

Between Affect and Structure: Shame, Mobility, and the Novel Form

A dissertation submitted by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

Tufts University
and
Sorbonne Université

August 2024

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Abstract

English:

Between Affect and Structure: Shame, Mobility, and the Novel Form makes an intervention in the theory of the novel and argues that shame is the affect of the form. The novel draws from the *Bildungsroman* and the picaresque traditions, which organize the uncertain position of the protagonist within or at the margins of a social order while exploring the protagonist's interiority. This dissertation conceptualizes shame as a double movement toward individual identity and relationality. In the novel, shame thus asks to be read with mobility and migration: by identifying shame as the impulse of the form and the affect it produces out of its failure to cohere, this study charts the progression of the novel form as a series of displacements. This trajectory strives toward a totalizing coherence and is formalized by literal or figurative migrations, which seek to transform, overcome or escape the moment of shame. This dissertation proceeds in five chapters, after an introduction that outlines the theoretical framework. The first chapter studies instantiated and metafictional shame in relation to sentimentalism from the 18th-century to contemporary Ireland. The second chapter turns to shame in relation to Englishness and nation formation, with the figures of the gentleman and the butler in the 19th and 20th centuries. The third explores fatigue as a particular instantiation of shame in a posthuman chronotope through 20th-century American science fiction and opens on the contemporary New Weird. The fourth chapter examines the relation between shame and different forms of displacement and migration through the figure of the terrorist in contemporary postcolonial novels. Finally, the fifth chapter goes back to formal distinctions established in the introduction, and develops the idea that the novel functions as "the confession of a liar," which may rely on shame as a tool to elicit the sympathy of the reader.

French:

Entre affect et structure : honte et mobilité dans le roman contribue au champ de la théorie du roman, et fait l'hypothèse que la honte est l'affect propre au roman. Le roman s'inspire des traditions du *Bildungsroman* et du picaresque, qui organisent la position incertaine du protagoniste à l'intérieur ou aux marges de l'ordre social tout en explorant l'intériorité du protagoniste. Cette thèse conceptualise la honte comme un double mouvement vers l'identité individuelle et vers la relationnalité. Dans le roman, la honte doit être lue en lien avec la mobilité et la migration : en identifiant la honte comme l'impulsion du genre romanesque et comme l'affect qui résulte d'une cohésion empêchée, cette étude trace la progression du roman en tant que série de déplacements. Cette trajectoire tend vers une cohérence totalisante et prend la forme de migrations littérales ou figurées, qui cherchent à transformer, dépasser, ou échapper à la honte. Cette thèse est divisée en cinq chapitres, après une introduction qui présente l'articulation théorique de l'argument. Le premier chapitre étudie la honte instanciée et métafictionnelle en lien avec le sentimentalisme, du XVIIIème siècle à l'Irlande contemporaine. Le deuxième chapitre porte sur la honte en lien avec l'identité anglaise et la formation de la nation, avec les figures du gentleman et du majordome au XIXème siècle et XXème siècle. Le troisième chapitre se focalise sur la fatigue comme instanciation de la honte dans un chronotope posthumain au travers de la science-fiction américaine du XXème siècle, puis se tourne vers le mouvement contemporain du New Weird. Le quatrième chapitre examine la relation entre la honte et différentes formes de déplacement et de migration à travers la figure du terroriste dans des romans contemporains postcoloniaux. Enfin, le cinquième chapitre revient sur les distinctions formelles mises en place dans l'introduction, et développe l'idée que le roman propose la « confession d'un menteur », qui peut prendre appui sur la honte afin de susciter la sympathie du lecteur.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express all my gratitude to my adviser Lee Edelman, who chaired my exam committee at Tufts and helped me frame my ideas and define the scope of my project. Lee was generous with his time and with his advice about my work, always insightful, precise and rigorous in his feedback, and the excellence of his own scholarship is always a great source of inspiration to me. He was also a great teaching mentor: it was a privilege to learn from him as a professor in undergraduate classes and graduate seminars, and to have conversations with him about pedagogy.

I am extremely grateful to Alexis Tadié, my adviser at the Sorbonne, for his mentorship in the last decade. His seminars on eighteenth-century fiction and postcolonial literature have helped shape my ideas, and I thank him for his guidance, reading recommendations, and astute feedback on my two Master's theses and on this dissertation.

Thank you to the other members of my committee for taking the time to engage with my work: Jess Keiser, Sonia Hofkosh, Vanessa Guignery, and Kerry-Jane Wallart.

Thank you, Sonia and Jess, for being so encouraging, supportive, and welcoming during my time at Tufts. I am also indebted to the other faculty in the English Department, who have helped me become a better writer and reader, especially to Lisa Lowe for helping me think through my project very early on and to Joseph Litvak for his valuable advice, immeasurable knowledge, and friendly presence over the years. I would like to thank the staff in the English department as well: Jennifer Le Blanc, Wendy Medeiros, and Lauren Jo Alicandro.

Thank you to Kristina Aikens and my fellow writing consultants at the StAAR Center for helping me articulate my ideas, and to my amazing cohort at Tufts for our fruitful discussions.

To the faculty, staff, dissertation and postdoctoral fellows at the Center for the Humanities, in particular to Kamran Rastegar, Teri Incampo, and Courtney McDermott, thank you for making my last year in Boston so enjoyable.

I am lucky to count many generous, hospitable, and smart friends, and I am grateful to the various spaces and communities that welcomed me. To all the friends I have made in Boston – at Tufts, Boston College and beyond: Paul Driskill and his family, Lee Nevitt, Samantha Bondaryk, Craig Ford, Rebecca Aberle, Sriya Bhattacharya, Matthew Scully, Nell Wasserstrom, Rachel Pollard, Tokio Sano, thank you for our thought-provoking conversations and for making me feel at home in New England. I would also like to thank my friends in Paris, especially Manon Delarue for her constant, unflinching friendship, as well as Julie Meissner, Johan Picard, Antoine Naïk, Mathilde Poirrier, Nicola Brarda, Camille Pech de Laclause, Alice de Bourgoing, Bérénice Bourgon, Milena Glicenstein, Gabriella de Franchis, Marie Arcadias, and many more at the École normale supérieure and the Sorbonne.

Last but not least, thank you to my family for believing in me. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my twin sister, Shabnam Cathelain, and my father, Tanguy Cathelain, for always giving me strength, and to my mother, Shirine Cathelain, without whom I would not have started reading Anglophone literature as soon as I did. This project was born out of connections I made between 19th and 20th-century British novels and contemporary postcolonial, diasporic novels: I was lucky to have access to her copies of Thomas Hardy, E. M. Forster, Henry James, Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitav Ghosh and many others when I was still in my teens. I am also incredibly grateful to my partner, Jason Thomas, for his love and unwavering support, and for being my daily source of joy.

Table of Contents

Abstract (English)	1
Abstract (French)	2
Acknowledgments	3
Table of Contents	5
Introduction	6
Chapter 1: Shame in the Flesh	37
I. <i>A Sentimental Journey</i> by Laurence Sterne	41
II. <i>A Girl Is A Half-formed Thing</i> by Eimear McBride	72
Chapter 2: Shame and Englishness: The Gentleman and the Butler	100
I. <i>Daniel Deronda</i> by George Eliot	105
II. <i>The Remains of the Day</i> by Kazuo Ishiguro	134
Chapter 3: Shame and the Chronotope of the Posthuman	164
I. Human, Machine and Obsolescence	169
II. Posthuman Time: The Fatigue Chronotope	184
III. The Human and the Weird	199
Chapter 4: Shame and the Terrorist in Postcolonial Novels	221
I. The Terrorist	224
II. Embracing Shamelessness	241
Chapter 5: Shame and the Confession of a Liar	278
I. Shame and Social Justice	284
II. The Reactionary Turn and the Allure of Transgression	288
III. Shame: A Self-Serving Myth?	305
Conclusion	318
Bibliography	322
Index	340

Introduction

I. “So I called myself Pip”

My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip. [...] My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things, seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. At such a time I found out for certain, that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and that Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana wife of the above, were dead and buried; and that Alexander, Bartholomew, Abraham, Tobias, and Roger, infant children of the aforesaid, were also dead and buried; and that the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dykes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and that the low leaden line beyond was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing, was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip. (Dickens 3-4)

This dissertation relies on the premise that the novel form is always organized around *Bild* and *Bildung*, and that the *Bildungsroman* is both a genre and the form's defining structure. This structure of formation (*Bildung*) is flawed and inadequate; it is a structure of constant misalignment. On the one hand, it always resists complete socialization and fellow-feeling; on the other hand, the *Bildungsheld* is always haunted by the tension between his real self and his ideal self, between the fantasy of epigenesis and the perception of being the result of external accretions. As we can see in Dickens' *Great Expectations*, this results in a fraught construction of subjectivity,

threatened by its own unmaking and inadequacy within the social order. Indeed, while *Great Expectations* reads as a *Bildungsroman* which relies on the nuances of social shame as its young protagonist leaves a bleak countryside for London, the first page of the novel already stages its investment in shame.

Pip's journey is later articulated around the impossible relation with Estella – a relation in which reciprocity is foreclosed – but, as we can infer from the first sentence, it is also articulated around an identity which is both truncated ('Philip Pirrip') and redundant (the repetition of the name of the father as a short onomatopoeic unit and a palindrome). The identity of the "small bundle of shivers" that is Pip seems as disjointed as the "identity of things": Pip has no self-knowledge and seems to arise from the unstable ground of the marshes and its crowd of enigmatic ghosts, whose only materiality resides in empty signifiers and shapes. While this scene might indicate anxiety rather than shame, it is crucial that it only takes place after Pip's genealogy has been established. It is also crucial that, before we even know who Pip is, we have a precise image of what his family looks like in his imagination, which has the ability to translate tombstones into little boys:

To five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside their grave, and were sacred to the memory of five little brothers of mine [...] I am indebted for a belief I religiously entertained that they had all been born on their backs with their hands in their trousers-pockets, and had never taken them out in this state of existence. (3)

Similarly, Pip's "impression of the identity of things" could be identified as anxiety in a world of things where identity is tautological, were it not for the fact that the next sentence encompasses both his naming of his natural surroundings and his name-by-name recapitulation of the dead. This

description interrogates the relation between anxiety and an idealized, absent family. Indeed, the orphaned Pip can only think about his identity by putting himself in relation to the dead as images whose graves create a recognizable landform. Unlike Pip, his brothers have multisyllabic names that indicate a clear, fixed identity, bestowed by parents and assuring them of a place in the family lineage; Pip believes they were born already formed as little boys and they will always remain, in his imagination, a “neat row” of fully-clothed homunculi, from whose ranks Pip is excluded. Pip only exists in the shadow of Philip Pirrip, and the “small bundle of shivers” (an entity of pure affect) is already set up against the stone-cold series of “lozenges,” the irrevocable repetition of “dead and buried” – in other words, Pip is already framing his own existence as inadequate, redundant, out of place.

The narrator ends this enumeration with a clause that establishes an uncertain identification: “the small bundle of shivers” has to be recuperated and given a name too. While seemingly conclusive, that process of identification remains unfinished because the narrator breaks away from the assertive first-person voice which started the chapter and self-consciously dissociates himself from his own shameful materiality. The sentence thus ends on the division of the protagonist into three entities (the “bundle,” “Pip,” and the narrator as the detached mediator between signified and signifier). The problematic reconciliation of a condensed name and an inchoate living entity (still a seed, a pip) compels us to consider this passage, and the novel as a whole, in light of this discrepancy – the discrepancy between *Bildung* and *Bild*, between vibrating affect and image/name, the discrepancy that is precisely at the heart of shame. Pip’s stated fear¹

¹ We could also explore the double ambiguity of his “cry” (shouting or weeping, spontaneous reaction or spectacle?) As Eugenie Brinkema explains in her reading of the tear as structure, the tear (unlike the blush, for instance) is not an immediate physiological reaction and rather “testifies to a lost sincerity” (14) – Pip’s crying may thus be read as a performance against the ego-shrinking experience of shame itself – a performance which is crucial here, since it prompts another scene of shaming and terror, where Magwitch alternatively tells him to stay quiet and to speak louder.

reflects his recognition that there is no clear correspondence between the “identity of things” and his own sense of identity.

I therefore identify Pip’s first experience of disorientation as shame, insofar as shame is both the experience of the inadequacy of the self in relation to the self and in relation to the social world. Like Timothy Bewes, I define shame in relation to misalignment: “shame is an entity that comes into being on the basis of a discrepancy, such as the gap between subject and object, or between available forms and the drive to expression” (23). Shame is a dislocation, a double pull into different directions. It acts both as a threat to identity and social relations, and as its necessary ground. This dissertation therefore challenges understandings of shame as solely deactivating interest and desire.² I rather turn to the form’s relation to the various emotions that aggregate as shame and I argue that shame, understood as an affect which is both intimate and public, individual and social, is the animating force of the novel form.

This conceptualization of shame as structural and involved in a movement toward individual identity and relationality is crucial to my project since this structure is precisely that of the novel form. Indeed, the novel is invested in movement, episodic progression, and draws from genres which organize the uncertain position of the protagonist within or at the margins of a social order while exploring their interiority (the *Bildungsroman* and the picaresque). In the context of the novel, shame thus asks to be read with forms of mobility and migration: by identifying shame as the impulse of the form and the affect it produces out of its failure to cohere, I chart the novel form’s progression as a series of displacements. This trajectory strives towards a totalizing coherence and is formalized by literal or figurative migrations, which seek to transform, overcome or escape the moment of shame. Shame and mobility are the two terms of a self-perpetuating cycle;

² Shame, as the affect of exile and self-loss, may be put in relation to melancholia (Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia”) and depression (Kristeva, *Black Sun*).

novels about migration are therefore always confronted with shame as the experience of displacement and difference, and novels about specific instantiations of shame are always bound up with dislocation and movement. As we have seen, Pip's experience of shame is located well before his urban socialization, and provides the impulse towards different forms of migration, which, in turn, will create more experiences of shame: Dickens thus encapsulates, in a few paragraphs, the essential dynamic of the novel form.

As I have suggested with my reading of the turn to the third person in *Great Expectations*, shame can appear in the sudden dehiscence of narrative discourse. If we can say that shame constitutes the structural impulse of the novel form, it is also its resulting affect, insofar as the novel remains inadequate to its mimetic, ideological or transformative aims, unable to turn *Bildung* into *Bild*. While Bewes claims that “[s]hame and writing are coterminous,” this dissertation explores the idea of “shame as form” (23) in the context of the novel, precisely because this particular form articulates a double movement toward the other and toward the self (hence the importance of both empathy and the formation of individual identity since the rise of the novel). Drawing on Lukács’ insight about the sinfulness and fundamental dissonance of the novel, but also on narratological and linguistic analyses of the novel’s discourses, this dissertation aims to draw out the implications of the shame as form.

By analyzing the relation between shame and the novel form, this dissertation thus explores shame as both affect and structure: do novels about (cultural, social) shame and novels about migration find a fertile, adequately unstable ground in a form structurally organized by shame, or does the novel’s shame of form prompt its own thematization? I investigate this double causality by attending to shame as always moving between cause and symptom. In order to read shame as affect and structure, this dissertation relies on analyses of shame and affect, and of affect in relation

to form (Brinkema). Since shame in the novel has been theorized primarily in relation to the *Bildungsroman*, to the question of sensibility or empathy or, more generally and frequently, to its multiple cultural or social instantiations, it also draws on a variety of literary analyses – from the failures of the *Bildungsroman* (Castle, Esty, Redfield, Stević) to the eighteenth-century “failures of feeling” (Lee).

This dissertation makes an intervention in the theory of the novel by arguing that shame is the affect of the form. Recent scholarship in this field has focused on the questions of affect and scale in time and space, and on the *Bildungsroman*’s failures to represent coherent individual identity and sustainable relationality, but ignores the persistence of shame as structuring the novel itself. Shame is rather theorized in relation to writing in a postcolonial world (Bewes) and to literature at large, including nonfiction (Martin). I draw on those analyses, as well as general theories of the novel and theories of character, which point to a correlation between social shame and protagonists – as Nancy Armstrong suggests in *How Novels Think*:

[N]ot all fictional characters could become the protagonists of a novel. In order to qualify, a character had to harbor an acute dissatisfaction with his or her assigned position in the social world and feel compelled to find a better one (4).

I connect those analyses to theories of shame, which has primarily been studied through the lens of psychology (Tomkins) or as a political emotion or affect (Ahmed, Berlant, Probyn).

This dissertation’s aim is therefore to theorize the novel simultaneously through its paradigmatic structure of shame and mobility, and through its affective modes. Its chapters are both chronological and thematic: they provide an overview of the development of the novel in relation to shame while tracing the continuities and differences of thematized shame. For instance, Chapter One focuses on two novels that present the body as the (overwhelming, overridden) locus

of shame, and question its relation to sentimentalism. The dissertation chapters thus attend to particular tropes, patterns, and ideological frameworks: the development of sentimentalism, the construction of the English gentleman and its counterparts (the butler, the lady, the foreigner), the posthuman chronotope, the problematic figures of the refugee and the terrorist, and the contemporary weaponization of shame by unreliable narrators.

My project is therefore significant to the theory of the novel, but it also has implications for recent developments in affect theory, especially as it reconsiders the relation between affect and form.

