smile and sit up and return to the world" (225). Storytelling is a Freudian wish-fulfillment that resurrects those lost. O'Brien continues, "The thing about a story is that you dream it as you tell it, hoping that others might then dream along with you, and in this way memory and imagination and language combine to make spirits in the head. There is the illusion of aliveness" (230). This illusory power of narrative to make-live is the focus of "How to Tell a True War Story," about O'Brien's compulsive

¹⁹ Bonn, apparently reading to the contrary, argues that "stories can save us, but through preservation rather than through salvation" (14). However, this distinction is trivial, and, more importantly, makes O'Brien's own insistence on the act of saving nonsensical. Preservation is a form of salvation, as in the Platonic tradition with which O'Brien is familiar; Foucault notes that one meaning of the Greek verb "to save" is "to preserve and protect something, like decency, honor, or possibly memory" (*Hermeneutics* 182).

attempts to memorialize the traumatic death of a fellow soldier, Curt Lemon. The memory of Lemon's death is, at first glance, something of a compensatory substitute for his loss, but, more importantly, sanctifies aspects of the horrific scene.

Over the course of the chapter, O'Brien's memory of the scene of Curt Lemon's horrific death by an explosive boobytrap is repeatedly narrated with slight stylistic variations. Nonetheless, O'Brien consistently gravitates toward the chance detail of the day's sunlight—which operates like an angel's halo. This sanctifying image ultimately lends a sense of magical grace to the otherwise grim scene:

Twenty years later, I can still see the sunlight on Lemon's face. I can see him turning, looking back at Rat Kiley, then he laughed and took that curious half step from shade into sunlight, his face suddenly brown and shining, and when his foot touched down, in that instant, he must've thought it was the sunlight that was killing him. It was not the sunlight. It was a rigged 105 round. But if I could ever get the story right, how the sun seemed to gather around him and pick him up and lift him high into a tree, if I could somehow re-create the fatal whiteness of that light, the quick glare, the obvious cause and effect, then you would believe the last thing Curt Lemon believed, which for him must've been the final truth. (84)

The epiphanic truth of this story is also the truth of *all* true war stories, in O'Brien's formula: "a true war story is never about war. It's about sunlight. ... It's about love and memory. It's about sorrow" (85). The sunlight symbolizes the love for Curt Lemon that remains as O'Brien's mourns. In narrative, O'Brien's melancholic return to Curt Lemon's death purifies the scene by reducing it to its most uncanny and, ironically, happy elements. In this way, the commemorative passage recalls Lifton's idea of the "survivor as creator," who may use "mockery" to provide "a kind of literary 'wake': a vigil or 'watch' over the dead social body prior to burial, a means of expressing anguish and of crying out against the cruelly haphazard gods of death and loss, but at the same time a form of libation and release, and at least in some cases a celebration of life in the midst of

death” (249). For O’Brien, narrative has this profound responsibility to carry the image of the dead in memory and thereby make a mockery of death’s disruptive power over life.

Although O’Brien disavows the equivalence of his writing with therapy (158), the notion of narrative as an art of mourning is without question a literary appropriation of the therapeutic outlook envisioned by post-Vietnam psychoanalysts like Shatan, and as further elaborated in Jonathan Shay’s landmark monograph, *Achilles in Vietnam* (1994).²⁰ According to Shay, the narrator “can transform involuntary reexperiencing of traumatic events into memory of the events, thereby reestablishing authority over memory” (192). Exemplifying this therapeutic style, O’Brien utilizes narrative to reestablish authority over the memory of the dead. The final chapter of the book, “The Lives of the Dead,” redeems loss through the sanctifying powers of narrative memory. Proustian in a way, the collection of war stories culminates in O’Brien’s unrolling the memories of his youth, reviving O’Brien’s lost first love (228-236). The collection of stories thus settles on the memory of Linda, whose death at 9 years old by cancer taught O’Brien, as a child, narrative’s capacity for fantastic resurrection: “In Vietnam, too, we had ways of making the dead seem not quite so dead. ... We kept the dead alive with stories” (238-239).

In sum, *The Things They Carried* exemplifies how a therapeutic outlook, in the form of a literary ethos, evolves through the textual resource of *Heart of Darkness*, in the figure of the storyteller representing the emerging therapeutic culture of the military

²⁰ The genre of self-help is certainly a background structure informing the reception of O’Brien’s writing. As one reader of *The Things They Carried* tells O’Brien, “I read ‘Chicken Soup for the Veteran’s Soul,’ little things like that. Yeah, I went in [to reading *Things*] with an open mind ... I kind of figure, okay, this is just another pile of garbage to just throw onto the stack, you know, and the self-help books. But it actually—it opened my eyes to make me realize that there are other guys out there like me” (O’Brien, “*Things ...*, 20 Years On”)

medical establishment. As a crucial part of this culture, the Conradian tradition of writing “about the human heart” (O’Brien, “Interview”) is modernized with ego-psychoanalytic concepts, such as psychic numbness (produced by combat stress) and therapeutic narrative mourning (a psychic compensation for grief and loss).

***Matterhorn: The “Jungle Trail”*²¹ to Compassion**

The best-seller *Matterhorn* (first published in 2009) is another striking example of therapeutic stylization at work in the *Heart of Darkness* tradition: Partially recalling Tim O’Brien’s “platoon fiction” in its therapeutic outlook, its affective range is however tinged with an impressive sense of valor instead of melancholy. The novel charts the emotional journey of “a young man learning compassion in the middle of a war” (“After Words”). Focalizing mostly on the young and overthinking lieutenant Waino Mellas (who contours Marlantes’s own military career), the narrative details the “boredom and anxiety and confusion” of counter-guerilla warfare through the conceit of a Conradian jungle journey plagued by organizational incompetence, racial strife, and an intractable natural environment. Sebastian Junger, summarizing the plot, points to the journey-through-horror structure of the adventure narrative:

At great psychic and physical cost, Mellas and the rest of Bravo Company, Fifth Marine Division, climb a steep mountain near the intersection of Laos and the DMZ separating North and South Vietnam, then *build an outpost* capable of withstanding enemy artillery. As soon as they finish, they are told to *abandon it* because they are needed for a large operation farther south. There ensues a multiweek *stagger through impenetrable jungle*, the company plagued by lack of food, lack of ammunition and inadequate resupply. One man is killed by a tiger. Another dies of cerebral malaria. Starving to death and bearing a dead friend on a

²¹ As Ralph Peters observes regarding *Matterhorn*, “the road to learning compassion is very, very brutal—in fact it is not a road but a jungle trail” (Marlantes, “After Words”).

pole, the men of Bravo Company finish their mission and are allowed a brief rest at one of the main support bases. Soon enough, however, they are ordered to *retake* Matterhorn, which has since been occupied by the enemy. It is there, on the flanks of their own outpost, that *the horror* and absurdity of war are finally played out. (Junger; emphases added)

After facing these horrors, the novel ends with a sentimental hospital sequence, where the concern for the soldier's salvation suggests an ultimately therapeutic outlook—in my view, part of what Junger dismisses as the novel's "awkward" PTSD scenes.

Indeed, the cultural position of the Vietnam War novel, published soon after the renewal of the American empire in the Middle East, is awkward: a relatively listless narrative popular with women readers,²² it condemns incompetencies in Vietnam but remains sentimentally attached to the archetype of the heroic warrior. Although the novel takes seriously the idea of traumatic stress, Marlantes is not reserved in speaking about the joys of war, describing it, in short, as a mystical religious experience. He favors the contemporary reformist view of traumatic stress as an adaptive survival response (instead of a tragic "disorder").²³ Is this dramatic war novel, however, not simply returning us to the boyish romance of combat?—or, worse, excavating something that might be better repressed: the death drive? As Pauline Kael has decried in her excoriating review of *The Deer Hunter*, the fetish for heroic self-sacrifice in combat, and the glorification of the body at the most extreme limits of survival, becomes nearly indistinguishable from a kind of masculinist suicidal ideation.²⁴

²² That is, according to Marlantes, who explains the "pattern" determining in the novel's reception: "It's women who have rescued this book from obscurity" ("After Words").

²³ For a summary of this reformist view, see Shay, "Casualties" 182.

²⁴ See Kael (1978) for the excoriating review of the film, and David Denby (1979) for a summary defense.

It is tempting, indeed, to dismiss Marlantes's novel for its sentimental idea of war—what may be read as the vestige of a “nostalgia for the front” (to borrow Teilhard de Chardin's term). For example, note how Marlantes describes the courageous task of leading the squad through the jungle: “The point man is all alone. It makes no difference if there's a fire team or an entire battalion behind him. He sees no one—only shadows. At every turn lurks the possible ambush—and the point man is the first to go. ... There's no help. No rope. No friend to lean on. The point man is also blindfolded by the jungle” (171). While harrowing, the act is a test of the point man's courage under fire, and initiates the soldier into the sempiternal battle between good and evil that, as in the ancient Greek tradition, heroizes some men with eternal glory and resigns others into oblivion. For Marlantes, the soldier models the Jungian-literary archetype of the warrior (who Shay recognizes in Achilles). Part of this archetype involves accessing, through warfare, ordinarily hidden parts of human experience, such as the mystical quality of fighting to the death. Junger notes of Marlantes's tendency to glorify this aspect: “[C]ombat puts men in an emotional state where even other soldiers can't reach them.” In an interview, Marlantes elaborates, “[Combat] is a life-changing experience that in its intensity and maybe in its actuality approaches the spiritual—a spiritual experience that is beyond ordinary life, normal life and it's very difficult to come back down from it and—and function in society” (“Q&A”). Here, combat is elevated to the apex of human experience; the glorified idea of combat in *Matterhorn*—set in the highlands no man's land of central Vietnam—reflects the highly dedicated perspective of a Marine officer tasked with demanding search-and-destroy missions and overcoming the odds.

Certainly, Marlantes's writings do not shy away from embracing the "primitive and savage" joys of combat (*What* 30). In contrast to Caputo's novel that had denounced the army as a collection of savage "Kurtzes," so to speak, Marlantes instead rationalizes the horrors of military life through conventions of ethical and moral theory, frankly measuring the savage dimension of combat as a basically necessary part of the effective soldier's duty. As if novelizing the theoretical sources of Shay, the tone oscillates between that of classical Greco-Roman pride, including mysterious respect for combat as a test of the self, and the half-measured objectivity of a passionate scientist, documenting the effects of the stressful environment on men's psychology. Styled as a therapeutic narrative in which a difficult journey through hell gives way to salvation, *Matterhorn* closes with the scene of the grieving hero, Mellas, who, with his own incipient confession of horrors experienced, has begun to conquer the traumatic demon of the archetypal "night journey" that was, speaking literally, the war in Vietnam.

In Marlantes's vision, the impenetrable jungle hosts a variety of horrors that operate as demonic symbols of this war's trauma. Indeed, if Marlantes's narrative of the war is noteworthy as an instance of a therapeutic style, it is because, more than any novel examined so far, it lays bare the centrality of demonic symbolism in the tradition's therapeutic narrative form. As if literalizing O'Brien's notion of haunting, here nature is a demonic symbol, an "evil principle" that may take over and transform the identity of the traumatized person, according to the conventions of therapeutic narrative (Illouz, *Saving* 177). Nature contaminates the subject and motivates a ritual of purification. The novel evidences what Derek Gregory describes as the common perception of nature as a *demonic* principle in Vietnam: "the [jungle] rot set in as the deeply sedimented

Enlightenment distinctions between nature and culture dissolved in the jungle” (34). As in Marlow’s testimony about the madness of the jungle, nature in this instance exercises a demonic agency—invading, infecting, and generally threatening to disintegrate the boundaries between self and other, inside and outside, good and evil.

This demonic principle of nature is established immediately through a graphic sequence that occupies the book’s first chapter: a leech, lodged in the urethra of a marine, must be hastily removed by emergency field surgery (12-40). Throughout the book, the motif of the leech dramatizes the disintegration of self and other by demonic nature. Actually, as Marlantes writes, it is against the leeches that the men “waged their real war” (83). The symbol of the leech conveys the process of invasion by nature that was perceived by soldiers in the bush as a trauma. Gregory notes, “[W]hat they [the American soldiers] clearly came to loathe with a passion was their intimate, intensely corporeal violation by the jungle itself. ‘There it is you motherfuckers,’ crows Corporal Jancowitz in Karl Marlantes’s *Matterhorn*: ‘Another inch of the green dildo’” (Gregory 62-63, quoting Marlantes 125). Marlantes’s own view of “diabolical nature” is in this way comparable to Herr’s observation that “the Puritan belief that Satan dwelt in Nature could have been born here [in Vietnam]” (94 qtd. in Gregory 34). With this language, the experience of war in the jungle is rendered analogous to a demonic possession or invasion of the self by an evil principle that calls for a purifying exorcism.

At the close of *Matterhorn*, it is the therapeutic outlook that responds to this call, modeling the communalization of combat trauma through the ritual of therapeutic confession. As Mellas’s mission finally comes to an end, the hellish jungle opens up under the rotor of a medevac helicopter, and we are transported to the clearing of a

hospital ship where he is treated for a shrapnel wound that has caused partial blindness. (In its carrying Mellas to salvation, the helicopter is a displacement of the steamboat motif that carries Marlow along his own night sea journey.) In this sequence, an epiphany—just before the helicopter arrives—foreshadows the purification of the demonic and indicates a means to salvation secured by an anthropology of “care”:

He [Mellas] thought of the jungle, already regrowing around him to cover the scars they had created. He thought of the tiger, killing to eat. Was that evil? And ants? They killed. No, the jungle wasn't evil. It was indifferent. So, too, was the world. Evil, then, must be the negation of something that man had added to the world. Ultimately, it was caring about something that made the world liable to evil. Caring. And then the caring gets torn asunder. Everybody dies, but not everybody cares.