II. The Hermeneutics of the Novel Form

In canonical accounts of the birth and rise of the novel, this form translates the dislocation of the modern world, the loss of the immediacy of the storyteller, of its “active, living presence” (Benjamin, “The Storyteller” 48). For Lukács, this dislocation is the “inadequate relation between soul and reality” (112). The novel is structured by a fundamental break between hero and world and by a search for authentic values in a degraded world; this search itself is degraded, demonic. The typology that results from his analysis shows that such a break can never be mended, as each type presents a variation of the incommensurable scales of individual consciousness and world, and a physical and/or figurative migration which seeks an impossible adjustment. The idea of degradation is also crucial in René Girard’s analysis,³ although, unlike Lukács, Girard argues that authenticity can be reached and mediation can be disavowed by the protagonist (from Don

³ “La médiation double dévore et digère peu à peu les idées, croyances et valeurs mais elle respecte la dépouille : elle lui laisse l’apparence de la vie. Cette décomposition secrète des valeurs entraîne celle du langage qui est censé les refléter.” (Girard 124)

Quichotte to Julien Sorel). As for Thomas Pavel in *The Lives of the Novel: A History*, rather than focusing on the novel's relation to degradation like Lukács, he analyzes the form as projecting a tension between both idealization and degradation. These theorists of the novel thus insist on the rift between individual consciousness and a form of transcendence, which, in turn, redefines the relation between the individual and the social. In *Les testaments trahis*, Kundera describes the rise of the novel in relation to the loss of the divine as a structuring principle of the social world, and to the subsequent rise of individualism:

La dédivinisation du monde (Entgötterung) est un des phénomènes caractérisant les Temps modernes. La dédivinisation ne signifie pas l'athéisme, elle désigne la situation où l'individu, ego qui pense, remplace Dieu en tant que fondement de tout ; l'homme peut continuer à garder sa foi, à s'agenouiller à l'église, à prier au lit, sa piété n'appartiendra désormais qu'à son univers subjectif. (19)

But this characteristic, rather than a melancholy-inducing loss, is the productive problematic of the novel. Indeed, the role of dislocation in the birth and development of the form could be related to its endless regeneration, hybridity and formlessness, to its investment in newness which seeks to adjust those incommensurable scales. Both Kundera and Pavel analyze the novel as non-dogmatic: it relies on tensions, paradoxes, and offers hypotheses,⁴ or explorations of fictional egos.⁵ If the non-conceptual “thought of the novel”⁶ emerges from hypotheses, questions, paradoxes, we can see that the novel's investment in dislocation extends beyond the birth and rise of the novel. The novel thus articulates and formalizes two problems from the eighteenth century onwards: the changing relation between hero and world (and consequently, the changing relation between

⁴ “une hypothèse substantielle sur la nature et l'organisation du monde humain” (Pavel 46).

⁵ Kundera's description of the novelistic character as an “experimental ego” (*L'Art du roman* 45).

⁶ Pavel's “pensée du roman,” which is the French title of *The Lives of the Novel*.

individual and social, private and public) and the problem of understanding, defining and representing individual identity.

The concern for individual identity, consciousness and affect is particularly marked in the English tradition, and highlights the shift from the epic or the romance. Indeed, if Kundera's analysis focuses on the importance of Cervantes in the elaboration of "the wisdom of uncertainty" (17) – the ambivalence of the novel being the site of resistance to "the totalitarian Truth" (25) –, his quick transnational genealogy of the novel's "discovery of existence" emphasizes that Richardson is the first to examine sentimental life and write what would later be called psychological novels. If the predecessors of the novel focused on action and adventure (Boccace), the novel *per se* leaves the realm of the visible (action) and turns to the invisible internal life:

Richardson a lancé le roman sur la voie de l'exploration de la vie intérieure de l'homme. On connaît ses grands continuateurs : le Goethe de Werther, Constant, puis Stendhal et les écrivains de son siècle. L'apogée de cette évolution se trouve, me semble-t-il, chez Proust et chez Joyce. (*L'Art du roman* 37)

The problem of the novel, as Kundera emphasizes, is the identity of the individual, in a world where the individual has replaced God: this raises an array of questions, or novelistic hypotheses, about the individual's ability to recognize oneself and be recognized by others. In that sense, the struggle of the novel's protagonist always has to do with recognition and misrecognition. According to Axel Honneth, social integration is a process of inclusion through forms of recognition: societies are legitimate only insofar as they are able to guarantee relationships of reciprocal recognition. The principles that organize those forms of reciprocal recognition are institutionalized, which makes normative social integration possible. I argue that the rise of a new

type of shame, correlated to self-respect and self-esteem, corresponds to the rise of what Honneth called new modes of recognition:

In pre-modern contexts – roughly, until the bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century – one's standing in society and one's status as a moral and political agent were fused, typically, in the concept of 'honor.' Rights and duties were rights and duties *of one's status group or 'estate'*, never of one's status as a free legislator in either the local kingdom or the 'kingdom of ends' (Kant). In the modern period, however, the fundamental principles underlying the realm of law and rights came into conflict with the idea of according legal status on the basis of class privilege. In this way, the notion of one's 'status as a person' was historically differentiated from the notion of 'social standing,' giving rise to psychologically and analytically distinct modes of recognition, as well as to the corresponding notions of 'self-respect' [*Selbstachtung*] and 'self-esteem' (*Selbstschätzung*) (Honneth xiv)

Honor is no longer the primary lens through which one's status is observed and understood; the rise of new modes of recognition thus redefines the experience of shame, which may feel like an ontological experience that both unsettles and grounds one's sense of identity, as Sedgwick suggests:

[S]hame and identity remain in very dynamic relation to one other, at once deconstituting and foundational, because shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating. (*Touching Feeling* 36)

The idea that shame can be both “deconstituting and foundational” brings me to the concept of *Bildung* (formation): indeed, if shame is individuating, it is because it “can entail self-evaluation

and transformation” (Probyn xiii). I will now briefly sketch the ways the novel has formalized the tension between individual identity and social world, by focusing on *Bildung*.

III. *Bildung* and the Novel

1. The *Bildungsroman*

The genre which most explicitly tackles the relationship between individual identity and social integration is the *Bildungsroman*. The *Bildungsroman*, which is more commonly known as the coming-of-age novel or novel of formation, emerged and was theorized in Germany, and is often tied to Goethe’s 1795-96’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*. It is the literary genre that derives from the concept of *Bildung*, a tradition of self-cultivation and maturation which hinges on societal acculturation, rationalization and normalization. *Bildung* is thus focused on individual growth or maturation with regards to an ideal image of selfhood (*Bild*), but also on a harmonious state between the individual and the social world, which makes the construction of identity possible. Theorizing the *Bildungsroman* often leads to registering both its ideological underpinnings and its constitutive failure to transcend *Bildung*’s inchoative state and end with *Bild*. For instance, in his typology, Lukács categorizes the *Bildungsroman* (or *Erziehungsroman*) as a compromise between pure action and contemplation, interiorization – the protagonist thus renounces the search for authentic values.

Another essential feature of the genre is its nomadic, restless dimension, which also contradicts the idea of a seamless integration into a social order, as Franco Moretti points out:

Already in Meister’s case, “apprenticeship” is no longer the slow and predictable progress toward one father’s work, but rather an uncertain exploration of social space, which the

nineteenth century – through travel and adventure, wandering and getting lost, “Bohème and “parvenir” – will underline countless times. It is a necessary exploration: in dismantling the continuity between generations, as is well known, the new and destabilizing forces of capitalism impose a hitherto unknown mobility. But it is also a yearned for exploration, since the selfsame process gives rise to unexpected hopes, thereby generating an interiority not only fuller than before, but also – as Hegel clearly saw, even though he deplored it – perennially dissatisfied and restless. (Moretti 4).

Moretti thus insists on the importance of “mobility and interiority” in the *Bildungsroman* – we find, again, the two main features of the novel form: its migratory nature, and its simultaneous investment in the uncertain relation between the individual self and the social world into which it is formed.

Interestingly, these elements have a lot in common with the picaresque, which arose in Spain in the sixteenth century, and which is also concerned with the inadequacy of a protagonist’s position in a disenchanted, incoherent world, and with attempts at spatial and social mobility. According to Claudio Guillen, the picaresque novel “deals with lives, with evolvment, with the unfolding in historical time of individual destinies”:

In Spanish, the key word is *vida*, which most often has a place in the titles of picaresque tales: *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes, y de sus jortunas y adversidades*. The picaresque *novel*, then, offers a process of conflict between the individual and his environment, inwardness and experience, whereby one element is not to be perceived without the other.

(Guillen 77-8)

He insists that the *picaro* should not be understood as a type, but rather as a “creative comment on [...] how it felt to be a man among men” (79) and outlines its various characteristics: the *picaro* is

an orphan, who “moves horizontally through space and vertically through society” and whose position as a half-outsider invites satire; the picaresque novel is written as a pseudoautobiography,⁷ stresses the material level of existence, displays an episodic structure, and provides the totalizing, philosophical value of the *picaro*’s experience as well as the limitations of his perspective.

These characteristics are particularly interesting when we compare them to the idea of dislocation and to the *Bildungsroman*’s own concern with the adjustment of the individual’s interior and social life. The fact that the *picaro* is an orphan, for instance, is analyzed by Guillen as physical and metaphorical exile, and hints at the *Bildungsroman*’s own ambiguous relation to time and youth:

At once fatherless and homeless — self-exiled, or, in the words of Tristan L’Hermite’s *Le page disgracié* (1643), “dépaycé” — he will seek new cities, further replacements for the absent tutor, only to discover that the world can at best act like a cruel stepfather. He will remain, like Gil Blas, “un vieil adolescent.” (80)

The *picaro*, by being deprived of a family circle, is taken out of time and out of space, but only partially – which leads to the ambiguous status and dual temporality of the “old adolescent,” the inevitability of aging and the reluctance to grow up. But this refusal to let time run its course, or this rift between the immutable self and the changing world, is key to the novel form at large and the *Bildungsroman* in particular. Indeed, it is precisely the individual’s relation to the figurative movement of *durée* which leads Lukács to articulate the problem of the “homelessness” (*Obdachlosigkeit*) of the novel’s protagonist:

⁷ “An inner man (embracing all the richness and subtlety of one’s private thoughts and judgments) affirms his independence from an outer man (the patterns of behavior, the simplicity of the social role). This profound division of the hero is, I think, one of the most significant achievements of the picaresque, and perhaps its most substantial contribution to the thematics of the modern novel (its shattering of the unity of “dual man,” its concentration on the dreams and the thoughts of fictional beings, its unrealistic saturation with inwardness).” (89)

The most profound and most humiliating impotence of subjectivity consists not so much in its hopeless struggle against the lack of idea in social forms and their human representatives, as in the fact that it cannot resist the sluggish, yet constant progress of time; that it must slip down, slowly yet inexorably, from the peaks it has laboriously scaled; that time—that ungraspable, invisibly moving substance—gradually robs subjectivity of all its possessions and imperceptibly forces alien contents into it. That is why only the novel, the literary form of the transcendent homelessness of the idea, includes real time—Bergson's *durée*—among its constitutive principles. (Lukács 121)

Contrary to the epic, untouched by time – more precisely, untouched by duration – the novel addresses the most profound shame of the individual in the world. The model of the *Bildungsroman*, in which individual growth, social mobility, subject formation and national destiny coalesce, could therefore be interpreted as an apparent corrective to the shame and disorientation of a tentative subject disjointed from the world.

For Lukács, Romanticism constitutes a particular response to the impossibility to transcend real time:

In the Romanticism of disillusionment, time is the corrupting principle: poetry, the essential, must die, and time is ultimately responsible for its passing. That is why in such novels all value is on the side of the defeated protagonist, who, because he is dying, is endowed with the beauty of wounded youth, while coarseness, harshness, the absence of an idea, belong entirely to time. (Lukács 123)

His characterization of novels here calls to mind Goethe's proto-Romantic, *Sturm und Drang* novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, whose protagonist's defeat relates to his attempt to abolish

any mediation between himself and God,⁸ thus proposing a doomed return to what Lukács would define as the time of the epic; in contrast, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* will become, in the European literary tradition, the template for the novel of education, which negotiates the demands of the individual and those of society. Rather than equating duration with unbearable discordance, the *Bildungsroman* (especially as developed in the nineteenth century) thus proposes a model for progressive integration into a given social and national community. However, rather than opposing Goethe's two novels and putting forward the text of *Wilhelm Meister* as the formal model of *Bildung* that overcomes *Werther's* Romantic model, it is important to consider that the "failures" of the *Bildungsroman* are constant throughout the history of the novel; the Wertherian "defeated protagonist" is no less of a *Bildungsheld* than a Wilhelm Meister (similarly, in the nineteenth century, Lucien de Rubempré isn't just a failed Rastignac or a mere aberration within Balzac's social system).

In the context of Modernism, Jed Esty frames his analysis of novels of stunted growth or of a "youth out of joint" (16) as a response to the inadequacy of the "reciprocal allegories of nation-building and self-making that underwrite the nineteenth-century bildungsroman, or novel of education" in an "increasingly globalized world" (ix). Globalization translates into overwhelming incoherence; within the history of the novel, there is therefore an affinity between the Modernist protagonist's attempt to escape *Bildung* (that is, the socially sanctioned process of identification of the subject and the nation) and Lukács' Romantic hero seeking to extract himself from corrupting duration and change.

If we take the *Bildungsroman* and the picaresque as the two main models that have given rise to the novel, we could oppose them insofar as the typical *pícaro* remains on the outside of the

⁸ See Astrida Orle Tantiño's *Goethe's Modernisms* (2010).

social order and doesn't attempt to fit in, whereas the *Bildungsheld* seeks integration and normalization. Guillen nuances this and highlights the partial, or ambiguous socialization of the *pizaro*, "the possible passage from an innocence approximating nature to the corruption of an *état de société*" (87) which can even evolve into a religious conversion and a withdrawal from society. It is often the case, however, that the *pizaro* remains resolutely outside the social order in an explicit way, not only because of his asocial function (the rogue) but also because of his inability, or unwillingness to change – in other words, compared to the *Bildungsroman*, the picaresque tradition allows for more tangential trajectories that have the potential to be comical, satirical or to take part in magic realism. This is particularly significant if we consider the *pizaro*'s affinity with the trickster figure in literary traditions that predate the novel form, and if we examine the postcolonial afterlives of the *pizaro* (in Rushdie's *Midnight Children* or Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, for instance) as well as his postmodern instantiations, influenced by the Absurd and the Nouveau Roman (for instance, Oskar Matzerath in Günter Grass' 1959 *The Tin Drum*, who literally interrupts his own growth).

While the argument of an evolution from the outward-looking *pizaro* to the inward-looking confessor has been made by critics,⁹ it is not a strict literary transformation, especially since, as Guillen establishes, picaresque and inwardness are not antithetical. In that sense, there isn't so much an evolution from the *pizaro* to the protagonist of the modern novel as a tension between those two possibilities. The *pizaro* doesn't seek to adjust his interior self and the external world,

⁹ "From the forward-looking, utopian close of *Wilhelm Meister* through the subdued and elegiac rise of *Der grüne Heinrich* to the anguished retrospective visions of Malte, the viewpoint of the hero in the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* shifts unerringly from the world without to the world within. The change is signaled in at least three ways: thematically, by the gradual retreat toward the days of one's childhood; structurally, by a turning toward forms dictated by the psychological time of memory – to autobiography, diary, and notebook; and, in terms of the image of the hero, by the transformation of the "pizaro" into the "confessor" (Miles 989). A footnote adds: "A similar historical shift could also be demonstrated in the English and French traditions of the *Bildungsroman*, from *Tom Jones* to *A Portrait of the Artist*, and from *Emile* to *La Nausée*."

but rather to survive – as a hypocrite, if necessary: “[t]he picaresque novel is, quite simply, the confession of a liar” (Guillen 92). This terse definition, which encompasses the ambiguous status of first-person fiction, the characteristics of the *picaro* and the Machiavellian concern with the cultivation of a dissembling exterior, could easily extend beyond the category of the picaresque: when we consider the formal characteristics of novelistic fiction, we could infer that any novel is “the confession of a liar,” and this dissertation will investigate how shame works as the particular affect attached to this oxymoronic association of self-exposure (the confession) and concealment (of a liar).

In the eighteenth century, the novel form is thus already embroiled in ethical questions about one’s self-presentation and one’s ability to connect with others – and whether those two goals exclude one another. As we will see in the first chapter, sentimentalism puts forward empathy as the ethical response of a world grappling with the consequences of commerce, but the eighteenth century is already critical of sentimentalism and of the possibility of empathy. The shameful, self-conscious man of feeling and the shameless individual, who draws from the *picaro*, adjoin each other: indeed, the eighteenth century sees the development of a Yorick, but also of Rameau’s nephew, Diderot’s shameless creation, attuned to dissonance, who purposely distorts the scruples of the bourgeois conscience.

While the *Bildungsroman* and the picaresque may have more in common than it may seem at first glance, the tension they provide between surface and depth, interior transformation and superficial presence, between veiling the real and exposing the tears of one’s conscience, could therefore be a productive lens through which the development of the novel form may be examined.

2. *Bildung*

In *Born Yesterday*, Stephanie Hershinow focuses on the “entrance into the world” (18) across different novels, and discusses inexperienced characters, whose function is to make “multiple futures more visible” (25):

Novice characters cleave to a standard of character that was considerably more abstract (and thus less particularized) than many commenters on the early novel would have us believe (28).

Hershinow thus rejects “*Bildung* as the governing model of the early novel” and considers the *Bildungsroman* to be an anachronism with regards to eighteenth-century novels. However, by contrasting the “plot of inexperience” to the “plot of development” (40), Hershinow is still highlighting a tension between *Bild* and *Bildung*, both in the history of the novel – since, in her view, the *Bildungsroman* took over novels of inexperience and became prevalent in the nineteenth century – but also within the “plot of inexperience” itself. In her analysis, “inexperience” is a state defined by the (prolonged but not indefinite) absence of experience, and therefore always in implicit relation to possible *Bilder* – ideal, cohesive forms.¹⁰

If we shift the focus away from maturity and youth as the organizing principles of the *Bildungsroman* genre, and rather repurpose form and formation (*Bild und Bildung*) as the two poles of the novel form at large, we can account for the different ways in which the contradictory ideals of self-determination and socialization, individuality and normality are accommodated or destabilized. Indeed, if we expand the definition of the *Bildungsroman* beyond the coming-of-age or apprenticeship novel, this genre may include variations of the “compromise” Lukács identifies as its main characteristic (i.e. different types of arrangements that lead to social acceptability), but

¹⁰ The optative mood itself, theorized by Andrew H. Miller and on which Hershinow builds, projects possible cohesive forms.

it may also counter Lukács' definition by either presenting failures of socialization, picaresque resistance to (and withdrawal from) the social order, or by renewing the idealistic quest altogether,¹¹ in novels that Lukács would rather categorize as psychological novels, or as novels of abstract idealism.

The novel therefore articulates the processes of formation (*Bildung*) or deformation (*Verbildung*), and the *Bildungsroman*, if we take it as an organizing structure rather than a genre – precisely because it is “the genre most essential to the development of the novelistic protagonist” (Woloch, *The One vs. The Many* 29): it can thus overturn its eighteenth-century logic. For instance, Leo Bersani describes the Beckettian narrator before being summoned into relations as being “called up from the immobility of perfect self-adequation to be displaced within a language that, before meaning anything, operates as an agent of spatial dispersion” (Bersani 104). In the logic of Beckett's reverse *Bildung* model, the perfect *Bild* that constitutes self-adequation gives way to displacement, dispersion and nonidentity – if there is a progression, it could be described as a decomposition.