It occurred to Mellas that he could create the possibility of good or evil through caring. (500)

Gregory writes of this passage, “In speaking so directly to the recuperative, regenerative capacity of even a militarised nature, I suspect Marlow is also expressing a desperate hope that those who have brutalised so many of its life-forms might find redemption too” (37). The introduction of the principle of care toward the end of the novel amounts to a conversion of the self, or moral elevation, that anticipates the subsequent optimistic hospital scenes by underlining the power of man to overcome demonic nature. Like Christ who mediates between fallenness and transcendence in the theological tradition, in this therapeutic style Marlow frames the power of care as a kind of mediator that facilitates salvation from worldly evil. In the Kantian jargon of morality, here the concept of Mellas as a caring officer amounts to a “contrapurposive form of nature” that provides opportunity for moral education through “shaping and promoting the agency of man’s forming power in the world” (Ross 50-52).

Mellas's heartfelt epiphany regarding the formative power of care foreshadows the grace of the hospital, personified in the Navy nurse who serves as his caretaker. In the hospital sequence, Marlantes lays bare the modernist *mise en scène*. What are such allusions to the tradition of "ascetic modernism" doing here?²⁵ The concern for spiritual salvation in modernist authors such as Eliot and Conrad is repurposed in the service of a novelization of therapeutic culture. What is notable is that the narrative's conclusion, miniaturizing Mellas's own hypothetical homecoming, is imagined in terms of a therapeutic ritual of confession, thus introducing the theme of heroic speech as a culmination of the soldier's duty. Dramatizing gendered rules of emotional display, Mellas's attraction to the nurse who treats his blinded eye later gives way to his mournful confession that provides opportunity for her to act hospitably, to mourn, and thus to help him recover psychologically from his stress. First, the desire for physical intimacy at an ascetic distance, foreshadowing the role of the woman as conductor of emotions:

Mellas watched her every move, noticing her hips and the outline of her bra strap beneath the crisp white synthetic material of her dress. He longed to catch up to her and touch her, make contact with someone soft, someone who smelled clean and fresh, someone warm. He wanted to talk to someone who knew how he felt, who could talk to the lost, lonely part of him. He wanted a woman.

The nurse directed two corpsmen to arrange Mellas on an operating table. She wouldn't look him in the eye. Mellas regretted being sent to this place, where his sudden flood of longing had no possibility of fulfillment. She thinks all I want to do is stick it in her, he thought bitterly. Of course I do, but there's so much more. [...]

'Between the emotion and the response, the desire and the spasm, falls the shadow,' Mellas said. He attempted a smile. (507)

The allusion to Eliot's "The Hollow Men," and by extension, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (per that poem's epigraph), is reiterated in the subsequent meeting between Mellas and the nurse after the operation that restores vision to his blinded eye (thus overturning the

²⁵ On ascetic modernism, see Gott.

demonic trope of Marlow's blindness with fresh apocalyptic symbolism). During the later meeting, Mellas introduces himself to her as "T.S. Eliot" (517).

In the optimistic scene of their postoperative re-encounter, Mellas attempts to enlist the nurse's authority to retrieve a sword, lost in the ship's armory, that serves as a memento of the platoon's dead berserker, Vancouver. The scene recalls Marlow's own testimony given to the Intended, staging a romantic defense of honor, but updated in a therapeutic style. In fact, it reads like the original's inversion: whereas Marlow had perversely lied about Kurtz's honor to the hopelessly idealistic Intended, the true sincerity of Mellas's confession regarding Vancouver's heroism is authenticated by the material signs of his emotional grief (tears, touch). Note the cathartic optimism that the nurse's empathy imparts to Mellas, too, faced with his grief over Vancouver's sacrifice:

'It [the sword] belonged to a guy in my platoon named Vancouver. He died with it, running across an LZ trying to take out some gooks coming across from the other side. He saved the assault. He ...' Mellas, to his own surprise, started to choke up. 'He ...' He wanted to go on, but the choking sadness filled his lungs and eyes and stopped his tongue. He couldn't speak.

'It's okay,' Karen said. She touched him lightly on his forearm. 'He was a friend. You miss him, like the others.' She gently grasped his forearm and held on.

Mellas could only nod, tears streaming down his face.

'I knew it was important. You don't have to explain it. I'm glad I could find it.' She held him in her gaze and then released his arm.

Mellas smiled. The choke hold was gone. 'I don't think you know what you did,' he said.

'Actually,' she answered, 'I think it's just the opposite.'

Mellas looked at the sword. 'Yeah. It's like I think we're going to need it someday or something. Crazy, I guess.'

'No, healthy.'

He looked directly into her eyes, and they looked back, clear and warm. (521-522)

Mellas's anxiety over his sword is not only a kitschy restaging of the romantic myth (in which the sword metaphorizes the phallus); it also symbolically inverts the

castration scene with which the novel had begun. Pinpointing the importance of Mellas's mourning, the confession scene is certainly the most optimistic moment of Marlantes's therapeutic style, as words break down and intimate bodies emote in the service of the promise of mental health. The role of the nurse in this ritual, as master of communication and conductor of grief, instills a sense of the "ethos of communication" (Illouz, *Saving* 134) that Marlantes's reformist vision shares with contemporary therapeutic culture.²⁶ Mellas's "choking sadness" around the nurse symbolically resonates with Marlantes's own account of accepting archetypally "feminine" emotionality during his own recovery from PTSD (*What* 50, 186). Indeed, the optimistic conclusion to *Matterhorn* echoes Marlantes's broader theoretical pleas for a more considered therapeutic culture within the military establishment to aid with the soldier's successful handling of combat. The example of Mellas's grief is, in this context, legible as a case for mourning, turning the war novel's theme of courage under fire towards the topic of therapeutic salvation.

In the novel, the confessional scene models the "new man"²⁷ of therapeutic culture, in the figure of the emotionally-competent warrior that Marlantes outlines more directly in *What It Is Like To Go To War*. In the latter, effectively self-help guidebook, he draws on concepts of Jungian psychoanalysis (e.g., "the shadow"; 9, 200) and literary archetypes (50-54; as was Shay's Achilles) in arguing for the use of therapeutic ritual techniques to enable "ego control" (30) as an innovation in military practice. Such techniques may better enable the soldier to face the violence of combat, thereby reducing the psychological cost of war. The concern for the soldier's conquering his or her demons, in the symbol of the Jungian shadow, alludes to Guerard's own psychoanalytic

²⁶ On women and the sharing of emotions, see Illouz, *Saving* 124.

²⁷ On the "new man," see Illouz, *Saving* 217.

interpretation of the *Heart of Darkness* narrative. Marlantes's conception of the therapeutic process thus resembles the Jungian "night journey" that Guerard had already recognized in *Heart of Darkness*. The therapeutic process is conflated with the heroic battling of evil; this equation undergirds Marlantes's respect for the Conradian tradition and motivates the therapeutic style of *Matterhorn* as a psychological adventure of "compassion." Bootstrapped by the popular jargon of Jungian archetypes, and conceptually refined by knowledge of PTSD and its treatment, Marlantes's twenty-first century writings favor a post-Vietnam psychiatric consensus regarding the need for American soldiers to be acculturated to the praxis of a new therapeutic emotional style.²⁸

The post-Vietnam therapeutic stylization of *Heart of Darkness*'s confessional elements culminates in Marlantes's vision of the compassionate warrior. The warrior not only journeys through the darkness of Vietnam; as in Mellas's confession, he also offers a cry that incubates a story about his emotional suffering. Beware the straightforward idea of *courageous action* on the battlefield; in this case, virtue is more complex, as demonstrated through the warrior's requirement to stage an *emotional confession* in front of a listening audience. The battle is waged against grief and self-hatred. For Mellas, the caring officer, injuries seem principally emotional: with an intensely punitive superego, he is haunted by fear and guilt regarding the deficiencies of his own command, suffering more in caring for his men, than in a physical wound. How to treat such emotional suffering? With a therapeutic ritual of confession that purifies grief by communalization, initiating a process of salvific self-change. As a psychological novel about the combat

²⁸ For a suggestive reading of ego psychology in Marlantes's *What It Is Like to Go to War*, see Susan Derwin. For a perceptive critique of Marlantes's psychological language, on the basis of its obscuring the factor of class, see Anthony Swofford.

officer's impasse—of caring for those who are inevitably sent to die—*Matterhorn* shows how an anthropology of the “new man” catalyzes the therapeutic stylization of *Heart of Darkness*'s confessional elements. Assured of redemption, the confessing officer (combining elements of both Kurtz and Marlow, executioner and victim) intimates the promise of redemption through the moral conventions of therapeutic discourse that have subtended the American empire as a contemporary global project.

The Text and Its “Horror”

The requirement that suffering be publicized in front of an other—as in the form of an “*exposé*” (Michel Foucault's term²⁹)—lends a theatrical quality to the therapeutic process stylized in literature. Indeed, *Matterhorn*'s sentimentality points us to the postmodern “theatricality” that informs the ritual of confession in contemporary therapeutic narrative.³⁰ While works such as Hochschild's *The Managed Heart* have argued for recognizing the theatricality of therapeutic practice, the theatricality of the therapeutic style of narrative featured in *Matterhorn* is *not economic, but moral*; the performance of emotional disclosure has a moral value. In linking Mellas's conversion and confession to the achievement of cathartic purification, Marlantes emplots a kind of therapeutic selfhood that is enmeshed in the reparative process of establishing authority over memory. Here, the simulated ritual of confession is, to put it simply, a *literary* requirement of the symbolic form of therapeutic narrative. This is why, despite whatever pretensions toward autobiography may be entertained, the novels of the post-Vietnam

²⁹ Michel Foucault, “Technologies” 42.

³⁰ On the performative staging of “horror” in postmodernism, see Walter Benn Michaels 141.

tradition are not so concerned with providing an empirical account of the conflict in Vietnam; rather, they plumb the limits of the empathetic relationship between confessing victim and trusted listener as imagined by therapeutic discourse.

While taking the cue from Kurtz in their focus on savagery, the novels certainly “universalised Vietnam ... as a shorthand for the madness of a jungle war” (McCrum); but the importance of the irrational must be understood as subsidiary to, and gravitating around, the focus on the rationality of confession. Therapeutic rationality overdetermines the American appropriation of the source-text, more than any interest in primitive “madness.” In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said corroborates this claim. There, he comments on the power of narrative to conquer, contain, and even save the self from an irrational element. As discussed (first in Chapter 2), the hegemony of the *Heart of Darkness* tradition (as understood by Said) results from its powerful capacity for “historicizing and narrating” events that threaten to devastate the imperial subject (164). In this tradition, the therapeutic narrative acts as a technology of power. Therapeutic rationality facilitates this power; the emotional disclosure of the self in the form of the *exposé* effectuates the moral superiority of the ego, confessing subject.

For decades, the post-Vietnam *Heart of Darkness* tradition has stitched together the traumatized veteran with a listening audience in a therapeutic ritual of confession. Aiming to communalize trauma, the confessions of a wounded narrator are offered to *trusted listeners* capable of empathizing with the victim’s grief.³¹ This typical reliance on an audience of trusted listeners to symbolically complete the therapeutic ritual constitutes the theatricality—that is, the ritualistic and iterative nature—of the literary form.

³¹ Regarding the idea of a “trusted listener,” see Shay, *Achilles* 189.

Recognizing the horror as the object of the ritual of confession, the public faithfully responds in its role as trusted listener (even in the case of *A Rumor of War*, where Caputo maintains that was not his intention). For instance, reifying the notion of the public as a trusted listener to the novelistic confession, Junger describes *Matterhorn* as a “brilliant account of war that may well serve as a final exorcism for one of the most painful passages in American history.” The symbolic language of exorcism is ready-to-hand for the critics conditioned by the therapeutic style. The implied reader—i.e., the trusted listener—acts as a powerful “other”—a kind of authority figure—in the process of the soldier’s salvation, empathizing with the soldier-as-victim of evil, recognizing the disclosure of injury, and aiding in the therapeutic ritual of purification.

Let us linger on the emotional exchange between Mellas and the nurse that may serve, for us, as a striking example of the post-Vietnam literary tradition’s culmination, exemplifying how communication is reduced to an emotional confession. Why focus on this scene? At first glance, it seems almost banal—almost, that is, too believable. First, consider the content of the confession. What is enunciated by Mellas seems trivial: “‘He saved the assault. He ...’ Mellas, to his own surprise, started to choke up. ‘He ...’” (521). We understand, amidst these stutters, that Vancouver had turned the tide of the battle, but is this story really so special? Consider the contrasting conclusion about war stories that is drawn from Paul Berlin’s flashbacks in O’Brien’s first novel, *Going After Cacciato*:

Out of all that time, time aching itself away, his memory sputtered around those scant hours of horror. ... Odd, because what he remembered was so trivial, so embarrassing. War stories. That was what remained: a few stupid war stories, hackneyed and unprofound. Even the lessons were commonplace. It hurts to be shot. Dead men are heavy. Don’t seek trouble, it’ll find you soon enough. (286)

If the content of Mellas's heroic confession seems more than commonplace in this sense, it is because of its form, which appeals to the values of therapeutic culture. What is notable is that, contrary to O'Brien's insistence that nothing profound is "salvageable" from trivial war stories, in Marlantes's work we are led to believe that Mellas's memory, and the story of Vancouver's sacrifice, is tied to the salvation of the combat veteran. How is this effect produced?