Moreover, insofar as the novel emerged as a form about the construction of a subject rooted in the bourgeois class, theorists of the novel have measured the extent to which this form is invested in the failures of this process: the idea of a successful, completed *Bildung* is a utopian, unrealizable project and/or corresponds to a mode of subject formation which conceals disseminated structures of power (Miller);¹² it is inherently flawed because it attempts to overlap incommensurable

¹¹ Hermann Hesse provides an illustration of the latter, i.e. the renewal (or reversal) of the *Bildungsroman*'s renunciation, as defined by Lukács and exemplified by Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* – this renunciation, for Hesse, is not that of the search for authentic values, but rather the renunciation of the degraded world itself: in *Demian*, for instance, which would be categorized as a typical *Bildungsroman* (i.e. a coming-of-age story), *Bildung* gives way to *Versenkung*, the process through which the individual reaches unity, the identity of the self and the world.

¹² What D.A. Miller calls the “subversion hypothesis” means that, “in the case of the nineteenth-century novel, it is widely held that (1) though the project of this novel is to produce a stable, centered subject in a stable, centered world, (2) this project is inevitably doomed to failure.” This is the hypothesis he nuances by arguing that “the enterprise of the traditional novel [...] would instead (or in addition) be the more successful task of forming – by means of that

temporalities (Castle); it actually tends to condemn its heroes to failure (Stević), etc. Ian Duncan also argues that the *Bildungsroman* as a recognizable form is unstable, paradoxical: *Bildung* is “always in formation, surging toward an unrealized future; it is the genre of infinity, not totality” (24).

Pavel’s proposition that the novel offers a “hypothèse substantielle” is itself paradoxical and points to the novel as structurally struggling between form and formation: a hypothesis is a possibility among others, a sketch that eludes assertive truths, but being substantial implies consistency, homogeneity, and even (calling on Rabelais’ metaphor of the “substantifique moelle,” the substantial marrow of his novel *Gargantua*) an essence, an idea. While the *Bildungsroman* may be defined, like the picaresque, as a subgenre of the novel, I therefore take it here as its paradigmatic structure, in the sense that the novel’s investment in dislocation and in the individual subject leads to the re-articulation of the relation between form and formation.

IV. Interrelated Propositions

The novel, in its tension between form and formation, is structured by disjunctions or binaries, which are revealed, or activated by shame and mobility:

1. Real Self/Ideal Self.

This is the binary that animates the *Bildungsroman* pattern, and it is rooted in the hero’s sense of shameful inadequacy in the dislocated world I have outlined at the beginning of this introduction.

The *Bildungsheld* seeks to elevate himself and escape his condition – he experiences shame as the

very “failure” – a subject habituated to psychic displacements, evacuations, reinvestments, in a social order whose totalizing power circulates all the more easily for being pulverized.” (xii-xiii)

non-identity between his selfhood and what others see or construe. This inadequacy between the two is what motivates the protagonist towards spatial and social mobility; it is also the contradiction at the core of the form, since, as Gregory Castle argues, the time of experience and the time of reflection can never meet:

This belatedness is the general condition of our conscious lives (and thus of our consciousness of *Bildung*), since our reflections on ourselves come too late to align perfectly or completely with our experience of ourselves as selves. Belatedness is the incommensurability of two temporalities: one of experience and one of reflection. (Castle 485)

We see here that the process of *Bildung* itself is an experience of misalignment, of disorientation; Marc Redfield also makes the point that *Bildung*, as the attempt to make the (real, inchoative) self and the ideal self coincide, is fundamentally contradictory since the ideal self cannot be found outside the self (Redfield 49).

However, this binary is not specific to the diegetic journey of the protagonist; indeed, it is key to understand the novel's ongoing concern with the representation of consciousness, as well as its concern with realism – whether realism means psychological and moral authenticity, adjudicating between knowledge and opinion, or (especially with the rise of the realist novel) striving toward sociological, linguistic or topographical verisimilitude. Aiming to tell the truth of human experience creates a particular tension, a discordance that constitutes the shame of writing, i.e. of representation being inadequate to experience, which has been primarily analyzed in autobiographical texts in relation to the determination of the identity between author, the narrator and the protagonist (Lejeune 14).¹³ But while the identity between author and narrator will remain

¹³ The separation between those two types of shame of writing is never neat but becomes more defined as the “author” gains the intellectual property of their work. While this question could be investigated in early novels that play on the

outside this dissertation's purview (with the exception of the last chapter), the identity between the narrator and the character will be important to delineate how shame functions between cathexis and detachment – for instance, in first-person novels, which sometimes model specific non-fiction genres: the travelogue (Sterne), the memoir (Ishiguro).

2. Self/Other

As Wendy Lee shows in *Failures of Feeling*, the novel form hinges on the relation between sensibility and attendant strands of asocial behaviors; it thrives on vicarious feeling but simultaneously explores the antisociality of individualism (Armstrong 58); and it is, more generally, concerned with the ethics of sympathy, as I have shown earlier.

In that sense, we see that the shamefulness of the inward-looking, navel-gazing posture of first-person novels is situated at the juncture of the two binaries: for instance, in *A Sentimental Journey*, the attempt to feel *with* the other questions the ability of the individual to become both an idealized, fully empathetic version of himself, but also to relate to others and thus escape the limited confines of the individual self.

The fact that the novel form investigates the ways in which individuals can enter or exit the social world, relate to others or turn to solipsism, can be useful in defining shame and shamelessness. What is shamelessness, if not the unrealizable attempt to extract oneself from the social fabric? More exactly, shamelessness suggests the inability to feel shame, and therefore, the inability to feel at all. But if extreme shame means complete withdrawal, concealment, shamelessness as the resistance to shame closely resembles the insensitivity of an individual who acts according to principles that preclude transformative encounters. Shame and shamelessness, at

uncertainty of authorship and the blurred lines between confession and invention, but also in the case of later novels written under pennames (the Brontës), I will primarily discuss the tension produced within the text of fiction, without reference to paratextual elements.

their most extreme, thus tend to collide. Indeed, a figure like the Queen's Guard, whom Wendy Lee uses to demonstrate how emotionlessness provokes "energetic and even dangerous attempts to elicit a response" like "rage/laughter/shame" (2010, 2), could be described as shameless, unconcerned, apathetic, completely extracted from the social world which, according to Lee's analysis, is bound to taunt and attack him. And yet, he could also be described as full of shame, if we understand shame as the ability to conceal, control and withdraw oneself to the utmost. The novel form oscillates between describing, staying with shame as the impulse towards others, towards an ideal self, and investing the space of shamelessness, pulling at the roots of shame (understood then as a means of subjugation of the self).

Shame could therefore be characterized as a response to the simultaneous pull towards and away from the social (which can privilege one or the other) but also as one particular modality of one's embeddedness in the social order, related to honor, as we saw earlier with Honneth's description of the pre-modern world. In that sense, shame means socially inflicted self-consciousness. This includes women's modesty, for instance, a type of shame which is immediately cast on the side of concealment, and functions as both a response and a preemptive measure against the gaze of the other. Shame-honor is a form of social death; it is the type of shame that operates in texts that predate the novel, the shame that signals the end of the story rather than its impulse. However, especially in the early novel, shame-honor remains attached to female characters, who appear as objects before they can appear as subjects – shame is therefore the emotion which exacerbates feminine submission to a patriarchal order by turning women into a spectacle¹⁴ (which raises the question of the possibility of empathy, as we will see with Laurence

¹⁴ "C'est parce qu'elles sont mystifiées qu'on voit fleurir chez les femmes des vertus inutiles et charmantes telles que leur pudeur, leur orgueil, leur extrême délicatesse" (Beauvoir 625-6). In *Le deuxième sexe*, Simone de Beauvoir argues that Stendhal, unlike his contemporary male writers, resists this narcissistic relation by refusing to turn the woman into the Other, and rather approaches her as an equal.

Sterne and the eighteenth century at large). The figuration of shame-honor in relation to female characters sheds light on the novel's concern in adjudicating the boundaries between the (white, male, heterosexual) self and the other. This is why, even though my general conceptualization of shame in relation to dislocation and *Bildung* applies to a variety of characters and narratives, it is nevertheless gendered, in the sense that it presupposes a measure of personal agency, a freedom to transform and evolve in ways that are often inaccessible to female characters. While this point needs to be nuanced depending on the geographical area, socio-economic status and time period, considering the role of shame-honor opens a subset of questions (i.e.: what does shameless behavior afford female characters? what does it foreclose?).

V. Shame and Mobility

1. Shame

As I've mentioned earlier, Sedgwick insists on the dynamic relation between shame and identity, and she goes further by describing its specific "double movement [...] toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality" (*Touching Feeling* 37). On a similar note, Sara Ahmed describes shame as a "double play between concealment and exposure" and adds that "the desire to take cover and to be covered presupposes the failure of cover" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 104). Drawing on my previous tentative definitions and on the two binaries I have isolated, the shame of being in the world unfolds as the shame of being a socially determined, already stable subject, alienated from others (and thus seeking relationality) on the one hand, and the shame of not being a fully formed, socially functioning, stable subject (thus seeking

individuation) on the other. It threatens identity and the social bond,¹⁵ yet makes them possible. This is where we can make a distinction between shame and guilt, insofar as shame is woven into the experience of the social world:

The distinction between shame and guilt can be schematically defined as follows. Guilt is a sense of inner badness caused by a transgression of moral values; shame, by contrast, is a sense of failure or lack in the eyes of others. It has less to do with infractions of morality than with infractions of social codes and a consequent fear of exposure, embarrassment, and humiliation. Shame, then, is fundamentally connected to everyday sociability. This emotion comprises a painful experience of self-consciousness, resulting from a sudden recognition of a discrepancy between one's behavior and that of one's peers. (Felski, *Doing Time* 42-43)

Shame is the experience of the inadequacy of the self in relation to itself (or to an *Ichideal*), but also of the enclosed self in relation to an external social world. Shame functions as dislocation on the level of the individual's internal life: it is therefore related to disorientation, disarticulation – to being placed or displaced.

Indeed, according to Bewes, the “substance of shame is fundamentally a gap, an absence, an impossibility” (39). This movement that translates into gaps, discontinuity, identity crises, physical disorientation or ungroundedness is the movement that defines the novel, which simultaneously keeps identity and relationality at bay:

Shame is a figure not of the intimacy of the self to itself—or at least, if that is so, it is the very discontinuity of the self, its otherness to itself, that is emblemized in that relation.

¹⁵ “By shame I mean a large family of emotions that includes many cognates and variants, most notably embarrassment, humiliation, and related feelings such as shyness that involve reactions to rejection or feelings of failure or inadequacy. What unites all these cognates is that they involve the feeling of a threat to the social bond” (Lynd 96-7).

Shame, far from being a figure of self-identity, is a figure of incommensurability. It is experienced when we are treated as something or someone—a foreigner, a personality type, an ethical person, a generous spirit, a human being, an animal, an alien—that is incommensurable with our own experience. (23)

In *The Forms of the Affects*, Eugenie Brinkema questions the logic of the affective turn, which places affect outside language, signification, structure:

One of the symptoms of appeals to affect in the negative theoretical sense—as signaling principally a rejection: *not* semiosis, *not* meaning, *not* structure, *not* apparatus, but the felt visceral, immediate, sensed, embodied, excessive—is that “affect” in the turn to affect has been deployed almost exclusively in the singular, as the capacity for movement or disturbance in general. (Brinkema xiii)

As an affect, shame encompasses a range of emotions (embarrassment, awkwardness, discomfort, etc.) and functions as a structure of contradictory impulses: inside and outside, back and forth, upward and downward. Following Brinkema, this dissertation shifts the definition of affect; indeed, shame is not reducible to sensation and asks to be read as form, “composed” in texts:

What [...] would happen to the study of both affectivity and form if we were to reintroduce close reading to the study of sensation, not as felt by moved bodies, but as wildly composed in specific cinematic, literary, and critical texts? (xvi)

While this dissertation refers to the novel as a form, the novel may be more aptly characterized as a combination and juxtaposition of forms. In *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, Caroline Levine expands “our usual definition of form in literary studies to include patterns of sociopolitical experience” (2); the novel is therefore “a site where multiple forms collide” (Alworth). If we posit that the *Bildungsroman* is the novel’s paradigmatic, dominant structure, we

can identify shame as an affective form, a pattern of emotions which fuels and derives from the tension of *Bildung*, but also from social categories, identities, and situated experiences.

2. Mobility

I had decided to allow no room in the universe for something which shamed and frightened me. I succeeded very well—by not looking at the universe, by not looking at myself, by remaining, in effect, in constant motion. Even constant motion, of course, does not prevent an occasional mysterious drag, a drop, like an airplane hitting an air pocket. (Baldwin 20)

David's trajectory in *Giovanni's Room*, one of "constant motion," leads him to flee to Paris and is directly tied to his resistance to shame, or his resistance to the very possibility of being shamed. Motion translates as migration or expatriation, but also as a willful cultivation of insensibility, a closure to affective possibilities – the possibilities that are embodied by Giovanni, by the encounter with his flesh. *Giovanni's Room* follows the model of the *Bildungsroman*, a narrative about a character evolving within a social world and in relation to his own conscience and represented consciousness. As David exemplifies, the strategy to overcome shame is *dynamis*, "constant motion," a primary characteristic of the novel form. But if the novel is always invested in motion, migration or displacement, that very movement, in all its instability and unpredictability, is precisely what gives rise to shame.

The novel is the direct successor of the epic quest, of Aeneas or of the knight-errant and, as I have shown with the *Bildungsroman* and the picaresque, is linked to mobility, travel, migration. It could even be argued that movement generates the story; and, in the eighteenth century, physical mobility is explicitly associated with figurative mobility, with the development

of digressions within the story (Diderot, Sterne).¹⁶ In the novel form, migration or travel appear to be a pharmakon with regards to shame, since it is an attempt to cure shame that potentially creates more shame, that is, a more acute sense of one's limitations and difference: shame and mobility are not two unrelated tropes but are interwoven, insofar as the generally dynamic, migratory impulse of the novel form can translate into physical displacement and crossing, but also figurative mobility, the movement of time and/or consciousness (as we have seen earlier with Lukács' insistence on duration).

Soren Frank offers a definition of migration that makes of *Bildung* its most visible and coherent form:

[E]tymologically the concept of migration originates from the Latin *migrare*, meaning simply “to wander” or “to move”—that is, movement per se. Migration as employed in this study thus signals *oscillatory and inconclusive processes* that manifest themselves on different levels in the literary work—for example, in relation to personal, national, and cultural identity, language, narrative form, and enunciation. (Frank 8)

Mobility, which is figured most explicitly by various forms of migrations, is at the juncture between physical and figurative, wandering and organized progression; it is therefore the principle that simultaneously organizes and disorganizes the novel form.

VI. Chapter Breakdown

In Chapter One, “Shame in the Flesh,” I analyze texts that put forward the body as a vehicle of sensations, predisposed to shameful encounters. My argument begins with the examination of

¹⁶ See Will McMorran, *The Inn and the Traveller: Digressive Topographies in the Early Modern European Novel* (2002)

shame and mobility in relation to sensory experiences and sentimentalism in the eighteenth century, at a time when the novel wasn't entirely teleological and bound to epistemological gain (Nandrea 2); I examine Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, a novel that explicitly engages sentimentalism and problematizes empathy, while subverting the picaresque structure and fixing the boundaries of the white, male, British protagonist. This text's counterpart is Eimear McBride's 2013 *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*, which breaks down *Bildung* through a tale of degeneration and self-destructive behavior, and reinvests the picaresque through the construction of a shameless character. In both novels, shame is experienced in the flesh, experimented with, overturned – both texts investigate the porosity of the self through the porosity of the flesh, and both protagonists alternate between acute self-consciousness and shamelessness. Chapter One thus investigates the significance of the body in relation to shame, in an eighteenth-century faux travelogue and in a 2013 deconstruction of *Bildung* – the body is at the center of the novel's playing field in the age of sensibility and in a contemporary novel drawing on the Modernist exploration of the bounds of the embodied self. And yet, the hyperbolic bodies in these two novels have a different relation to shame and mobility: Yorick's journey is one of bourgeois emergence through encounters with shame, of a cosmopolitanism that serves to assert and ground Englishness, of relationality that seeks communion, while McBride's protagonist experiences a gradual submergence, turns relationality into promiscuity and incest, and has to be read in the context of postcolonial Ireland.

While Chapter One hinges on the dichotomies between mind and flesh, word and touch, emotion and cognition, Chapter Two, "Shame and Englishness: The Gentleman and the Butler," investigates a particular dimension of the novel, especially as it solidifies in the Victorian era: the dichotomy between mastery and error which is tied to the national project and affirms the difference between Britishness and otherness, opposes national formation to destiny and

eschatology. This chapter thus situates shame and mobility in the context of the apex and failure of bourgeois subjectivity, in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* and in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, around the figures of the British gentleman and the British butler. Chapter Two thus focuses on two novels in which the questions of mastery, containment and control are more explicitly bound up with nationality and subjectivity. Escaping shame turns into expatriation, and into different versions of shamelessness: impunity, resistance to the social order, resistance to affect itself, erasure of the individual, autonomous, responsible self.

Chapter Three, "Shame and the Chronotope of the Posthuman," focuses on fatigue as an instantiation of shame in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick, *The Lathe of Heaven* by Ursula Le Guin, and *Annihilation* by Jeff VanderMeer. Building on the exploration of belatedness in the previous chapter, Chapter Three examines a temporal paradox as the novels represent the confrontation to a temporality beyond a human timescale and to the threat of formlessness. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, degeneration and obsolescence gives way to irresolvable shame as the human characters are dwarfed by rapidly expanding formless matter. *The Lathe of Heaven* by Ursula Le Guin proposes a different variation on fatigue as an instantiation of shame with a paradoxical protagonist, whose power to exhaust timelines through "effective dreams" threatens the fabric of reality. The novel thus opens on a chaotic re-arrangement of forms, and offers a metafictional meditation on the relation between sentimental narrative forms and formlessness. The final section on *Annihilation* by Jeff VanderMeer turns to the New Weird: the experience of fatigue, misalignment, inadequacy becomes a condition of acceptance of non-human, hybrid, grotesque forms beyond perception and understanding.