The narration here is relatively limited in terms of providing access to any kind of subjective interiority; instead, emphasis on the external signs of Mellas's state of grief recall Paul Ekman's idea of the "affect program" of faciality. The limited third-person narration of Mellas's enacting of the therapeutic confession involves situating the reader from the perspective of a conversation partner, as merely an observer of his emotions while they "leak" (Ekman's characteristic word) from bodily signs. We are not reading the private language of consciousness, as is sometimes afforded by more omniscient narrators; rather we adhere to the externals like the face. At one level, the material signs of Mellas's "flashback" to Vancouver's death resonate with O'Brien's own interest in the mourning through storytelling. However, whereas O'Brien's narrative mourning compulsively returns to a scene in the past, Mellas's incipient confession prospectively anticipates a redeemed future.

In the case of O'Brien's storytelling, mourning is part of a deliberate ethos of literature conducted retrospectively, spanning decades of meditation whose essayistic qualities resemble Proust's. The story of Curt Lemon's death is repeated through a series of variations that modify qualities of the past, like an exercise in style; and the story of Linda pushes the reader even further along the reverse road of retrospection, toward a

kernel of a childhood memory embedded before the war. With the power of retrospection, O'Brien's literary practice is also an imaginative power of resurrection that brings lost souls back to life: such is the therapeutic style of that work. Unlike O'Brien, however, Marlantes's work does not draw us toward the topic of considered memory through the sense of burdensome years of reflection, "things carried" emotionally. Rather, looking forward as situated from the war's middle, we champion the war hero who, hospitalized but still virile, bows to the emotional force of sacrifices rendered for America, translated into the expression of grief and made meaningful as an object of therapeutic confession. Remembering Vancouver, the dramatically expressive body of Mellas presents psychic grief through basic affective signs that flood the scene and call for the nurse's concern. In *Matterhorn*, these law-like material signs of grief, anticipating healing, substitute for the spiritual power of the letter in the case of O'Brien's style of retrospective mourning.

Matterhorn's ethos of communication presumes a grieving subject delivered to salvation through emotional *expression*. The effusive cries of the therapeutic subject reveal more than Mellas's broken verbal reporting could; or rather, the effusive cries and the broken reporting are two sides of the communicative coin that is exchanged between the material signifier that discloses a repressed experience to a responsive interpreter. Material signs such as Mellas's cries register a psychic unconscious that is produced by combat stress and anticipates what this experience may become in retrospect: that is, put into narrative discourse as an illuminating confession, as was indeed the tendency in the group therapy "rap sessions" that the veterans' self-help movement encouraged in alignment with mainstream therapeutic culture at the time.

At a generic level, the therapeutic narrative folds the experience of horror back into the narrative discourse of confession, but what is striking in this context is that within such discourse, there are no particular words that refer to an obviously savage transgression. Rather, our attention is turned toward the bodily signs that flashback to a repressed psychic wound. With this formula, the novel's approach to memory resembles the "narrative of self-help" in therapeutic culture. Illouz writes: "The narrative of self-help and self-realization is a narrative of memory and of the memory of suffering, but it is simultaneously a narrative in which the exercise of memory brings redemption from it. Central to this narrative is the assumption that one exercises one's memory of suffering to free oneself from it" (*Saving* 182). Adopting this convention of the therapeutic narrative of self-help, *Matterhorn* implies that the story of a soldier's heroism does not just end in combat, but continues after service in therapeutic practice, into the "very act of telling" (*Saving* 181) about the psychological cost of war. In its focus on the expressive significance of the emotions, the scene is a tempered form of the popular (mis)conception³² of therapeutic confession as an emotional-energetic catharsis.

With its emphasis on the material signs of the affects that are supposed to aid in the "telling" of grief, the emotional scene in *Matterhorn* resonates with the predominant cultural mythology of the "expressive hypothesis" (Terada 12) that acts in concert with the therapeutic ethos of communication. "[V]oice and face" work as "superconductors" (12) to express the horror, so to speak, and thereby successfully communicate grief in a therapeutic setting. Supercharged with significance, the material signs establish a situation in which language need not do much. Indeed, what can it do? Mellas's

³² The scene in Marlantes's novel reads as a tempered version of the popular "apocalyptic-cathartic idea of healing," as denounced by Shay (*Achilles* 187).

incapacity to speak when flooded by emotions reproduces the “deconstructive” view of language commonly held by contemporary literary theorists of trauma (Leys 304). For psychoanalytically-inclined theorists of testimony such as Cathy Caruth, the traumatic flashback is “the interruption of a representational mode” (*Unclaimed Experience* 115n.6 quoted in Leys 267) that, in deconstructing symbolic language, suggests the material trace of psychic wounds. The reader, like the nurse in the presence of Mellas, is urged to attend to a primordial cry that makes present the trace of a bodily horror that initially resists symbolization. *Unlike verbal language burdened by the negative resistance of repression, the material signs of the emotions are, according to this cultural mythology, liberated from the unconscious, establishing the basis for an empathetic relationship with the other.*³³ In this way, Mellas’s expressive cries reify the “currently modish idea that the domain of trauma is the unspeakable” (Leys 304). Yet, the resistance to language of trauma does not prevent the triumph of truth through bodily expression. Rather, the failure of language certifies the authenticity—the spontaneity—of what is communicated at this more basic level. As Ruth Leys writes, “On this view, language succeeds in testifying to the traumatic horror only when the referential function of words begins to break down, with the result that, as Walter Benn Michaels has put it, what is transmitted

³³ In this way, and despite the purportedly deconstructive views of Caruth, the emotions thus reproduce a metaphysics of presence in this context, according to the therapeutic ideology of confession. Indeed, Caruth’s literary study of trauma narrative was successfully workshopped at Lifton’s influential “Wellfleet” school for psychohistory, whereupon “the impact of trauma on language” was proposed (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 117n8). In the post-Vietnam period, Lifton’s school for psychohistory had become an *éminence grise* in American intellectual life, particularly through the prominence of the school’s members within the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (Robert Jay Lifton, “Preface” 14-15).

is ‘not the normalizing knowledge of the horror but the horror itself’” (Leys 268, quoting Michaels 141).

Posed in sentimental response to the horror suffered, the expressive body (signifying unconscious traumatic memory) invites a communicative relation with the other. The material signs of the emotions alone may sustain the “dramatic expression of the situation” of suffering (Foucault, “Technologies” 48) so that verbalization is unnecessary; the breakdown of language in fact clears room for the veridical emotions. The importance of this scene in *Matterhorn* is precisely that the confessional technique of emotional expression has become self-evident as part of the resolution of the hero’s journey, imagined specifically in terms of the empathetic relationship that confession, understood as emotional expression, may establish with a trusted listener.³⁴ In this emotional exchange, Marlow’s pessimistic dictum, “We live, as we dream—alone” (Conrad, *Heart* 27) is summarily overturned by the relationality of the optimistic gesture of listening that establishes salvific communication.

Regarded as compatible with this so-called deconstructive view of language that provides new veridical significance to the emotions in relation with the other, particularly pronounced in scenes of unknowing where words break down, Marlow’s retrospective narration of Kurtz’s savagery is renovated with a therapeutic emotional style, staging the adventurer as a Vietnam veteran, the heart of darkness as a combat trauma, and the retrospectively narrated memory of Kurtz as an arena for melancholic affects, grief and mourning. The novels of the post-Vietnam tradition, however, differ radically from the *Heart of Darkness* that is familiar to modernist studies in that the imperial scene is not

³⁴ In *Achilles in Vietnam*, Shay similarly highlights the grief of Achilles as part of the warrior’s virtue (46-53).

simply understood in negative terms—as a shock, devastation, irrational element, or “unknowing.” Rather, the post-Vietnam tradition has heralded Marlow’s retrospective narration constructively by depicting how the confession of horrors partakes of a moral-formative therapeutic process. In the post-Vietnam novels, Marlow’s confessional storytelling becomes a paradigm for the contemporaneous project of “reestablishing authority over memory” that is the task of therapeutic narration. This task is introduced in the veterans’ self-help movement and later formalized by institutional psychiatrists such as Shay (*Achilles* 188-192), as hypothesized in this chapter.³⁵

Over the pivotal decades following the end of the war, the post-Vietnam *Heart of Darkness* tradition not only organizes such confessions for an empathetic listening public, but also, in detailing the work of mourning through literature, resonates with broader philosophical concerns about the historical experience of the twentieth century. Martin Heidegger’s praise for being-toward-death, or authenticity in the face of strife, in a way summarizes the century that many have seen as defined by disaster.³⁶ The phenomenologist Jan Patocka essentializes the twentieth century as “the century of night, war, and death” (116). The psychiatrist Lifton considers a tragic kind of being-toward-death, “death-dominated life,” in his study of *hibakusha* (survivors of the [atomic] bomb), *Death in Life* (30). Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*, politicizes the century’s bloodshed as culminating in “[t]he atomic situation [that] is now at the end point of this process: the power to expose a whole population to death” (137). In the work of Maurice Blanchot, the vocation to write of disaster develops into a

³⁵ See also Leys 251.

³⁶ Regarding Heidegger’s notion of *polemos*, the face-to-face relation with being that is unconcealed through strife (war), see Christopher Fynsk 117-125.

fully-fledged literary praxis,³⁷ while psychoanalysis begins turning to narration as a model for the therapeutic process of recovery (Leys 105).

In the case of the post-Vietnam tradition examined here, therapeutic ideas bridge Marlow's confused, symbolist monologue about *the horror* with the rationality of contemporary psychoanalytic discourse on trauma and mourning. The retrospective narrative form, organized as a confession, interfaces the archetype of the heroic warrior with the popular conventions of the therapeutic process. With the hero's therapeutic night journey, we are confronted with an image of the vortex of moral self-formation through an encounter with the evils of war.³⁸ Novelists suggest this image as guiding their interpretation of Marlow's idea of cycles between light and darkness, civilization and savagery. After all, the post-Vietnam tradition brings our attention to the ways in which the "heart" of the therapeutic subject awakens from the experience of a demonic night, in a haunting process of moral formation. As Emmanuel Levinas writes of this kind of archetypal awakening from night: "The recurrence in awakening is something one can describe as a shudder of incarnation ... in which a subject becomes a heart" (182). Thus, from demonic darkness to the saved heart, *Heart of Darkness* spans the century's therapeutic culture.

With these patterns I have tracked the basic characteristic of modern literature that Lionel Trilling astutely recognizes in *Heart of Darkness*—that is, its concern for

³⁷ The writer is "the man for whom death is the greatest passion and the ultimate platitude, who cuts off people's heads the way you cut a head of cabbage, with such great indifference that nothing is more unreal than the death he inflicts, and yet no one has been more acutely aware that death is sovereign, that freedom is death" (Blanchot 378)

³⁸ Lifton writes of the necessity of evil for morality, "We need Hiroshima and Auschwitz, as we need Vietnam and our everyday lives, in all of their horror, to deepen and free that [aesthetic and moral] imagination for the leaps it must take" ("Survivor" 256).

salvation. In the American cultural context, this concern for salvation is rethought through what I have shown as the late-modern therapeutic emotional style. In a pivotal historical moment—perhaps an “event in thought”³⁹— this emotional style transforms and repurposes Conrad’s text into a founding resource for the therapeutic culture that has been flowering in the Vietnam War’s aftermath.

Concluding Remarks

The holocausts have imposed upon all of us the series of immersions into death that mark our existence. Our literature is beginning to make clear that we are survivors not only of holocausts that have already occurred, but of those we imagine or anticipate as well.

—Robert Jay Lifton, “The Survivor as Creator”

From its beginning, this dissertation has detailed three main concerns regarding the formation of modernist studies and the subsequent transition to postmodern hermeneutics, which may be named thus: the historical, the theoretical, and the critical.

First: two basic conventional components may be distinguished as part of the *historical* concern, as analytically separate parts composing a single big picture about the history of modernist studies. On the one hand, I draw on the conventional *history of psychoanalysis* in the well-known phase of post-Freudian “revisionism” (or psychoanalytic ego psychology) in its distinctly American context, applied in my interpretation of the mid-century formation of modernist studies. In this respect,

³⁹ The concept of an “event for thought” is borrowed from a different period in Foucault’s history of practices of the self (*The Hermeneutics of the Subject* 9). On the general idea of an “event” in the writing of history, see Foucault, “Questions of Method” 226-229.

revisionist psychoanalysis, as a *discourse of the ego*, ultimately encourages and gives rise to the literary rehabilitation or restoration of the ego following Trilling's pivotal invitation to Freudian thinking about modern literature. In my understanding of the history of psychoanalytic ego psychology, I have relied, throughout this dissertation, on the work of Adorno, Jacoby, and Illouz, who each in their own way critically address the American brand of psychoanalytic ego psychology and the sources that nourish the predominance of revisionist psychoanalysis in postwar American culture.