Chapter Four, "Shame and the Terrorist in Postcolonial Novels," explores how contemporary postcolonial novels about terrorists and refugees dramatize the novelistic tension

between character and figure, between feeling and unfeeling, between national belonging and postcolonial dissent, with *The Lowland* by Jhumpa Lahiri, *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid. This chapter first analyzes the representation of the terrorist as an ambiguous character, in relation to an asymmetrical distribution of character-space in *The Lowland* and *Home Fire*. It then moves to female characters who are defined in relation to terrorism and who distance themselves from shame: as figures of disaffection, they embrace different forms of shamelessness with regards to gendered expectations. The chapter ends with the work of Mohsin Hamid on the figures of the terrorist and the refugee, and focuses on how *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Exit West* challenge and reverse conventional structures of feeling and identification: the novels seem to mobilize shame against implicit identificatory impulses.

Drawing on the questions raised by *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s unreliable narrator, Chapter Five, "Shame and the Confession of a Liar," focuses on the political reversibility of shame, and investigates what shame, as it is expressed and reclaimed in both queer and reactionary texts, owes to the novel form. The chapter compares *L'avenir dure longtemps* by Louis Althusser, a memoir written in response to his critics after he murdered Hélène Legotien, to *Shroud* by John Banville, a first-person novel loosely inspired by the controversies that surrounded the academic figures of Paul de Man and Althusser, in order to contrast the characterization of the fictional/nonfictional narrators in relation to shame and via the femicide as a paradoxical and foundational literary trope. The chapter examines the reactionary weaponization of shame in degenerative realism, its extension in the domain of politics, and – with Banville's *Shroud* and *Disgrace* by J.M. Coetzee – discusses how literary works may rather challenge the weaponization of shame and question their own reliance on voyeurism and exhibitionism.

Chapter One

Shame in the Flesh

Introduction

Lecturing on shame, I used to ask listeners to join in a thought experiment, visualizing an unwashed, half-insane man who would wander into the lecture hall mumbling loudly, his speech increasingly accusatory and disjointed, and publicly urinate in the front of the room, then wander out again. I pictured the excruciation of everyone else in the room: each looking down, wishing to be anywhere else yet conscious of the inexorable fate of being exactly there, inside the individual skin of which each was burningly aware; at the same time, though, unable to stanch the hemorrhage of painful identification with the misbehaving man. That's the double movement shame makes: toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality. (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* 37)

In this passage, Eve Sedgwick initially focuses on the inexorable, fateful movement of individuation before moving to the bleeding wound that constitutes identification, and therefore relationality. Her recapitulation of shame as “painful individuation” and “uncontrollable relationality” thus creates a chiasmus, as relationality becomes the inexorable force, and individuation turns into the painful experience. This chiasmus and the implications of her example could infer that this “excruciation” is the result of inexorability, and that they both have a part to play in those two movements: “identification with the misbehaving man” is painful because we can resist neither this identificatory pull, nor the consciousness that we cannot be someone else somewhere else. However, Sedgwick's ambiguous attribution of pain and loss of agency to either

facet of the experience of shame raises questions: what is painful and what is uncontrollable? Can those two experiences be conflated, and is the uncertainty of categorization part of the experience of shame? Indeed, we could infer from this paragraph that this experience might go into four different directions, or rather, two double movements: painful individuation and uncontrollable relationality, uncontrollable individuation and painful relationality.

I want to emphasize the ambiguity of inexorability in Sedgwick's paragraph. When inexorability is associated with individuation, she defines it as excruciating. She points to the pain of being stuck within an "individual skin" and having no exit door, out of the embarrassment felt deep in the body, out of the lecture hall, out of one's particular embodied position in time and space. If individuation is painful, "uncontrollable relationality" could have been framed as freeing; however, it is just as unbearable as individuation here since it constitutes a particular modality of identification, which could be described as vicarious embarrassment (*Fremdscham*, shame for the stranger). However, one could venture that relationality encompasses a large gamut of experiences beyond this particular one. When relationality becomes inexorable, "uncontrollable," the individual is no longer enclosed into a single self but rather transgresses those limited confines and might be able to feel with others, to encounter other selves, other bodies. Shame, as a bodily experience, can also be called "cringe":

If awkwardness sounds the alarm, cringing is what happens when it goes off. It's the intense visceral reaction produced by an awkward moment, an unpleasant kind of self-recognition where you suddenly see yourself through someone else's eyes. It's a forced moment of self-awareness, and it usually makes you cognizant of the disappointing fact that you aren't measuring up to your own self-concept. (Dahl 17)

This experience of seeing oneself from someone else's eyes makes self-knowledge possible precisely because it reorients the gaze through other (often uncomfortable) subjective positions. Moreover, the gut-wrenching shame that derives from an awkward situation, while seemingly isolating, functions as a revelation that creates a new dynamic, a new pattern of relationality: as Melissa Dahl points out, "[a]wkward moments arise when the stage and the backstage clash, when the audience can see you mid-costume change" (19). Her metaphor shows that, in the moment of shame, relationality becomes radical, transgressive, *obscene* in the original meaning of the word: shame opens up a type of human connection that does away with the limitations of performance by showing what should have remained hidden.

Unlike uncontrollable individuation, the idea of "uncontrollable relationality" thus doesn't have to be unequivocally defined in relation to pain, horror, embarrassment, since it may open to empathy or erotic encounters, to desire running amok and affecting other bodies: the double movement of shame becomes the contradictory pull of self-control and self-abandonment. There is a persistent concern with this broad understanding of "uncontrollable relationality" in the novel form, especially in the English tradition. From eighteenth-century literature, which emphasizes sympathy (which we would now call empathy) as the ability to feel what others are feeling, to E.M. Forster's definition of sympathy (*simpatica*), an elusive and precious feeling *with* others, to novels asking if it is possible, in a postcolonial, globalized age, to empathize with others across ethnicities, religions and borders, the novel form negotiates the inexorability of individuation and relationality – or more precisely, a double, contradictory ideal.

In this respect, Sedgwick's point about the parallel movement of individuation and relationality might be nuanced; indeed, what she interprets as a double movement might only profess to be contradictory. Rather than showing one's "uncontrollable relationality," what she

describes as the “hemorrhage of painful identification” could have more to do with a narcissistic impulse, that of collapsing the experience of the other with one’s own. This is precisely the conundrum at the heart of Yorick’s account in *A Sentimental Journey*. Is his self-professed empathy (and his empathy’s conflict with his sense of self) merely exaggerated or feigned in the service of a sentimental ideology? The text, I argue, is caught in a double bind: an embrace of sentimentalism and of the double movement outlined by Sedgwick, as well as a satirical critique of this logic, exposed as disingenuous. This chapter addresses the continuum of sensation in the history of the novel and the relationship between shame and sentimentalism that developed since the eighteenth-century novel, which results in two different models of sentimental formation.

This chapter focuses on two novels, in which shame functions formally and diegetically as a state of tension between two possibilities, empathy and solipsism. *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* by Laurence Sterne (1768) adopts the genres of the travelogue and of the sentimental novel in order to trace Parson Yorick’s peregrinations and encounters with fellow travelers and foreigners. *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* by Eimear McBride was published in 2013: the nameless protagonist of this contemporary *Bildungsroman* starts telling her story before she is born and recounts her abuse-filled life until her suicide. While this chapter will show the lines of fracture between the versions of shame that appear in Sterne’s and in McBride’s texts, it will also analyze in what way the embodied experience of shame is central to the patterns of *Bildung* in the two novels.

I explore how both novels suggest that the fundamental misalignment at the heart of the experience of shame and the experience of the novel cannot be rectified; both novels are ambivalent about their own implication in a fantasy that responds to that misalignment. I identify points of continuity between structural shame and characterological shame in the novel form

through particular tropes, namely the man of feeling, and the fallen woman, in relation to different iterations of shame and sentimental attachments.

I. *A Sentimental Journey* by Laurence Sterne

1. Shame, *Bildung*, and Travel

Yorick is not only a traveler but also a man of feeling, and the text uses the trope of the traveler as a pretext to put Yorick on a quest of sentimental adequacy: rather than money or status, sentiment is the currency in which the eighteenth-century novel is interested. The structure of formation proposed by *A Sentimental Journey* combines, as the title indicates, both a sentimental formation and a physical journey. The text is organized around the acknowledgment that Yorick's position is uncertain within the social world, and his journey to adjudicate and correct his experience of inadequacy:

They order, said I, this matter better in France. —You have been in France? said my gentleman, turning quick upon me, with the most civil triumph in the world. (5)

In the opening lines of the novel, Yorick presents his reason for embarking on his whimsical *grand tour* – a sentimental reason, since it has everything to do with his pride being under attack. This shaming scenario combines Yorick's embarrassment of saying something that may expose his lack of experience, and that of being indirectly challenged by a subaltern, his "gentleman" – even though it remains unclear whether the "triumph" was intended, or merely the result of Yorick's paranoid interpretation. In *Between Men*, Sedgwick insists on the particular characterization of Yorick's bond with his servants (the first one is a fleeting presence in the text, but La Fleur will be a more important character), as "anxious and ideologically threatened" rather than "stable,

hereditary, traditional, paternalistic” (70): Yorick is introducing himself as liable to be undermined in his superior position to his “gentleman,” a position he feels he must reclaim.

Even though the “matter” they are discussing is unknown, Yorick’s claim is about France’s superiority, and therefore about his cosmopolitan knowledge. The construction of the good English subject implies a universalism and cosmopolitanism that implicitly deride the lower class’ parochial perspective; what is exposed by his gentleman, then, is the emptiness of Yorick’s claim of cosmopolitanism. Curiosity and admiration for other cultures to the point of distancing oneself from one’s national pride are the qualities to which Yorick aspires, and that should put him above the close-minded traveler he later criticizes.¹⁷ Yorick thus announces an idealized version of the experienced man of the world he seeks to become.

Travelling, moving away or moving up is an attempt to displace shame; according to Adrien Pasquali’s analysis of travel narratives, the relationship with geographical space gives individuals the ability to find a legitimate place in the world (18). However, displacement itself creates shame, as Yorick discovers during his journey through France. Travelling puts Yorick in a situation where his identity becomes uncertain. For instance, sometime after his arrival in France, he finds out that he needs a passport, and that not having one is like having the plague, i.e. like being a vector of shameful, illegible foreignness: “The master of the hotel retired three steps from me, as from an infected person, as I declared this” (66). The passport episode thus enacts a slippage between migration as vagrancy and cosmopolitanism as a bourgeois luxury, and shows the fundamental instability of the protagonist as an undefined trespasser. As Shaun Regan argues, “Yorick resembles a ‘cosmopolitan being’ in the terms outlined by Zlatko Skrbish and Ian Woodward: someone who is ‘defined by an openness and willingness to change and indeed is open

¹⁷ *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* calls to mind Tobias Smollett’s earlier *Travels Through France and Italy* and caricatures Smollett as the moody Smelfungus.

to being changed by encounters with difference” (267). Cosmopolitanism, turned toward liberation and change, is inseparable from Yorick’s *Bildungsroman*, his journey of formation through those encounters. And yet, the question of migration as punishable vagrancy implies that trespass is uncivilized, dangerous, linked to the ultimate form of repression and containment (prison, loss of civil liberties), and thus shameful.

In his attempt to get proper documentation, Yorick meets the Count de B-, who helps him secure a passport. However, this encounter creates a misunderstanding. Yorick initially intends to identify himself in the simplest way possible, i.e. by name – and thus demonstrate the “function of proper names,” that of expressing the “particular identity of each individual person,” an idea that the novel form helped to establish (Watt 18):

There is not a more perplexing affair in life to me, than to set about telling any one who I am,—for there is scarce any body I cannot give a better account of than myself; and I have often wished I could do it in a single word,—and have an end of it. (82)

But by pointing to his printed name in *Hamlet*’s gravediggers’ scene instead of uttering it, Yorick appeals to a fictional double to tell his own story, and is misidentified as *Hamlet*’s Yorick, who, if we follow Freud’s observations on the double, simultaneously functions as an “insurance against the destruction of the ego” (it provides the Count with a stable signifier, with which Yorick claims not only kinship or resemblance, but identity) and as a “ghastly harbinger of death” (Freud 229) since Shakespeare’s character is famously deceased.¹⁸ While this episode is humorous and becomes the occasion for a witty exchange, Yorick’s identity is nevertheless destabilized by the fact that his name cannot suffice to introduce himself; rather than containing the subject and restoring his sense of self (which was put into question by his lack of a passport), it brings about a

¹⁸ One may also be reminded of *Tristram Shandy*, in which Yorick’s character is dead.

set of incongruous assumptions and further displaces the possibility of individual coherence and mastery. Ultimately, he is identified by the Count and on his newly minted passport as the “king’s jester,” which solidifies his ambiguous status, and not only because he is not, in fact, a jester: he is both coopted by the highest institutions (and therefore made legitimate) and given the identity of the transgressor, the actor, the player, who is close to power but linked to the lower class.

As we can see with La Fleur, whose good nature and French charm are enough to allow him in new circles, mobility is contingent on shameless transgression, seduction: “La Fleur’s prevenancy (for *there was a passport in his very looks*) soon set every servant in the kitchen at ease with him” (43).¹⁹ As we see with Yorick, it is also associated with the shame-inducing uncertainty of identity. Yorick himself reclaims his accidental Shakespearean identity as a means to formulate his unstable position: “Alas, poor Yorick! cried I, what art thou doing here? On the very first onset of all this glittering clatter thou art reduced to an atom” (47).

Early in the novel, he intuits that this leisurely dislocation implies shame and self-questioning. Indeed, his own logic about travelling is contradictory and acknowledges this vicious cycle. He makes the point that travel creates discontent since the traveler cannot efficiently communicate his sensations outside of the surroundings he is able to understand and master:

It must have been observed by many a peripatetic philosopher, That nature has set up by her own unquestionable authority certain boundaries and fences to circumscribe the discontent of man [...]. It is there only that she has provided him with the most suitable objects to partake of his happiness, and bear a part of that burden which in all countries and ages has ever been too heavy for one pair of shoulders. ’Tis true, we are endued with

¹⁹ The sentence insists on La Fleur’s innate ability to enter different circles: not only is La Fleur welcome everywhere because of his behavior (his “prevenancy”), his “looks” already signal to others that he is *allowed* to be there (“passport”).

an imperfect power of spreading our happiness sometimes beyond her limits, but 'tis so ordered, that, from the want of languages, connections, and dependencies, and from the difference in education, customs, and habits, we lie under so many impediments in communicating our sensations out of our own sphere, as often amount to a total impossibility. (11)

2. Shame and Sentimentalism

A. The Fantasy of Transparency

I argue that shame is both normative, since it serves as the regulator and indicator of ideal bourgeois behavior, and disruptive when it reveals the failures of empathy: *A Sentimental Journey* contributes to the investment of the eighteenth-century novel in sentimentalism, and satirizes its goals and contradictions. Sentimentalism is therefore organized around empathy and shame. I will be discussing empathy,²⁰ which is primarily linked to the contagion of feeling for Hume in his 1739 *Treatise of Human Nature*, and to a “relation of contiguity” (Hume 323), and defined as fellow-feeling by Adam Smith in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759): for both, feelings can pass over from one individual to another and, as we will see with Sterne, shame is a key ingredient in the process of emotional contagion, which is, in turn, essential to the sentimentalist framework. In her chapter “The Tragedies of Sentimentalism,” Vivasvan Soni characterizes sentimentalism as a necessary “ethical paradigm” (292) in response to “a new set of social relations”:

²⁰ What we now call empathy is a contemporary translation of sympathy: “Mirroring what a person might be expected to feel in that condition or context, empathy is thought to be precursor to its semantic close relative, *sympathy*. Although the word *empathy* is a relatively young term, entering English in the early twentieth century as a coined translation of the German word *Einfühlung*, aspects of empathy have been described by philosophers since the days of Adam Smith and David Hume under the older term *sympathy*” (Keen 4). Sympathy now designates a more specific form of empathy: “Empathy: I feel what you feel. Sympathy: I feel a supportive emotion about your feelings.” (5)

The modern conditions of anonymity, social fragmentation, and population mobility demand a new mode of ethical relationality, one that is not predicated on the narrative intertwining of lives in more customary, face-to-face communities. [...] [T]he kinds of interpersonal encounter that sentimentalism seeks to theorize are paradigmatically urban: the chance encounter with an anonymous other. (293)

Indeed, *A Sentimental Journey* insists on encounters between passing strangers, in urban environments: Yorick's journey as an Englishman in France thus functions as an extreme exercise in chance encounters and relationality outside of one's community.

According to Jeffrey Smitten, the eighteenth-century novel develops and relies on the "representation of gesture and expression" (95) in a context where body language functions as a "universal language" (85). Shame, with its striking bodily expressions, is the main component of novelistic non-verbal communication, as Sedgwick argues:

Shame floods into being as a moment, a disruptive moment, in a circuit of identity constituting identificatory communication. Indeed, like a stigma, shame is itself a form of communication. Blazons of shame, the "fallen face" with eyes down and head averted – and, to a lesser extent, the blush – are semaphores of trouble and at the same time of a desire to reconstitute the interpersonal bridge. (*Touching Feeling* 36)

The novel hinges on those "blazons of shame" for communication between characters (bodily manifestations) and/or the reader (the text translates the "disruptive moment" as a digression).

For example, early in the novel, Yorick meets with the Count de B- in Versailles to ask him for help with a passport, and he insists on his good faith by claiming that he has not "come to spy on the nakedness of the land" (80): the anxiety around the transgression of national borders is articulated around a metaphor of voyeurism that turns the land into a modest, pure female body,

and that evokes shame in its original meaning (which has to do with covering nudity, averting the eyes). The count responds to this plea for mercy with an “animated blush,” which could be interpreted as a self-conscious reaction to being flattered, or to being perceived as potentially lacking “the gallantry of the French” if he didn’t, in turn, insist on his own good faith.