On the other hand, I draw on the conventional *history of modernist studies* in the well-known phase of the institutional *consolidation* of the modern literature tradition. In this context, Trilling has served as an important figure in this dissertation for the purposes of conceptualizing the formation of modernist studies in accordance with the disciplinary history of the American academy. In this context, my view in general about the importance of Trilling for the definition of what would later become known as "modernist studies" is consistent with the historical account provided by Latham and Rogers (see also Mao and Walkowitz 3-5). Not only did Trilling select *Heart of Darkness* as representative of "modern literature" in its hostility to civilization while pioneering the university teaching of modernism; he also grounded his interpretation of that novel's so-called modern element through a basic concept of the Freudian subject. In doing so, he laid the groundwork for the use of psychoanalytic theory to rationalize the value of literary modernism's "badness," in the sense of its purported ethos of moral transgression. Trilling's emphasis on the liberation of nature envisioned by modern literature, as personified by Kurtz, refers to a Freudian-biologicistic theory of civilization as a repressive iron cage and thus inserts Freudian thinking about transgression at the foundations of

modernist criticism. In this way, Trilling opens the door to Freudian and post-Freudian speculation about texts far beyond the limits and stakes of Freud's original idea of creative writing as "daydreaming." Yet, as with ego psychology more generally, in this context, too, Trilling's emphasis on the maladjustment of the instincts would soon be displaced by therapeutic discourse on symbolic form (as in the postmodern theory of Caruth) that works to recuperate the ego in more healthful communication with culture. In this way, critical attention to Kurtz's primitivism also shifts to a new kind of interest in the therapeutic rationality of Marlow as storyteller.

These two conventional components—regarding the history of psychoanalysis (in the phase of psychoanalytic ego psychology) and the history of literary studies (in the phase of institutional modernist studies)—*together* form the big historical picture of the dissertation that, in my view, constitutes my dissertation's originality in synthetically rethinking the relationship between literary studies and psychological discourse: modernist studies' penchant for "Freud," notably in its gravitation toward the interpretation of therapeutic narrative, is historicized as expressing the American reception of psychoanalytic discourse, and thus as an important cultural institution of the therapeutic emotional style in the late-modern period. In this way, therapeutic discourse provides the historic rules governing the production of modernist studies in the approach regularly taken regarding literary narrative, thereby shaping the discipline's postmodern afterlife within the genealogy that I chart from Trilling to Caruth.

Second: the *theoretical* ambition of this dissertation has been to establish a *principle of unity* organizing the use of psychoanalytic concepts in literary studies, via the historic threshold of modernist studies, in particular, as a phenomenon canvassed by a

therapeutic style. With close attention, it is clear that modernist studies indeed has been populated by psychoanalytic concepts, a process which may be figuratively described as the formation of a psychoanalytic archipelago in literary theory. To name a few of these concepts, there is: “modernist melancholia,” “literary unknowing,” “the survivor as creator,” and, in the transition from Lifton’s neo-modernism to Caruth’s postmodernism, narrative as “testimony.” (Though not explored here, “reparative reading” may also be appended to this list, as a counterpart to the postmodern therapeutic turn to testimony.)

In my view (and despite the obvious limits to any totalizing concept of a “period style”), the utility of applying the notion of the therapeutic emotional style to conceptualize the ascendance of literary modernist studies is that it renders the diverse themes of the so-called psychoanalytic archipelago coherent as expressions of a shared style. This style is implicit, to various degrees, in novelistic narrative and aesthetic criticism from the mid-century onward. As such, the therapeutic style—a term referring to the aesthetic impact of therapeutic discourse in the modernist literary field, as consolidated by the American academy—may be understood as a *historical a priori*⁴⁰ to which texts and criticism are compelled to respond in a generative fashion. (The basic rules of this discourse, as pertaining to the literary field, are outlined in the discussion of “therapeutic narrative” in Chapter 1). As theorized in this dissertation, literature now exists in the shadow of the therapeutic style and in light of the therapeutic discourse

⁴⁰ As Foucault writes of the historical *a priori*: “this *a priori* does not elude historicity: it does not constitute, above events, and in an unmoving heaven, an atemporal structure; it is defined as the group of rules that characterize a discursive practice: but these rules are not imposed from the outside on the elements that they relate together; they are caught up in the very things that they connect; and if they are not modified with the least of them, they modify them, and are transformed with them into certain decisive thresholds. The *a priori* of positivities is not only the system of a temporal dispersion; it is itself a transformable group” (*The Archeology of Knowledge* 127).

housed by American culture at the dawn of postindustrial society. For “our literature,” so to speak, as Lifton notes in “The Survivor as Creator” (245), is a literature of real and imagined suffering; it is marked by the problematization of therapeutic rationality and the specter of trauma that combine in a new-age theodicy⁴¹ that is tempered into a postpsychoanalytic literary theory of History, as in Caruth’s account or Jameson’s work: “History is what hurts” (*Political Unconscious* 3).⁴²

Accordingly, my dissertation chapters have sketched out a set of *antinomies* of therapeutic stylization that inform modern literature’s aesthetic engagement with therapeutic discourse. These antinomies refer to how narrative handles, imagines, and creatively resolves the immanent disagreements or contradictions emerging from therapeutic discourse, without however the capacity to absolutely escape the questions and problems that such discourse raises about the interpretation of traumatic suffering. These antinomies in narrative include: therapeutic pessimism vs. therapeutic optimism; demonic symbolism vs. apocalyptic symbolism (describing how the former moods are imagined); the kitsch vs. the avant-garde (which in such cases may be read as bourgeois psychology vs. negative psychoanalysis [see Jacoby 80]); salvific speech vs. heroic action; and biologicistic (Freudian) theory vs. socio-cultural (ego psychological) theory.

For example, in Chapter 2, I consider how Conrad’s use of demonic symbolism may be understood as a form of incipient therapeutic pessimism that is overwritten by Guerard’s optimistic, groundbreaking interpretation of *Heart of Darkness*; the turn to therapeutic optimism is reified in Greene’s *A Burnt-Out Case*, interpreted in Chapter 3 as

⁴¹ On therapeutic discourse as a theodicy, see Illouz, *Saving* 246.

⁴² For a history of the shift to postindustrial capitalism in the American context that takes Jameson’s dictum as its starting point (in the form of an epigraph), see Gabriel Winant.

a novel that envisions the successful purification of the demonic, guiding the narrative to an apocalyptic conclusion. Yet, this optimism is also kitschy, since, as Adorno suggests, therapeutic optimism refers to a socio-cultural theory of the ego's rehabilitation appealing to revisionist psychoanalysis that is compatible with the ideology of bourgeois culture. In another vein, the antinomy between speech and action appears, in some novels—such as *A Burnt-Out Case* and, additionally, Constant's *White Spirit*—to allow for the displacement of salvific speech by heroic or ironic (anti-heroic) action instead. (Although in the instance of Greene, the preference for action still allows for an idiosyncratic kind of therapeutic optimism.) As I detail in Chapter 4, in *White Spirit* irony and anti-heroic action crowd out any sense of therapeutic optimism, suggesting that the novel may be read as an avant-garde, anti-psychoanalytic riposte against the hegemony of the American therapeutic style. Finally, in Chapter 5, therapeutic optimism is restored to the fate of the combat veteran's ego through the apocalyptic symbol of confessional speech as narrative testimony, in a way replacing or, more accurately, sublating the virtuosity of heroic action in combat under the newer model of communication. In each of these chapters, the above antinomies can be understood as a set of combinatory traits capable of being activated or remixed according to the respective historic situation and aesthetic intentions of the author, whose craft consequently generates a new and complex relationship to the materials of therapeutic discourse.

Even with the combinatory and in effect generative potential of the therapeutic style in practice, one conceptual trend, attached to the question and interpretation of history, is recognizable throughout this dissertation. This may be described in terms of a theoretical-historical hypothesis first intimated by Said in his theory of the “imperial ego”

in realist and modernist narrative, viewed as a gauge of colonial or imperial power. If, as suggested in this dissertation, postpsychoanalytic literary studies in the transition from modernism to postmodernism registers and amplifies the therapeutic discourse of psychoanalytic ego psychology, then the relevance of ego psychology for literary studies in its therapeutic turn would be precisely that ego psychology records and reifies the triumph of imperial power through late modernity. In other words, the restoration of the ego through narrative ideologically confirms the resurgent empire of post-War American hegemony, soothing the self from the contradictions of capitalism and the machinations of its forces. This tendency is most obvious in the therapeutic interpretation of *Heart of Darkness* that finds widespread utility in the novels of the Vietnam War. Yet, even in *A Burnt-Out Case*, which is tempting to read simply against Greene's British-Catholic culture, the novel presents a humanistic-romantic vision of labor that sentimentalizes aspects of American popular culture that feature ironically in its source-text, Nabokov's own American road novel, *Lolita*. More explicitly, in Constant's *White Spirit*, the postcolonial situation is imagined, at the end of the Cold War, through the globalization of American postindustrial capitalism that sends shockwaves through the so-called Third World by subsuming new forms of (immaterial) labor into circuits of economic production, thereby foregrounding the historical problematic of the therapeutic as an American export, so to speak.

In sum, the novels examined in my chapters circumscribe a trajectory regarding *Heart of Darkness* that is vital to the argument of this dissertation. In an oscillating manner, this dissertation has stretched between, on the one hand, the moment of *Heart of Darkness* as a text of literary modernism circa 1900—that is, within the diverse period

known as “paleo-modernism”—and, on the other hand, the mid-century theorization of the novel within the “neo-modernist” period. The latter period consolidates literary modernism according to the conventions of the ascendant therapeutic style, renovating Conrad’s paleo-modernist text as a monument for the post-Vietnam tradition. Through this juxtaposition, I have aimed to illuminate how the therapeutic stylization of Conrad’s novel was not only belated, but also contrived. From the standpoint of the paleo-modernist period, as in Flaubert, one may note in Conrad’s novel, too, the “obsessive exchange and multiplication of maniacs and their words (rather than thoughts)” (Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* 215) that is not straightforwardly consonant with the subsequent conventions of therapeutic speech. Indeed, as Bock suggests, Marlow’s confessional speech circa 1900 should be read as placed in an ambiguous transitional zone: after the waning of confessional religion, but before the cementation of the “Freudian world” (198). Moreover, as Levenson underlines, the paleo-modernists inveighed against—rather than championed—the individualistic ideology that informs the idea of self-help (*Genealogy* 15). Nonetheless, eliminating this dissonance, the therapeutic stylization of *Heart of Darkness* proceeds by recodifying Marlow’s confused babbling and obsessive philosophizing through a postpsychoanalytic framework, one that casts his “dialogized monologue” (Brooks 343) as figuratively modeling therapeutic speech, additionally interpellating the implied reader by tasking them with a kind of analytic or empathetic practice of listening. By the time that Marlow’s storytelling is generalized as testimony in the post-Vietnam tradition, generations of critics and novelists, beginning markedly with Guerard, have thus reread and rewritten the text in the shadow of the therapeutic style. Further, the broader situation

of therapeutic discourse supports these revisionist readings, as evident in the contemporaneous emergence of Caruth's postmodern hermeneutics of traumatic experience, a hermeneutics that should, arguably, be read as an abstraction from Lifton's interpretation of neo-modernism from the standpoint of post-Vietnam therapeutic psychology (on postmodern interest in trauma, see Michaels 13, 141-142).

In effect, this dissertation's historical and theoretical ambitions may be synthesized into a main critical point: the ascendance of the characterization of Marlow as a storyteller according to the conventions of therapeutic confession should not, I contend, be read as part of a natural or necessary unfolding that follows from paleo-modernism's discovery of the "psyche" through the terms of the "new science" of psychoanalysis; nor is that characterization simply part of the discovery of the psychic "microcosm corresponding to the new macrocosms of collectivity on the level of cities and social classes" that Jameson ingeniously describes at work in the novels of paleo-modernism (*Antinomies* 226). I would rather describe the therapeutic characterization of *Heart of Darkness*, in the critical tradition outlined in this dissertation, as part of the cultural and institutional (however, often diffuse and implicit) interest in psychoanalytic ego psychology that develops with notable intensity in the American context, where the transition from the period of neo-modernism to postmodernism passes through the literature of the Vietnam War. In this way, by "discovering" Marlow's testimony, the post-Vietnam novelists and critics (as well as more contemporary writings on the text, outlined in Chapter 1) engage in a sort of transcendental illusion by retroactively applying the rules of the therapeutic style from the standpoint of the current historical *a priori*. In this discursive encounter that catalyzes the formation of the novel's

tradition according to the logic of the therapeutic style, one should doubtlessly recognize the immense generativity of these novelists' and critics' line of thinking, reading, and writing. Their collective endeavor connects the text, which might otherwise have been resigned to the annals of pulp adventure, to some of the central problems of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: the ideology of capitalism, including the emotional components of bourgeois romance and immaterial labor; postcoloniality and avant-garde resistance against American hegemony; neo-imperialism and its war-machine; and, finally, the rise of postmodern hermeneutics in affiliation with postpsychoanalytic discourse.

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Biography

In 2015, I graduated from the University of Chicago with a BA in Philosophy and Fundamentals: Issues and Texts. I entered the Program in Literature at Duke University in 2016. This dissertation was completed with the aid of Summer Research Fellowships (2017-2021).