Shame responds to shame; the blush is the sign which informs Yorick and the reader that the count is well-intentioned and that both characters may appeal to each other’s emotions. Shame goes hand in hand with sensibility as the conduit to civility and good manners: it determines the encounter of two individuals as they gauge each other. The mutual recognition of shame as *aidos* is therefore crucial in sentimental commerce. This means *aidos* and the structural shame I have defined as necessary to the novel as form are not exactly commensurate, even if they bear a relation to each other. *Aidos*, the Greek word for shame, is linked to propriety, civility, modesty:

The basic experience connected with shame is that of being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition. It is straightforwardly connected with nakedness, particularly in sexual connections. The word *aidoia*, a derivative of *aidōs*, “shame”, is a standard Greek word for the genitals, and similar terms are found in other languages. The reaction is to cover oneself or to hide [...]. (Williams 78)

This ability to experience shame is related to the ability to hide and draw boundaries, but also to read others and be read, precisely because blushes, gestures, and facial expressions function as indicators, surface-level signs of the individual’s intimate truth. Indeed, the privileged encounter is one where bodies are made legible to one another: if shame (as *aidos*) is mutual, it makes legibility possible precisely as it ruptures the fragile cover of shame (as a defensive reaction).

The avowed anxiety of having one’s nakedness spied on conceals the desire to be read and to read others, as Yorick points out when he admits his “wish” to “spy on the nakedness on [French

women's] hearts" (81). The insistence on the readability and accessibility of others recalls *Tristram Shandy's* voyeuristic fantasy of Momus' glass, which allows for the complete transparency, nakedness of the soul.²¹ Later in the novel, when Yorick meets a grisette and touches her wrist to feel her pulse, she is able to read into him by looking at him: "I found I lost considerably in every attack: —she had a quick black eye, and shot through two such long and silken eyelashes with such penetration, that she look'd into my very heart and reins" (53). This passage, which turns Yorick into the seduced and the grisette into the seducer, implies a reciprocity of visual penetration across genders, a fluid game of seduction. We can oppose this sentimental and erotic exchange, which posits equality and mutual understanding, to the way Yorick criticizes the husband of the grisette, who refuses "social intercourse and gentle greetings":

The genius of a people, where nothing but the monarchy is *salique*, having ceded this department, with sundry others, totally to the women—by a continual haggling with customers of all ranks and sizes from morning to night, like so many rough pebbles shook long together in a bag, by amicable collisions they have worn down their asperities and sharp angles, and not only become round and smooth, but will receive, some of them, a polish like a brilliant—Monsieur *le Mari* is little better than the stone under your foot—

(52)

Their different experiences of "amicable collisions" has given them different natures – one is a diamond (a charming, intelligent woman), the other is a stone (a recluse who doesn't seem to notice Yorick's flirtation with his wife). The perfect sociability of the woman, which relies on the *aidos*

²¹ "If the fixture of *Momus's* glass, in the human breast, according to the proposed emendation of that arch-critick, had taken place ... nothing more would have been wanting, in order to have taken a man's character, but to have taken a chair and gone softly, as you would to a dioptrical bee-hive, and look'd in, — view'd the soul stark naked ... traced all her maggots from their first engendering to their crawling forth... then taken your pen and ink and set down nothing but what you had seen, and could have sworn to." (82-3)

of a body that can pulsate and blush, finds its negation in her husband's withdrawal, which is interpreted by the narrator as shameless, lonely misanthropy. Being in a position where one may be seen and judged (unlike the reclusive shopkeeper) means being susceptible to shame; the sentimental traveler strives for the "amicable collisions" that make civility possible.

The ideal Yorick seems to promote is a universal inclination to be polished. Indeed, the metaphor of polished stones may be drawing from Shaftesbury's argument about politeness and liberty in 1711:

All Politeness is owing to Liberty. We polish one another and rule off our Corners and rough Sides by a sort of amical collision. To restrain this, is inevitably to bring a Rust upon Men's Understandings. (Shaftesbury 31)

However, Yorick later criticizes the French as too urban, too civil, too *polis* (which translates as both "polite" and "polished"). He turns French *politesse* into a defect, an excess of liberty, openness and malleability that verge on porosity. As he explains to the Count of B- with a similar metaphor: "by jingling and rubbing one against another for seventy years together in one body's pocket or another's, they are become so much alike, you can scarce distinguish one shilling from another" (87). The English "ancient medals" are favorably compared to the French faded coins: being too polished leads to self-erasure. *Politesse* is opposed to individual authenticity and veils every encounter with good manners and rehearsed phrases.²² The Count of B- himself is a surface-level reader and flat character, who responds to irony with repetitive exclamations: "Mon Dieu!" (83), "Voilà un persiflage!," "Mais vous plaisantez" (84). The English, who appear more uncouth,

²² It is telling that Molière's 1666 play *Le Misanthrope* was the most famous critique of this widely celebrated social behavior in France. The play reverses the attribution of shame: for Alceste, *politesse* is shameful because well-intentioned individuals turn into dissembling performers: "ce commerce honteux de semblants d'amitié" (50). However, while Alceste's attitude reclaims virtue, honesty and the authenticity of individual voices, it disturbs and disrupts everyday propriety and morphs into misanthropy: the play therefore points to the conundrum of standing against *politesse* in the name of virtue, at the risk of shamelessness.

less civilized, “preserve their sharpness,” the “image and superinscription they bear” (87). Moreover, in the passage that compares the grisette’s husband to a rough stone, Yorick’s tone is already ambiguous, despite his explicit rejection of the character’s antisocial model. The first sentence pokes fun at a country whose “genius” is to leave women to haggle with customers all day (yet bar them from the throne), while the husband hides away. But is it better to be shaken around and polished (and therefore live at the mercy and in the service of others’ whims), or to remain a stone (unadulterated, unadorned, autonomous)? Does Yorick admire the grisette for her social skills or is he envious of “Monsieur le Mari,” whose privilege resides in the fact that he doesn’t even need to play the part of a (distinguished, sociable) “monsieur” or of a (jealous) “mari”? The episode with the Count might suggest the latter. It is therefore important to note that the openly reviled antisocial behavior of the grisette’s husband, which denotes the absence of *aidos*, exerts a particular power on the man of feeling.

While these examples and metaphors may seem contradictory on a national level (and inconsistent with Yorick’s purported admiration of the French), they actually serve Yorick’s aim to depict himself as having found the right balance between the double pull of relationality and individuation – contrary to the decadent French aristocracy, who has cultivated a *politesse* that hinders self-expression and depth of feeling.

B. The Man of Feeling and his Counterpart

While Yorick presents himself as a man of feeling, the eighteenth-century novel engaged with its haunting, fascinating counterfigure, the shameless man (an important example is *Rameau’s Nephew* by Diderot): the twin figures of the shameful or shameless man serve as the metric for good character. Shamelessness can arise from the erasure of the self or the erasure of others. In

Failures of Feeling, Wendy Lee focuses on the role of affective failure – “flagrant, inscrutable defections from relationality, interiority, and narrative” (2010, 7) – in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and argues that those failures of feeling can still drive plot insofar as they provoke and threaten. I link antisocial behavior to shamelessness, which ranges from the inability to feel shame (and therefore what Lee describes as unresponsiveness, ambition, hostility) to the weaponization of shame (behavior that reclaims humiliation). The eighteenth-century novel traces an ethical spectrum which puts the man of feeling at the center, a man shaped by sentimental encounters and simultaneously threatened by the shameless outsider he may become.

The use of shame as a metric of humanity is not new, but it is systematically formalized in the eighteenth century. It is presented as crucial in the distribution of morality between characters and in the logic of the plot, problematized across the history of the sentimental novel, openly discussed in texts like *Rameau's Nephew*, but nevertheless diluted as it loses its connection to the aristocratic code of honor. In “Note sur la honte,” Jacques-Alain Miller analyzes this figure as “the shameless intellectual” and opposes it to the settled, sated conscience of the honest man (“l’honnête”):

Cette conscience déchirée qui se manifeste par le renversement perpétuel de tous les concepts, de toutes les réalités, qui affiche la tromperie universelle – tromperie de soi, tromperie des autres – et qui témoigne aussi de ce que Hegel appelle l’impudence à dire cette tromperie. *Le Neveu de Rameau*, c’est la grande figure qui émerge – et peut-être Diderot l’a-t-il gardée par honte dans ses tiroirs – de l’intellectuel éhonté, par rapport à quoi celui qui dit « moi » dans *Le Neveu de Rameau* se trouve dans la position de la conscience honnête, qui voit les propositions qu’il avance être renversées et dénaturées par le déchaîné neveu de Rameau, et qui est roulé dans la farine. [...] L’honnête, Lacan le

définit comme celui qui tient à l'honneur de ne pas faire mention de la honte. Dans son Séminaire, il franchit cette limite. Il est franchement déshonnête de parler comme ça des gens qui l'ont reçu gentiment. L'honnête est évidemment celui qui a déjà renoncé à l'honneur, à son blason, qui voudrait que la honte n'existât point, c'est-à-dire qui enrobe et voile le réel dont cette honte est l'affect. (Miller)

The eighteenth-century sentimental novel integrates and complicates this dialectic of shame-shamelessness, honesty-treachery, honor-dishonor. As Miller points out, the man of feeling has paradoxically given up honor and shame behind his veil of good manners, behind his all-too-visible blush; shame as the corollary of (aristocratic) honor is kept at bay, replaced by a sentimentalist performance of shame that serves a socio-ethical purpose. By contrast, Rameau's nephew is presented as the archetype of the "shameless," "unbound" figure in a new order that has redefined shame as a discipline of organized exposure and concealment.

A striking example of the shameless individual posited by this system is Yorick's servant, La Fleur. Although he is far from unfeeling or cruel, he is described as a philanderer whose pursuit of amorous encounters is not rooted in the curiosity and self-reflection Yorick values for himself. He thus appears as a friendly, faithful, but ultimately immovable figure who resists being read, as we can see in his lack of bodily needs and facial expressions:

La Fleur was out of the reach of everything; for whether 'twas hunger or thirst, or cold or nakedness, or watchings, or whatever stripes of ill luck La Fleur met with in our journeyings, there was no index in his physiognomy to point them out by—he was eternally the same. (32-33)

This contrasts with Yorick's own reaction to La Fleur when he first encounters him:

I am apt to be taken with all kinds of people at first sight; but never more so than when a poor devil comes to offer his service to so poor a devil as myself; and as I know this weakness, I always suffer my judgment to draw back something on that very account,—and this more or less, according to the mood I am in, and the case;—and I may add, the gender too, of the person I am to govern. (31)

Yorick's sensibility is excessive by his own account and needs to be restrained: he thus presents himself as susceptible, capable of mirroring his new valet to the point of absurdity.

While Yorick's sensibility makes him acutely aware of different dispositions to generosity, La Fleur has no such anxiety about virtue and vice, or about limits to his heart's expenditure. By drawing attention to what the two characters seem to have in common, the text already sets up the fundamental difference between the shameful protagonist of the eighteenth-century novel, on an uncertain journey of *Bildung*, and his shameless counterpart, whose irrepressible movement towards an endlessly reincarnated love object makes him "eternally the same." The servant's indiscriminating donjuanesque tendencies are presented through a hyperbole by the landlord: "there is scarce a corner in Montreuil where the want of him will not be felt: he has but one misfortune in the world, continued he, he is always in love" (33). The phrase "garçon de bonne fortune" suggests that his nature is to be lucky in love, successful with the ladies. La Fleur turns into a type, a stereotypical French lover for whom desire is never mediated by or in conflict with the ethical aims of sentimentalism; in contrast to Yorick's obstacle-filled sentimental journey, La Fleur is completely invested in his desire. His name turns him into the very object that seduces and adorns the loved one, and links him to a tradition of seduction ("conter fleurette," "fleureter"): by nature, La Fleur flirts. When Yorick reflects on his similarity with his servant, he paradoxically

points out their differences, as he turns his own “eloge” into a journey of emotional turmoil and stunted passion, perhaps unrequited love:

I was making not so much La Fleur’s elogé as my own, having been in love with one princess or another almost all my life, and I hope I shall go on so till I die, being firmly persuaded, that if ever I do a mean action, it must be in some interval betwixt one passion and another: whilst this interregnum lasts, I always perceive my heart locked up,—I can scarce find in it to give Misery a sixpence; and therefore I always get out of it as fast as I can—and the moment I am rekindled, I am all generosity and good-will again. (33)

The narrator dilutes the threat that La Fleur constitutes in his ethical system by comparing their respective quests for love; the shameless promiscuity of the French servant parallels – and is therefore redeemed by – his own romantic endeavors, which is made particularly obvious when La Fleur provides him with an already written *billet doux*.

In the eighteenth-century, as sensibility becomes the currency of the bourgeois class, it is only natural that shamelessness be attributed to the lower class. And yet, the only character who is openly categorized as shameful is the “pauvre honteux” (36), the poor who is shameful (of being poor). The phrase itself is polysemic: “pauvre” and “honteux” are two adjectives, which can cast doubt on whether the noun should be “poor” or “shameful.” This potential confusion exemplifies the text’s assumption that those two words need to be understood in relation to each other. Shame is figured as the burden of the lower classes; the shame on which Yorick’s ethics relies is a more complex interplay of codified shame and shamelessness, allowing for both empathy and individualistic distance, identification and privilege, sincerity and satire. I will now explore in more detail how sentimentalism functions as an ambiguous ethical framework in the text.

C. Shame and the Split Self

The eighteenth century doesn't oppose feeling and reason, materiality and spirituality as much as it regulates their relations; but Sterne's novel questions the ambiguous position of the narrator as an arbiter, a man of feeling who reasons and categorizes to the point of being in conflict with himself. For instance, Yorick often attempts to erase his actual feelings of embarrassment, to contain the intensity of shame: indeed, Yorick never properly acknowledges the feeling of shame that prompts him to leave for France. Then, when he encounters a monk and refuses him money, and rather than expressing guilt in the first person, shame appears in a dissociation between heart and mind: "My heart smote me the moment he shut the door" (9), and in a sentence that insists on the schizophrenic doubling of the self in the moment of shame: "I have behaved very ill, said I within myself" (10). Those divisions allow for the birth of a median, sentimental self, one who can simultaneously shame and be shamed. In her analysis of Yorick, Sedgwick relies on this textual division between two Yoricks: "These puritanical, nationalistic, constricted sentiments represent a repressed Yorick of whom the manifest, expressive Yorick is deeply ashamed" (*Between Men* 75). Moreover, despite his hyperbolic movement of remorse, Yorick never shows explicit signs of shame after he refuses the monk. He rather reasserts his right "to deny him" and expresses shame that he wasn't gracious enough in doing so: "I had no right over the poor Franciscan, but to deny him; and that the punishment of that was enough to the disappointed, without the addition of unkind language" (9-10).

The following passage illustrates the way sentimentalism functions and prompts contradictory impulses. We can differentiate the types of shame that appear or are suggested in the episode with the "pauvre honteux" in relation to this sentimentalist framework. As I have noted, the burden of shame falls on him, precisely as the narrator experiences his own inadequacy in a

system of charity, where his vertical relations with the poor determine his horizontal relations with fellow members of the bourgeois, sentimental class:

But in the eagerness of giving, I had overlooked a pauvre honteux, who had had no one to ask a sous for him, and who, I believe, would have perished, ere he could have ask'd one for himself: he stood by the chaise a little without the circle, and wiped a tear from a face which I thought had seen better days.—Good God! said I—and I have not one single sous left to give him.—But you have a thousand! cried all the powers of nature, stirring within me;—so I gave him—no matter what—I am ashamed to say *how much*, now— (36)

The pauvre honteux paradoxically has too much pride to ask for money, which suggests the doubleness of shame, its reversability into pride. As for Yorick, he bears the shame of his past stinginess toward the monk and attempts to embody the ideal image of the generous “milord anglais” by upping the game of charity. This generous impulse, although part of a transactional system of charity, is presented as natural (“the powers of nature”), and therefore as *aidos*, his human ability to be moved, to be shamed by the misfortune of others. Of course, there is nothing natural in his progression from stinginess to shame and to excessive charity: we can find a similar episode in the conversion stories of Saint Augustine or Francis of Assisi, a narrative template which Yorick applies to his own life. Again, Yorick is divided: one Yorick is reasonable and pragmatic, while the other is passionate to a fault, overly enthusiastic. Finally, as a corrective to having yielded to the inner call of nature, the shame of his excessive generosity – of having given more than what was required of him – suggests Yorick’s false modesty, a devious way of drawing attention to an act of charity that overstepped the bounds of the system: “I am ashamed to say how much now.” This scene thus encapsulates the various ways shame functions as a performance and as an ethical framework that determines class relations. It also shows the double consciousness of

the text, which positions itself between the formation of the benevolent bourgeois traveler and a scathing critique of sentimentalism.

Shame is both linked to the sentimental teleology of virtue, and to the experience of an irreducible condition, a displacement that remains suggested throughout the novel. It is worth noting that, fourteen years after *A Sentimental Journey* was published, Rousseau's *Confessions* explicitly engaged with the latter type of shame. While much has been written of Rousseau's scenes of shame or humiliation in relation to his striving towards virtue through the exposure of his errors, the autobiographical text also expresses something that was far more suspicious, far less acceptable to his contemporaries: the "shameless sentimentality" (Locke 78) that results from the shameful experience of the pariah. As Jill Locke argues:

I read Rousseau's oeuvre as seeking to establish a common human bond among men amidst a modern world that Rousseau believes has divided and isolated men from each other. That bond is forged through a common experience of shame that all men wish to overcome. [...] In a modern, bourgeois world, Rousseau asks: Who but a few of us feels like he fits in, comes from the right place, speaks the right way, and has the right knowledge? Who among us doesn't dream of being liberated from the self-doubt and self-negation brought on by social regimes of comparison and envy? His answer is no one. Everyone wants to live a life that feels authentic and true and relatively free from the constraints of artificial social expectations. (75)

While those questions are not explicit in Sterne's novel, the text nevertheless insists on a shame that is not reducible to *aidos*: the shame of the trespasser, of the jester, of the foreigner, a shame that slips through the cracks and drives Yorick to create bonds with others and assure himself of his legitimacy. The logic of sentimentalism as a new paradigm comes full circle and exposes a

vicious cycle of shame: as Rousseau shows, the “modern, bourgeois world” creates shame on a structural level since no one truly belongs in an uncertain, anonymous, but still hierarchical system. *Aidos* is then mobilized against structural shame and transmutes it as a bourgeois sentimentalist aesthetic, that of the blushing man of feeling.

2. Shame as Form

A. Performance and Empathy

In *Failures of Feeling*, Wendy Lee points out that “[h]aving no feelings is asking for it” (2010, 2) and she analyzes Henry Crawford in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* as a shameless seducer enticed by Fanny Price’s lack of feeling and waxing poetic about his love for her; to that Austen character, we may oppose another, Mr. Knightley in *Emma*, who describes himself as being unable to make speeches precisely because he is in earnest. The man of feeling can thus be a convenient, ideologically codified disguise. It is the particular disjunction between this model of bourgeois virtue and Yorick’s own blundering journey that turns the text into a critique of sentimentalism.

The recuperation of *aidos* and its insertion in the ethical paradigm of sentimentalism could be read as a response to what Jill Locke calls “The Lament That Shame Is Dead,” a recurrent, sentimental lament in societies confronted with the shame of modernity, with the uncertainty of individual identity and community. The loss of *aidos* has been analyzed as a social danger: according to Axel Honneth, a society that doesn’t rely on *aidos* is a society of disrespect, of *Missachtung* (non-attention), which Bernard Stiegler, drawing on Hegel, argues is the result of the annihilation of desire (60). But if *Missachtung* disables the circuit of recognition, sentimentalism

– as a corrective to *Missachtung* – only creates another parallel circuit that privileges spectacle. The performance of sentiment is fundamentally contradictory since it organizes spontaneous feeling in order to valorize the bourgeois class:

Theories of sensibility claimed that conduct, and more particularly, the allegedly uncontrollable gestures, emotions, and feelings that arise from an innate sensibility, demonstrated cultural value and legitimized individuals as members of a new class. (Beaulieu 7)

Indeed, *A Sentimental Journey* is invested in *Bildung*, and emphasizes experience and change: the novel opposes Yorick to Smelfungus, who is unable to learn, wonder, be impressed upon. However, the logic of sentimentalism is paradoxical in that it reverses the order of cause and consequence: it presupposes that one already needs to be in a particular, sentimental mindset to go on this journey – feeling precedes the experience, the ideal of the man of feeling precedes the spontaneity of emotion, *Bild* precedes *Bildung*. Sentiment is thus the performance of uncontrollable relationality. Yorick exposes the a priori construction of fellow-feeling, but negates the principle of individuation, the painful understanding of one's unique, limited position: sentimentalism, as a shaming structure of collective feeling erases the complexity of individual experience.

Sentimentalism has to be understood in relation to class and gender, and as a framework of exclusion that establishes an environment of perpetual shame and self-regulation. It creates a model for middle-class virtue that supplants the aristocracy: “sentiment represents the bourgeois usurpation of and accommodation to what formerly had been considered aristocratic prerogatives” (Markley 217). This usurpation is legitimized by the assertion of moral superiority:

For many middle-class authors, sentimentality – the generosity of feeling – becomes their claim to a cultural power-sharing based on a liberal interpretation of "Breeding" that equates hereditary power with moral sensitivity. (218)

Because this moral sensitivity is located in the body, in its openness to sensations and *aidos*, sentimentalism creates a variation on the hereditary virtue of the aristocratic class:

It is important to note that this "generosity of feeling" resides in the body of the bourgeois, most particularly in his blood; the very signifier that marks the breeding of the aristocrat is redefined as a mark of innate and physiological responsiveness to suffering. (Frank 98)

Sentimentalism might seem to promote feminine qualities, but the man of feeling doesn't disavow virility. Sensibility rather constitutes a particular practice of virility and emphasizes the rejection of institutional authority (Vigarello 155) while pursuing such traditionally masculine endeavors as epistemic, romantic or sexual conquests. As we see in the novel's erotic encounters, shame turns into a source of erotic pleasure through the hyperbolic performance of the ingénu(e). Even though Yorick insists on his refusal to spy on "the nakedness of the land," the project of sentimentalism is essentially one of spying, of making minds legible through their bodies. This legibility is rooted in bourgeois self-fashioning and epistemic gain, in the *Bildung* project of the mid-to-late-eighteenth-century man of feeling (which came to supplant the process-based, wonder-oriented narrative structures that prevailed at the time): "Yorick's wish is a typically sexualized version of the sentimental traveler's project: the spying of the hearts of others in the service of bourgeois self-improvement and self-empowerment" (Frank 97). This self-centered dimension of sensibility in the service of sentimentalism shows the limitations of empathy and of the relationality to which Yorick aspires. For instance, Yorick's experience of being transported into the caged bird's consciousness leads him to imagine his own fate at the Bastille, but not to free the bird: the pitied

caged creature rather remains a fetishized object, a souvenir, and the affective sentimental experience trumps action and change.

Because the logic of sentimentalism can never be dissociated from performance, it inevitably accomplishes the opposite of what it claims to do. It creates another type of misalignment as it revives the experience of tragedy, which doesn't necessarily prompt sympathy. It may be argued, for instance, that the performance of sentimentalism as tragedy, in its theatricality and artifice, prompts a sadistic experience of pleasure as a response:

A sentimental ethics works through the operation of sympathy, which is a propensity to feel what others are feeling and enter imaginatively into their affective state. In other words, tragedy provides the paradigmatic instance of alignment of affects between spectator and sufferer. And yet, it is precisely tragedy that reveals the possibility of a radical misalignment of affect, in the pleasure we experience at a good theatrical performance. [...] It seems that tragedy, instead of giving evidence of our capacity for sympathy, as it promised, has only uncovered the *Schadenfreude* of the sentimental gaze (cf. Berlant, *Compassion*, 5, 10). (Soni 298)

The novel plays with the suggestion that, rather than promoting authentic feeling, sentimentalism is rather invested in the disruptive, shameless aesthetic contemplation of scenes and objects: the blush of the monk, the imagined speech of the helpless starling, Maria's tears in Moulines. Thus, sentimentalism is a fragile, easily upended framework, at the mercy of its own excesses,²³ that shows the reversibility of shame and shamelessness.

²³ "Too much emotion is given away; sincerity verges on self-parody. The sophisticated ear is disturbed by the grotesque, impish quality of awareness, of calculation, in the sentimental at the moment when one professes the most unselfconscious sincerity and directness of feeling." (Sokolsky 83)

B. Shame and Self-Consciousness

According to Mary-Céline Newbould, *A Sentimental Journey* was instrumental in the popularization of sentimentalism and, as she points out, scholars of sentimental fiction oppose sensibility as excessive, pathetic susceptibility, and sentimentalism as a more rigorously organized structure which tends towards virtuous behavior:

A Sentimental Journey has generally been considered a major catalyst in the formulation and popularity of the fashion for sentimentalism, the ‘reasonable feeling’ described by R.F. Brissenden, whose characteristics include profound compassion, tender-heartedness and the ability to be moved easily, usually manifested in the sighs, tears and faintings that were soon to shed their connection with ‘reason’ to become ridiculed as clichés. Janet Todd suggests a subtle distinction between the more reasonable ‘sentiment’ and ‘sensibility,’ which she describes as ‘an innate sensitiveness or susceptibility,’ and which was supported in eighteenth-century fiction through the increased focus upon the pathetic scenes and stories that would provoke a response of heightened emotion. (116)

As we have seen from the importance of *aidos* in sentimental encounters, “innate sensitiveness” cannot be neatly dissociated from “sentiment”: it is precisely because one is innately sensitive, vulnerable to *aidos*, that a moral encounter is possible and that reasonable feeling can be theorized. I argue that Sterne’s novel is neither invested in pure pathos, nor does it unequivocally follow the path of organized sentiment, which masks and displaces the experience of shame. It presents itself as invested in sentimentalism, but several anecdotes exaggerate sentimental tropes through double entendres and jokes. This narrative structure mobilizes feeling while relying on irony and self-consciousness.

Irony is profoundly antithetical to the project of sentimentalism, which is invested in sensibility, authenticity, relationality; it is a stance that attacks coherence. Irony might also be a way to conceal shame, to negate one's implication in sentiment. However, the victims of the narrator's irony in the novel are not always the same, and it is unclear whether the text clearly takes the side of either sentimentalism or irony. This is the double-bind described by David Richter, who also refers to it as "reverbatory irony":

Sterne's narrative [...] simultaneously makes available both literal and ironic interpretations, and the problem is that of deciding where the implied author stands. The reader who fails to grab at the ironic handle thrust toward him finds only a moral apologue with a conventionally edifying conclusion, one by no means at odds with Sterne's ethic. But the reader who grasps both handles at once, as Sterne intended, finds himself committed by his laughter to a bad bawdy joke, from which he recoils with a salutary sense of shame. (141)

C. The Incommensurability of the Novel Form

In *The Event of Postcolonial Shame*, Timothy Bewes theorizes "shame as form." He argues that:

[T]he consciousness of the inseparability of shame and form appears in the first or second decade of the century in Europe, but it becomes the object of a more generalized awareness in the years after the Second World War and takes on further nuances at different moments, and in different locations, through the rest of the century. (16)

While he points to a particular conjunction of historical factors where writing itself is posited as a problem, he follows Lukács' analysis and explicitly connects shame and form in the context of the novel: "The novel is constituted out of the very incommensurability—of form and content, of idea

and reality, of vehicle and tenor, of ethics and aesthetics, of subject and object—that, I am arguing, is behind every experience of shame” (44).

I want to emphasize the role of the early modern novel in the shame-inducing and shame-ridden history of form and incommensurability, and offer a modification of Bewes’ argument by pointing out two problems, which are clearly articulated in *A Sentimental Journey*: the problem of empathy and individuation, and the limits of representation through narration. Indeed, we have seen that sentimentalism emphasizes the link between the novel, empathy and the creation of an ideal individual self, positions its protagonist between the poles of shame and shamelessness, and questions the ethical stance one should uphold when faced with scenes of pathos. The rise of sentimentalism is due to specific historical factors:

It is no coincidence that sentimentalism arises at the historical moment that marks a transition from community (*Gemeinschaft*) to society (*Gesellschaft*). In a social order threatened by the centrifugal forces of self-interest, competition and atomization, where a traditional “virtue ethics” no longer suffices, sentimentalism arrives on the scene as a reassurance that ethical relations to others are (still) possible (Soni 293).

Bewes’ point that “[a]n obligation to write coexists with the impossibility of doing so innocently” (42) could therefore be applied to the eighteenth-century novel, as it negotiates its idealistic aims and more sobering realizations. *A Sentimental Journey* thus demonstrates the incommensurability of the novel form and the construct of the man of feeling, by being simultaneously critical of and invested in sentimentalism; the prose itself shows a discontinuity between the *experience* of feeling, and the fragmentary, elliptical *writing* of feeling, often interrupted and suspended by the Shandean dash. The very existence of narrative is at odds with the ineffable quality of subjective feeling, on which the novel form nevertheless relies:

In novels like Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* or Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*, the protagonist is a traveler who encounters people in sentimental situations that demand a response before one has learned the details of their narrative prehistory. The typical sentimental encounters in Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* – with the monk or fille de chambre, or the episode in which Yorick feels the woman's pulse – take place almost without the exchange of any words; affect is generated by looking on a particular scene regardless of its narrative history. To ask for a narrative in such situations would be a sign that the immediate sentimental response had failed or was being ignored. (Soni 303)

The problems and ambiguities of sentimentalism constitute a system of displacement of feeling with which the novel plays. According to Soni, *A Sentimental Journey* moves toward a model of sympathy as identification (rather than pity). Soni places this “self-consciously sentimental” novel in the context of a “drift toward identificatory sympathy” (311) which is crucial to the development of the novel, since, as she points out, realism will respond to this need for an imaginary affective landscape. This means that sympathy is only available to the reader through a displacement of the suffering object:

In such narratives, identification with the gaze of the narrator is privileged over pity for those whose suffering he witnesses. This sentimentalism to the second order is the very essence of sentimentalism. (311)

The text relies on the duplication of voyeurism, on the endless displacement of feeling, and therefore on identification, yet is wary of its attendant misunderstandings and quixotic attachments. Shame as form thus has everything to do with the consciousness of being “ensnared in implication” (64), as Bewes says. The novel relays an ambiguous innocence that highlights the limits of empathy and identificatory processes – as Adam Smith himself concedes, identification

relies on imagination.²⁴ This brings us back to Sedgwick: shame, as she describes it, comes from the in-between state of experiencing a form of identification which is only partial, since we are, after all, incapable of actually transporting ourselves into another body and another consciousness.

As a consequence, the novel stages both its aims to represent the protagonist's coherent individual identity and empathy and its inability to do so. The eighteenth century witnesses the rise of the autonomous, independent character, precisely as society becomes more democratic, less rigidly divided and ushers in "an era of consumer revolution": a character now has "a life (better still, an inner life) of its own" (Lynch 365). The contradictory double movement of individuation and relationality corresponds both to the logic of shame and to the impossible conundrum of the man of feeling: sentimentalism "pav[es] the way to the constitution of the subject as a principally affective entity" even as it constitutes "an ethical paradigm, because it is concerned primarily with theorizing our relations to others" (Soni 292). Yorick, the novel's man of feeling, is therefore placed in an impossible in-between; he is porous yet self-contained, and his investment in relationality is always distorted, stymied, displaced by self-consciousness. Indeed, Yorick is defined by a state of self-conscious disjunction, i.e. shame – as Elizabeth Goodhue points out, "nothing is funnier about *A Sentimental Journey* than the way self-interrogation and self-interruption prevent Yorick from ever managing to complete a narrative point or complete a transaction with another individual" (69). Yorick is always looking ahead at the finished image of the man of feeling having adequately experienced feeling; he is imagining the future form of

²⁴ "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is on the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination, we place ourselves in his situation." (Smith 9)

pleasure rather than its experience in the present. This proleptic structure is crucial to Yorick's experience of shame, insofar as it constitutes a painful displacement of the self – in this case, a temporal one.

In the context of sentimentalism, I want to suggest that *A Sentimental Journey* is ashamed of its own limits. According to Kyoko Takanashi, the sentimental novel reflects on its own implication in a world of increased circulation, of constant displacement and shame:

In contrast with critics who read sentimental fiction's self-consciousness as a sign of the novel's mediating potential, I argue that narrative disruptions and distortions in sentimental fiction gesture toward a historically specific model of reading that encouraged readers to look beyond the immediacy of feeling to revisit the material reality that informs it. By detailing the numerous obstacles to face-to-face communication, sentimental fiction also calls into question the even more mediated act of textual communication. (488)

Takanashi points out that the novel isn't a self-contained, efficacious vehicle of communication, but is rather "riddled with problems of noise" (494). There is too much getting in the way of relationality (Takanashi focuses on objects and misjudged identification), but also of individuation: Yorick's sense of self is undercut, mediated, misunderstood by himself and others. The novel calls into question "the act of textual communication" by drawing attention to mediated relations, but also by enacting an ambiguous *vis-à-vis*, a self-conscious address to the reader. The reader is the only true interlocutor of the narrator, but is an implicated reader – implicated in the narrator's sexual shame, as evidenced by the (cheeky) accusations of impropriety, which project shame onto the reader; implicated in and manipulated by Yorick's dubious sentimental gaze, since the goal of the sentimental novel is to elicit fellow-feeling in the reader and create a contagious blush, beyond the limits of the book.

In *A Sentimental Journey*, metafictional satire is an effect of shamelessness, of the detachment of the protagonist from a scene by which he claims to be moved. Indeed, *A Sentimental Journey* is as much a satire of sentiment as it is an actual text that popularized sentimentalism; it is metafictional in that it draws attention to feeling and its limited representation, which means that it is always at the nexus of the double movement of shame, between individuation and relationality, solipsistic frustration and vicarious emotion, voyeurism and communication. The self-consciousness of form is crucial to Bewes' argument, who contends that "inadequacy [...] develops a certain truth value" in the twentieth century (19). However, it may be argued that Sterne initiated that self-conscious realization of failure²⁵ as the primary tension of the novel form, most explicitly in *Tristram Shandy*: satire functions as a modality of shame, a way of writing aslant and comment on the incommensurability of form and content, of feeling and sentimentalism.

According to Linda Hutcheon, who theorizes metafiction in *Narcissistic Narratives: The Metafictional Paradox*, the "literary dialectic" of the "mimesis of product" and the "mimesis of process" is a "continuum [...] that has logically culminated in metafiction" (5). Hutcheon uses the myth of Narcissus as a way to articulate textual self-consciousness by offering narcissism as the diagnosis of the novel's "original condition" (9). However, self-consciousness can be understood from a different perspective. Indeed, the novel's self-consciousness, self-reflexivity or self-obsession convey its inability to be fully invested in its modality of storytelling: the novel is always aware of the incommensurability between form and content. While Hutcheon interprets this self-awareness as (metaphorically) narcissistic, I contend that the fracture, the break that leads one to observe oneself from the outside is precisely what characterizes shame (one can waste away in the

²⁵ "Failure is in some sense a measure of the work's success; or rather, the aesthetic tension between failure and success at the level of the perceiving subject is destroyed by a catastrophic and decisive irruption of the ethical. Not the ethical as a *new content* for literature, however, or a replacement of aesthetic concerns with ethical ones; rather, in the twentieth century, the ethical appears as a permanent *rendering inadequate* of form." (Bewes 19)

stasis of shame – which could be one way of understanding Narcissus’ predicament – or one can attempt to extricate oneself by moving, by going on a journey): in the novel, Yorick is interpellated by his own narrative voice; the text itself, ruptured by dashes and aposiopesis, which figure both ellipses and interruptions, draws the reader into the interstices of the story.

The novel ends on a suspension and an interruption. Yorick has found a room in an inn on his way to Lyons, but he has to share the room with a lady and her maid. After agreeing on a number of rules and fastening the curtains of the beds with corking pins, Yorick and the lady fail to fall asleep; following a minor disagreement, Yorick stretches out his hand, unaware that the maid has slipped in between them:

So that when I stretch’d out my hand I caught hold of the fille de chambre’s

END OF VOL. II (118)

The ambiguous open ending of *A Sentimental Journey* synthesizes and satirizes the various layers of shame that are constitutive of the eighteenth-century novel. Indeed, it functions as an act of shame (through self-censorship) and a brazen *morceau de bravoure*. This final interruption can be read as a metaphor of how shame acts as a catalyst and inhibitor of desire; decency intimates that nothing further can be said about the situation, but this structure of concealment creates suspense, frustration and thus the desire to see more. On a formal level, this “end” jokingly questions the possibility of narrative to do justice to the lived experience.

But this thematization of shame also emphasizes the essentially gendered nature of shame and its relation to the ever-present shadow of female sex(uality). If the novel started with an instance of shaming that pushed Yorick to go to France, it ends, quite literally with shame: indeed, the “end” here could be interpreted as shame itself, *aidos* in its original sense, i.e. the female

genitals that ask to be covered up. This journey of formation ends on the shameful form i.e. the impossibility of form *par excellence*.

A Sentimental Journey raises a fundamental question, that of the ambiguous position between sentiment and ironic distance; as Thackeray asks in 1851:

How much was deliberate calculation and imposture – how much was false sensibility – and how much true feeling? Where did the lie begin, and did he know where? And where did the truth end in the art and scheme of this man of genius, this actor, this quack? (233)

This is a problem that was common at the time; the critical reception of *The Vicar of Wakefield* by Oliver Goldsmith, published two years prior, echoes this ambiguity – can a novel actually be sentimental, if it is a novel (and not a romance)? I extend this problem to the novel form at large: if the novel responds to the double movement of shame and seeks individuation and relationality, to what extent does it acknowledge its failures to negotiate both, and to what extent does it attempt to extract itself from the sentimentalist framework? How does this tension challenge the bodily spectacle of feeling on which all dynamics of shame rely?

I argue that the correlation between shame and spectacle of feeling doesn't disappear with the eighteenth century; it rather remains crucial to the gendered construction of character. In the decades following the publication of *A Sentimental Journey*, the definition of sentimentalism started to shift, and had lost its allure by the 1790s (Johnson 6). Sensibility was progressively attached to chivalric ideals and therefore gendered in a more obvious way: “during the 1790s “men of feeling” were decidedly conservative types, country gentlemen who resisted needed change, who had an aversion to newfangled social ideas, and who exemplified the gallant ways of Old England” (8). According to Mary Wollstonecraft, the sensibility of the men of feeling was thus opposed to reason; and since female sensibility was nothing more than female weakness, it was

opposed to the “unsexed woman” who has shed her modesty (9). However, Claudia Johnson brings up an important point in the characterization of the unsexed woman: both progressive men and women were seen as sexually denaturalized, “unresponsive” (8), but, according to Richard Polwhele, “unsexed” women are “oversexed” (9). This is the problem articulated by *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*: the shame of the female protagonist has to be understood in relation to the contradictory construct of the unsexed-oversexed woman. The Girl is a “half-formed thing,” which means, among other “things,” a half-formed character; a character that doesn’t embody the extreme archetype of the monstrous unsexed woman, but doesn’t submit to the norms of feminine modesty and propriety either. McBride’s novel encapsulates the contradiction of the female *Bildungsroman*, where shame, if we understand it as a dynamic structure, pushes her forward, and, if we understand it as the sexual burden that falls specifically on women, prevents her inclusion in the project of *Bildung* and ultimately destroys her.

II. *A Girl Is A Half-formed Thing* by Eimear McBride

If the eighteenth-century emergence of the novel form is bound up with the idea of formation, so is the twenty-first-century novel, which still projects anxiety about the form of the novel and the idea of a protagonist's formation. McBride's novel is both a coming-of-age and a formal experimentation that meditates on the inability of its protagonist to come of age. Drawing on Claudia Johnson's remarks about the gender ideology that underpins male sentimentalism, this section explores the powerlessness of female encounters with shame and shamelessness as another mode of problematic novelistic formation, and proposes the figure of the fallen woman as the counterpoint to the figure of the man of feeling.

Female sexuality constitutes the locus of shame, etymologically and culturally, and remains a topos in the early novel; female sexual shame remains fundamental in the construction of female protagonists, from Defoe (*Moll Flanders*) and Richardson (*Pamela*) to contemporary novels. If we look at the category of the fallen woman, from the eighteenth century to the Victorian age,²⁶ it functions as a figure, or a model of character construction that is in tension with the traditional *Bildung* model, as it engages anxieties about self-control, autonomy and agency. The figure of the fallen woman is present in *A Sentimental Journey* with the character of Maria; however, Maria's fallenness doesn't lead to a reflection on her own agency as a character, but rather engages Yorick's empathy. She serves as a foil to Yorick, an object of pity, precisely because she embodies fallenness, and therefore the impossibility of *Bildung*. The fallen woman as a protagonist allows us to see a point of continuity between the characterological experience of shame – in her case,

²⁶ See Anderson on the rhetoric of fallenness in the Victorian age.

linked to gender, sexuality and class – and the formal question of the novel’s relation to shame, its own anxiety about the generic problem of form and formlessness.

The Girl’s half-formation is presented as an anti-*Bildungsroman*. However, *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* is interested in both descent and dissent, more specifically in the reclamation and weaponization of shame; while it doesn’t present the picaresque journey of an opportunistic, subversive character who manages to take control of her life, the text is invested in the ethical power of scandalous, transparent behavior, or in outrage as an ethical stance. The Girl experiences the “double play between exposure and concealment” (Sara Ahmed’s previously quoted definition of shame) as she engages in scandalous, promiscuous behavior, but also experiences the retraction of the self in fantasies of an underground journey and of death by drowning. The text plays with the unsentimental stance of the shameless character, and with the outraged, linguistically innovative stream of consciousness, but ultimately exposes its investment in sentiment and shame.

1. Shame and *Bildung*

A. *Bildung* and the Fallen Woman

A Girl is a Half-formed Thing inherits from the eighteenth-century novel, where the shame of the fallen woman is often the result of deflowering and trauma at the hands of rakes. It also draws from modernism, which takes interest in the voices and bodies of women, their perception, intuition, and formation in space and time, and insists on every dimension of the bodily experience. McBride’s text deals with the twin history of, on the one hand, the body of the woman, and on the other, the body in and of the novel, insofar as the burden of shame borne by female bodies is directly linked to the history of the novel.

As Fanon observes in the context of racism in *Black Skin, White Masks*, shaming turns the body into a flayed, bleeding thing²⁷ – in the Girl’s case, a sexualized, violated object designated for both shame and Catholic guilt. The process of individuation is replaced by dissociation, which, in turn, means that any attempt at relationality is fraught. Eimear McBride’s novel and its title posit the inherent difficulty of a female protagonist: how can a novel be about the individuation of a thing, of an object, rather than a subject? Despite the Girl’s attempts at resisting this assignation, the novel traces a downward journey: her half-formation is a gradual dissolution. The Girl experiences a double pull towards the transgression of the boundaries of the self, and the retraction of the self in fantasies of an underground journey and in her eventual death by drowning: shame seals the impossibility of *Bildung* for her.

In *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces*, Amanda Anderson analyzes the trope of the fallen woman in relation to agency and selfhood in character construction, beyond its reduction to transgressive sexuality (15). She explains that the debate between idealism and materialism provides context for the “understanding of agency and selfhood,” and she points out a fundamental contradiction between determinism and malleability for character:

[I]f character were both determined and infinitely malleable, then a coherent conception of moral action was undermined, and cherished notions of rationality, individuality, and autonomy were threatened with obsolescence. (4)

The ambiguous status of the fallen woman as a character crystallizes the anxieties of the *Bildungsroman* character, who wishes to rise up and assert control over their destiny. The fallen woman is presented as a character who has lost control, whose coherence has been undermined

²⁷ “Ce jour-là, désorienté, incapable d’être dehors avec l’autre, le Blanc, qui impitoyable, m’emprisonnait, je me portai loin de mon être-là, très loin, me constituant objet. Qu’était-ce pour moi, sinon un décollement, un arrachement, une hémorragie qui caillait du sang noir sur tout mon corps?” (91)

and who is therefore expected to stay within the stasis of shame, contrary to the masculine subject; her excessive malleability contradicts the logic of the *Bildungsroman* character as striving towards an ideal of bourgeois autonomy and harmonious insertion in the social world.

According to Anderson, the project of *Bildung* for fallen women characters is doomed insofar as fallenness functions “as attenuated autonomy” (6) and as the fallen woman is constructed as “hopelessly subject to structural forces that do not so powerfully determine more privileged subjects [...] she becomes an object of condescending sympathy or violent inscription” (167). Shame, as the corollary to the loss of human autonomy and self-control, is thus embodied by the fallen woman, who is positioned at the intersection of gender and class oppression.

This anxiety was solidified in the Victorian age, but is still at the core of the Girl’s characterization in McBride’s novel as a girl who is repeatedly abused and raped. Even as a young child, the Girl is prematurely assigned to the position of the fallen woman, when her grandfather shames her mother by shaming and sexualizing her:

And look at that one. What way is that to rear a girl? Look at her. Forward rolls in a skirt.

It’s disgusting. It’s perverted. Underwear on display. [...] I never reared you that way. (16)

The Girl is already badly formed, determined as disgusting and perverted, because of her own mother’s implied fallenness, i.e. her deviation from the right, godly path as a single mother raising two children.

McBride’s novel thus positions itself in the history of what Anderson calls “the rhetoric of fallenness.” Like the Victorian fallen woman, the Girl attempts to access “ideals of reciprocal recognition and response” (197) throughout the novel, in ways that would prevent her from losing autonomy and relationality altogether. She is the object of “violent inscription” in the text but the first-person narration also implies different modalities of identification and an attempt to gain

agency through a singular, recognizable voice. The novel hinges on the tension at the heart of the *Bildungsroman*, between determinism and transformation, subject and object. We thus find a similar structure at work in Sterne and McBride: the anxiety of incomplete formation and of being exposed as inchoate, half-formed, of a relation to the world that is purported without substance or predicated on interpersonal and structural violence.

B. Irish Tradition, *Bildung*, and Anti-*Bildung*

The anxiety about the generic problem of form and formlessness, which we find in Sterne, takes a different shape in this twenty-first-century novel that is at the confluence of several histories of shame: *A Girl* makes it clear that the gendered shame of its almost-character is compounded by class, religion, Irish postcolonial resentment and dysfunctional family dynamics.

Catholic guilt, which derives from the dogma of original sin, plays an important role in the cultural framework that triggers a more general sense of shame, which doesn't necessarily designate a cause or an object. The figure of the fallen woman is particularly important in the context of Catholic Ireland ("fallen women" were often sent to Catholic-run Magdalene Laundries), and the themes related to this figure are frequent in Irish literature.

In *A Girl*, the narrator effectively shows how religion is weaponized to shame her, but also how religious trappings conceal brutality and cruelty, for example when she describes her dead grandfather's body at his wake:

His jacket tucked just neat around him. Very clean. A candle burning. And his hands pressed Jesus in the garden. And white and white as hell. His nails the colour of his face. Translucent let the light through. The cold room. Jesus freezing. (101)

While the text seems to acknowledge that her grandfather's stern religious stance is a perverted interpretation of Christian tenets (even Jesus is "freezing"), religion gives a framework to the Girl's guilt. This is especially clear in the context of her relation with her uncle, since she partly blames herself for her abuse at his hands, as though she had a part in seducing and desiring him.

The influence of Irish Catholicism is apparent in the characterization of the Girl as a fallen, promiscuous, unworthy woman, but also through the references to Catholicism in the structure of the novel itself, which imply that the Girl is a sacrifice, an innocent lamb led to the slaughter.

The structure of the novel refers to Catholicism and Celtic mythology, which allude to an idealized, immutable past. The novel is made of five parts: *Lambs*; *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*; *Land Under the Wave*; *Extreme Unction*; *The Stolen Child*. We see the alternation of progress and degradation (the Girl is raped by her uncle in part 2, and hopes for a new life in part 3, before her brother dies and her life unravels). The structure plays with the suggestion of change and stasis, of arrested development and otherworldly escape. It follows the religious sacraments (baptism, extreme unction) and elements of Irish folklore, which refer to fantasies of submergence and supernatural harmony: the "Land under the waves," or "Tír Fa Tonn," is the land of eternal happiness and youth, stasis. "The Stolen Child" is the title of a poem by Yeats, where the poet bids the "human child" to "come away [...] to the waters and the wild."

The five-part structure frames the novel as a tragedy in five acts: the end of act 3 is the climax that determines the fall, as the Girl reconnects with her uncle, and accepts her fate as her stream of consciousness is overwhelmed by a sense of determinism and entrapment in act 4.

The Girl's shame is connected to her early experiences of trauma and abuse, which are also depicted as structurally and culturally determined. Indeed, her grandfather's scolding of her mother foreshadows the abuse she will be subjected to, but also demonstrates the cyclical pattern of shame

from one generation to the next. After the grandfather is gone, the Girl's mother takes on the role of the grandfather, and abuses her children in turn:

Do you see what you've done? Are you pleased with yourselves? What did I say about forward rolls? What did I tell you about keeping your knickers covered. She is jumping up the stairs. Take one and two. Crack my eyes are bursting from my head with the wallop. Blood rising up my nose. Drips my head forward. [...]

Stupid. You'll never manage anything. You're a moron. He's right. You're a moron. Hail Mary. How hard can it be? Hail Mary. I've had enough of you. (17)

The Girl is therefore positioned at the extreme of determinism and malleability: her fate is already framed by identifiable narratives and social structures, which undermine any agency to which she might aspire as an individual, and she is also extremely malleable, subjected to violations, governed by external forces, intruded upon in her own first-person account.

A Girl is A Half-formed Thing is avowedly influenced by celebrated Irish voices. The novel most noticeably draws on Joyce, especially in terms of style. As David Collard notes, the novel "could be Molly Bloom's great-great-great-granddaughter's soliloquy" ("Eimear McBride: Gob impressive," par. 1). While McBride herself has acknowledged the profound influence of *Ulysses* on this text, her novel also needs to be read alongside other contemporary Irish female *Bildungsromane* in which shame is often attached to gender, religion, and to a difficult (if not impossible) transition from girlhood to womanhood. *A Girl* draws on themes developed in other novels by women Irish writers – the themes of rape, with the recurring motif of water in *Down by the River* by Edna O'Brien, the theme of trauma in O'Brien's and Anne Enright's work. The novel belongs to the modernist resurgence in the post-Celtic Tiger years, but more specifically to the

resurgence of the Irish modernist *Bildungsroman*, which is characterized as a double journey, like Yorick's:

[A]s the protagonist turns psychologically inwards, they journey physically outwards: Joyce's Stephen Dedalus and Molloy's Ann McGlone take ship from Dublin for Europe, deciding that rejecting socially mandated "maturity" entails rejecting Irish society. (Sell 403)

This journey is similar to Yorick's in its doubleness, but where Yorick is afforded to reflect on his faults and grow, the Girl experiences more and more violation and her sense of shame expands and overwhelms her. This downward pattern is reminiscent of the reverse *Bildung* or anti-*Bildung* model we find in Beckett, although it differs in its insistence on affect and sensation – Beckett's novels present a trajectory towards nothingness, a progressive loss of the superfluous, an emptying²⁸ coupled with a non-human expansion of the body (as we can see in *Molloy*, with the character's reliance on various prosthetic objects). The Girl's progressive dissolution and self-destruction is rather linked to a body that is all too present.

For Yorick, shame, mobility, and formation are interrelated: Yorick is pushed to travel in order to encounter others and simultaneously become his ideal (cosmopolitan, affable) self. The novel shows the dynamic of shame and sentimental formation that drives the progression of Yorick, but also alludes to shame as it is experienced by women, a shame that is primarily exclusionary, intimately inscribed in their bodies. While Girl also experiences the tension between relationality and individuation, shame is not experienced in the same way by female protagonists. As a protagonist, Girl alternatively reclaims and rejects her body, but her journey becomes one of

²⁸ What François Noudelmann calls "un évidemment réglé dont la finalité est le 'moindre'" (14).

repetition and cyclical motion. We could apply Cixous's analysis of Everywoman's journey as a bodily rumination in *Ulysses* to the Girl:

Bridebed, childbed, bed of death": thus woman's trajectory is traced as she inscribes herself from bed to bed in Joyce's *Ulysses*. The voyage of Ulysses with Bloom standing constantly at the helm as he navigates Dublin. Walking, exploring. The voyage of Penelope – Everywoman: a bed of pain in which the mother is never done with dying, a hospital bed on which there is no end to Mrs. Purefoy's labor, the bed framing endless erotic dreams, where Molly, wife and adulteress, voyages in her memories. She wanders, but lying down. In dream. Ruminates. Talks to herself. Woman's voyage: as a body. (Cixous and Clément 66)

The novel renews Irish modernism, with what Aran Ward Sell calls "*stream of damaged consciousness*, where Irish and Irish-diasporic writers offer space on the page to traumatized, mentally ill, and even dead characters, depicting an Ireland defined negatively against the glib corporate idiom of the Celtic Tiger" (397). This stylistic choice draws on the literary techniques of Joyce but is particularly apt to express the psychosocial resonances of the 2008 economic crisis. Indeed, the Girl's consciousness is "damaged" insofar as her birth itself is presented as the fundamental death and division, and announces a degradation, a deformation. The first chapter reads as a mini-*Bildungsroman*, starting when the Girl is still in the womb, listening in on her family's interactions, and ending in the Girl's death-as-birth. This chapter hinges on what Kevin Ohi calls a "crisis of inception," as the "noncoincidence between beginning and inception." Here, the beginning is the birth, whereas inception means "establishing a form, institution, or consciousness" (Ohi 5): the latter is already riddled with ambiguities, confusion, and contradictions.

The first sentences, rather than giving her name, indicate that her mother gives her brother the right to name her (even though we never learn what her name is):

For you. You'll soon. You'll give her a name. In the stitches of her skin she'll wear your say. Mammy me? Yes you? (3)

The Girl is immediately meant to be subordinate to her brother, shaped and formed by him, which foreshadows her constant need to relate to him, her sense of inadequacy when she is without him, and her idealization of their symbiotic relationship throughout the novel: she will indeed wear his say in the stitches of her skin, and use him as an interlocutor to express her shame. The chapter provides her perception of her family, before she is born, as they learn of her brother's permanent disability and as her father leaves them behind: by the time the Girl is born, two tragedies have been announced. The perspective is not clear, since it incorporates all the characters' voices – for instance, the voices of the mother, the Girl, and her brother in quick succession:

Poke belly of baby that's kicking in me. Full in myself. Bustling hatchery. And I loved swimming to your touch. [...] Baby when you're born I pick your name. See you and me were busy with each other long before I came. (5)

Her birth is described as a tragic separation, and a loss of faculties (the sense of sight in particular), as new sensations come to the fore:

Mucus stogging up my nose. Scream to rupture the day. Fatty snorting like a creature. A vinegar world I smelled. There now a girleen isn't she great. Bawling. Oh Ho. Now you're safe. But I saw less with these flesh eyes. Outside almost without sight. She, asking after and I'm all fine. Hand on my head. Her hand on my back. Dividing from the sweet of mother flesh that could not take me in again. I curled there learning limb from limb. Curdled under hot lamps. Sorrow lapped. I'm so glad your brother's lived. That he'll see

you. It'll all be. But. Something's coming. Wiping off my begans. Wiping all my every time. I struggle up to. I struggle from. The smell of milk now. Going dim. Going blank. Going white. (5)

The insistence on a fundamental break from harmony and purity echoes the sense of loss and degradation, but also a tension between (happy, harmonious, safe) submergence, and disgust or abjection. The Girl is divided from the flesh of her mother, but also learns about bodily fluids, harsh smells, about being wiped clean. The smell of milk then signals the end of her pre-birth sensations, as she seems to lose consciousness, and that smell, usually linked to innocence, seems linked to decay (the occurrence of “curdled” earlier implies a negative association, although it is used metaphorically, and phonetically echoes “curled”). The color white, as we have seen with the grandfather's skin described as “white as hell” is associated with cleanliness but also brutality – i.e. an obsession with purity that justifies brutality – and an erasure of compassion and humanity.

Throughout the text, disgust relates to the Girl's growing sense of individuation and growth, as she learns to discriminate between clean and dirty, but it also reads as an affect she attempts to resist. The text, with its overflow of affect, of texture, of lexical disorder, points to dirt and bodily fluids as a site of resistance, enjoyment, and sensory formation, but also a site of lost innocence and morbid aspiration: towards the end of the novel, after her brother's death, the Girl yearns to go underground and join her brother in the “worming earth,” to be choked and mangled by roots, to rot and be turned into mud, stone, and dust (176). The role of disgust thus has an ambiguous, sometimes contradictory, relation to the Girl's “half-formation,” and is at the core of her attempt to discard her sense of shame and embrace a shameless stance.

2. A Girl's Ethics of Impurity

Despite the novel's construction as a gradual descent, the expansion/retraction of the protagonist's body in its social world and natural surroundings is central to the novel's structure and parallels the formative-destructive nature of shame. We can see two parallel trajectories at work in the text: a journey of degradation, which follows the progression of the Catholic sacraments and links the Church to the assignation of shame. This trajectory relies on strict binaries, where shame and disgust play a crucial role in adjudicating between good and bad and assigning blame – the malignant shame that results from this affective environment drives the Girl to her death. The other trajectory is one of resistance and vitality, and sketches an ethics of impurity at work in the book: it is predicated on the Girl's enjoyment of matter and of the sensory world, on the deliverance from the abjected body; on her resistance to form(ation) through *jouissance* as resistance to the fundamentally formative/normative structures of shame and disgust. In this model of half-formation, the character experiences a tension between individuation and abjection/submergence, as she is cast as an object of disgust.

At the beginning of the novel, the text emphasizes the Girl's enjoyment of language, nature, magic, of doing/saying/touching/licking the wrong things, and the pleasures of absorbing, ingesting, tasting, and excreting. The following passage shows a constant alternation between the possibilities of free interaction with the environment, and the harsh shaming structures that undo those possibilities:

Slap mud sandals. Slap mud all up my socks. I'll skid it. Scutter it. Holding thistles for fairy soup or foxgloves bad luck teacher calling giddy goat or I will tell your mother you were saying shite. Making out curses and people die. I can. Being magic. Saying fucker Christ. Into the fields. My bad words best collection. All the things my mother never taught

me. To shit in a field or run in from the rain. So I knew it always then and do it all the time. Oh crouch. Dock leaf. Plopped. True I could be killed for that. Such elicited outdoor. And a white one too. Should not have been licking chalk. I couldn't bide the loud Do not. Theeverysooften crunchy crunch. And white guilty gums. Poison I know. I'll die from it. But a little one. Ah a sneaky one and Oh I quail to think of that. You did something you should not have. Chalk's your downfall. Chalk's your crime. Day in school I. Didn't lick the blackboard just my hand. Smacked it palmly on. And sweet chalk powder lickety to my tongue. Swoon through lunch know I'll get caught or Who did that disgusting thing? Where's the glantóir? Teacher roaring. Who'd dare violate this board? She better confess because I always know. Panic runs lines across my face. I won't raise my hand. She'll kill me stone dead. Who did that? Nets not cast wide. The pair of ye, get up. (38)

The Girl's pure enjoyment is described through alliterations and repetitions, then through more conventionally structured sentences that incorporate the "roar" of the teacher to this sensory cacophony. The text moves from the slap of mud, the plop of excrement and the crunch of chalk to more discrete bodily matter, traces – the film of sweat, the "snail trails" of tears and snot. It also moves from jouissance as little death to the imagined death of humiliation, the metaphorical lapidation of public chastisement (in the doubt entendre "stone dead"). The next paragraph recounts the consequences of the transgression: (itinerant) pupils, whom the teacher calls "smelly tinkers" are targeted and punished:

Troublemakers. She knows them well. I sweat hands knowing I should tell. That love of chalk. Those smear is me. She crack their foreheads hard to each. Crack. Pulled to by the pony plaits with neat grease ribbons. I'm shame to that. (39)

The protagonist's shame is twofold: the shame of her sinful transgression ("That love of chalk") juxtaposed to the shame of being dishonest ("I sweat hands knowing I should tell") and, more largely, of being complicit in a racist act, even as she acknowledges the girls' plight (her complicity is emphasized by the image of "white guilty gums" which metaphorically allude to her white guilt).

The juxtaposition of those two scenes of enjoyment and punishment shows the constant alternation between the possibilities of free interaction with the environment, and the harsh shaming structure that undoes those possibilities. This is key to the dialectic of shame and shamelessness at work in the text. Shamelessness as an initial, childlike absence of shame, is swiftly replaced by a form of shame imposed on by others through punishment and abuse. Shamelessness then functions as a conscious, explicit rejection of shame through scandalous behavior, as the Girl grows up.

At the nexus of the two opposite trajectories of degradation and resistance, disgust functions as the visceral dimension of shame, its symptom of simultaneous rejection and fascination. For the Girl, the disgusting is first linked to enjoyment: the enjoyment of matter, the rejection of washing, of being scrubbed clean. Then, it is linked to her construction as an individual, when she becomes aware that the disgusting is what should remain outside, as we can see with the opposition of inside (house, brother) and outside (dirty, slug, bad smells, etc.). This paradigm is reversed when she accepts and reclaims the fact that she is "disgusting" (16); she refuses to be clean, which reads as a path of resistance against the normativity of disgust, but this strategy ultimately reads as an act of surrender to shame and acceptance of her downfall (177). This is the essential problem raised by the text: the Girl has been raised to feel disgust, but also to see herself as an object of disgust, of cringe, and therefore of shame. Contrary to her brother, she sees herself as beyond redemption:

You are filling with redemption. But I am for it. Me and my sins. Listen as they do it speaking loud in a thousand tongues. Could Germans understand it maybe French? Sounds A la la ka leash a na to me.

But when they go and it is night I'm a bit heart stopped. Gives chest hurt fright. Make the sign of the cross and I'll be fine. You'll be got because you drew on Christ, dirty thing. No if I die before I wake I pray to God my soul to take God bless you me Mammy Granda and Granny and don't let the end of time be tonight. You say thank you god for being so good and are not afraid of the dark. (37)

However, by emphasizing the contrast between the ideological violence of socially ingrained disgust, and the Girl's initial enjoyment of the disgusting, the text shifts the perspective on what we commonly understand to be disgusting: the character redefines the disgusting or the intolerable as the process of shaming to which she is subjected by her elders and her peers, as well as the ambiguities and the gaslighting that shape her relationship with her abusive uncle.

As Sianne Ngai points out, fascination is at the center of the dialectic joining of desire and disgust (333). However, she argues that there is an asymmetry in the pairing of the two, since disgust clearly designates its object, enacts a separation, while opening those who feel disgust to another form of relationality:

[W]hile disgust explicitly blocks the path of sympathy in Adam Smith's theory of moral sentiment, and is closely linked to his "unsocial" passions of resentment and hatred, there is a sense in which it seeks to include or draw others into its exclusion of its object, enabling a strange kind of sociability. (335-6)

Disgust prompts a form of rejection of what is distinctly intolerable:

[I]n its centrifugality, agonism, urgency, and above all refusal of the indifferently tolerable, disgust offers an entirely different set of aesthetic and critical possibilities from the one offered by desire. (345)

The first rape scene catalyzes the ambiguous joining of desire and disgust for the Girl, and, in turn, frames the abusive, exploitative uncle as an object of disgust. The Girl experiences desire and synesthetic enjoyment, but also guilt and disgust, and the text amalgamates those affects in the shape of shame (a multifaceted, recurring blush) to convey the confusion, thrill, and horror the Girl feels as she is taken advantage of:

Blood swirl and swirl. My thud cheeks up. You're not talking he says. Not saying much. What did I do? Nothing. Did I offend you? No. Quick with your nos aren't you just a bit quick? I think you're too shy of me for comfort's sake. Sorry I. He says I see you. What? I see you very clear. I see you. I do. So come here. And I can't help wondering if you see me? You see, I think you do. (53)

The syntactic confusion between the thudding heart and the rush of blood in the cheeks ("My thud cheeks up") echoes the difficulty to pinpoint what shame responds to, as the uncle begins to manipulate the Girl. As they kiss, she experiences a mix of pleasure and disgust, which she conveys through an evocation of the five senses:

Don't be angry with me he says. I'm very very honored. He touch my face. Kiss me again. And I touch his cheek. I touch his chin. I know now. What it feels. That mouth. His stubble. Grating. Think of cheese and not my skin blooming rashes. But it does red and pink alive and specially for me. The burn of it. That smell. That deep in his neck like warm and rich and far away. Like memory I might have had. Will make from this. Have made. And sound of kisses I did not know. Lapping. Thinking me of being at the shore and breaths like breeze

going over my head. He tasted. I don't know of coffee. Right. He tasted like dinner. Like something deep. (53-54)

All the senses are represented: the sense of sight ("red and pink"), touch ("grating"), taste ("of coffee," "like dinner"), sound ("sound of kisses," "breaths like breeze"), and smell. Smell is the only sense that remains unspecified ("That smell") and thus particularly evocative and mysterious, since it could be both good and bad – sense is also the most primal and synesthetic sense, particularly apt to be linked simultaneously to disgust and pleasure.

After their first encounter, the uncle successfully manages to make the Girl bear the burden of shame, as she attempts to reciprocate and respond to his touch by caressing him – she thus becomes the unnatural seducer, the object of disgust:

What. Stroke. He breathed out. No! Not for me he says. I stop that. I am not. I go red. I'm not that man. And I'm ashamed to have. What he did not want. But his hand on my chest no my breast. He says that's enough. For me? I am scalded. (54)

If we apply the related phenomena of alignment and allegiance proposed by Rita Felski ("Identifying with Characters") as modalities of identification, we see that the text blurs the relation between the affects and complicates the subject with which the reader can be expected to align. The text exposes the reversibility of the assignation of shame, and pushes the reader to reevaluate what is disgusting, what is intolerable.

3. Shame as Form

A. Shame and Language

Throughout the novel, language works as a way to deconstruct norms through which disgust functions. It also sets up the narrator as a deject, according to Julia Kristeva's definition:

The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), *situates* (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing. [...] A deviser of territories, languages, works, the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines—for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject—constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh. A tireless builder, the deject is in short a *stray*. (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 8)

The Girl's is a deviser of language, who crafts her own rhythm, and style, which marks her as a deject, but also expresses her desire to resist shame. Since the novel recounts the half-formation of a young girl which is soon overshadowed, overtaken by the destructive cycle of abuse that stunts progress and growth, the Girl evolves but her language remains purposely muddled. The particular, idiosyncratic language of the text could be attributed to the Girl's inability to fully own and assert a voice, since it is a patchwork of voices that includes her own (the Girl diminishes herself and incorporates other, shaming voices in her speech). As Marshall Lewis Johnson notes, the "narrative style, as invaded as it is by the free indirect discourse of her surrounding environment, produces an "invaded narrator" who cannot overcome or process her abuse" (430). Indeed, the Girl's individual voice is crowded by other voices, which undoes the project of individuation, since the text doesn't clearly differentiate between her voice and the voices of her abusers. The text mimics her violated, porous, fragmented body that ventriloquizes others, and expresses an affect of shame

that overflows, devours, expands, percolates. As Terry Castle argues about *Clarissa*, the text poses interpretative questions because of the “dissolution of claritas” and the fragmentary narrative and voice (Castle 27). It reflects the inadequacy of the child who expresses herself in her own idiolect, who is creative but not yet her own individual: the fragmented language becomes a symptom of shame, which is the affect that causes and results from this interrupted formation.

But language also becomes a site of resistance to shame: she creates an idiolect that refuses the constraints of grammar and conventional word choice. In this perspective, the novel’s style could be understood as a Deleuzian “stutter” that makes language “affective and intensive” (Deleuze 107), by expanding it from within, disrupting and destabilizing it.²⁹ In this novel, the stream of damaged consciousness draws the reader in a disturbingly intimate sphere, as close as possible to the body. The narrator’s original voice and absence of filters could be read as a strategy to overturn shame through performance, wordplay, exhibitionism:

As best described by Tomkins, shame effaces itself; shame points and projects; shame turns itself skin side out; shame and pride, shame and dignity, shame and self-display, shame and exhibitionism are different interlinings of the same glove. Shame, it might be finally said, transformational shame, is performance. (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* 38).

The text, and the narrator herself, are attached to the unfiltered flow of sensations as a means of simultaneously expressing and deactivating shame, and therefore invested in the sentimental fantasy of metaphorical and physical nakedness as synonymous with immediacy and authenticity. The text stays close to bodily experiences through a language that is both fluid and suffocating, sensory and dense, full of neologisms, allusions, juxtapositions, concatenations, and often lacking in punctuation. Because the Girl internalizes other voices, the language is kaleidoscopic and spills

²⁹ In his essay “He Stuttered,” Deleuze argues that a language can stutter: it is an unstable, heterogenous system that can follow different becomings and be pushed to its limits.

over a mere first-person account. Simultaneously, her attempt to stay true to her subjective experience leads to syntactic and lexical implosion which mimics the experience of the unbearable, as we can see in the last scene of sexual abuse with the use of unexpected emphases and phonetic spelling:

Done fuk me open he dine done on me. Done done Til he hye happy fucky shoves upo comes ui. Kom shitting ut h mith fking kmg I'm fking cmin up you. Retch I. Retch I. Dinneradntea I choke mny. Up my. Thrtoat I. He come hecomehe. More. Slash the fuck the rank the sick up me sick up he and sticks his fingers in my mouth. [...] Soon I'n dead I'm sre. Loose. Ver the alrWays. Here. mY nose my mOuth I. VOMit. Clear. CleaR. He stopS up gETs. Stands uP. Look. And I breath. And I breath my. I make. You like those feelings do you now. Thanks to your uncle for that like the best fuck I ever had. HoCk SPIT me. Kicks. uPshes me over. With his brown boot foot. WitK the soLe of it on my stomik. Ver. Coughing my. Y hard. He. Into the ditch roll in gully to the side. Roll. I roll. For it. He. Turn on the. I. Hear his zip. Thanks for fuck you thanks for that I hear his walking crunching. Foot foot. Go. Him Away. [...] I'm screaming in the blackness. Scream until I'm done my body. Full of nothing. Full of dirt the. I am. My I can. There there breath that. Where is your face off somewhere. Where am I lay down this tool. I fall I felled. I banged my face head I think. Time for somewhere. Isgoinghome. (193-194)

McBride was influenced by Sarah Kane in her resolve to express sensation without artifice³⁰ and unnecessary context, and by the “immediacy” (White 572) of a theater performance, as argued by Nina White:

³⁰ This is something that McBride acknowledges: “[T]he underlying aim of stripping away layers of artifice is one I identify with, not accepting the accepted impurities of form” (Collard).

The effect of the elongated language vividly creates the same uncontrollable wail: “My. llllllllllllllllll. Love my. Brother no.” The struggle to articulate “Love” is achieved with such effect as to make the reader feel as though they are intimately witnessing the Girl’s emotional breakdown as the language with which she renders her shock and grief undergoes a reciprocal form of fracture. We do not need to see the breakdown physically, as in Kane’s play, but instead are given an alternate and no less distressing form of fragmentation in McBridean style: “Ocean of that. Torn me. In two. Save. Clinging on the. No. No one. Drag me down. (566)

This shared experience creates a sense of “intimacy” with the reader. The recourse to unsentimental, unmediated representation of sensation demonstrates an investment in sentiment and in ambiguous modalities of identification. Alignment and allegiance ensure that the characters, as they blush and cringe, designate those who shame them as those with whom the reader shall not align or ally themselves. However, recognition is another mode of identification which is particularly important for novelistic characters whose construction as subjects hinges on recognition: “the struggle to know oneself and to be known” (Felski, “Identifying with Characters” 82). Recognition, according to Felski, prompts self-reflection and therefore an affective response which she differentiates from empathy, “with its associations of care, concern, and tolerance” (104). This “affective situation” mimics the helplessness and powerlessness one may feel when one is victimized, abused, and shamed: “recognition meets up with a pleasure in vicarious expression” (104).

But paradoxically, the overt display of sensation can impart a sense of exaggeration, excessive theatricality, and abstraction, precisely as the text resists traditional narrative structures, clear context, and realistic characterization; this coincides with a history of representation of fallen

women in the nineteenth century as “painted, melodramatic, histrionic” (Anderson 10), and therefore too distant to be empathized with.

According to Paige Reynolds, McBride’s use of modernist style “offers a prophylactic from intense absorption, keeping us at bay with its difficulty, its obfuscations, its knowing invocations of literary tradition” (Reynolds). In other words, the novel shows us abuse in spite of (rather than through) its modernist form. In her review of the novel, Anne Enright even argues that the narrator is “affectless”:

Drink may be involved, but the way the narrator inhabits – or fails to inhabit – her own account feels more French than Irish. Marguerite Duras and Catherine Millet come to mind as much as Sean O’Reilly or Edna O’Brien. She is affectless and highly transgressive – in her attraction to an older man, in her need to become a debased object; to break through pleasure and protect herself from the disaster that is desire. (Enright)

Modernist style, rather than being a “buffer,” as Reynolds argues, simultaneously conceals and reveals the horror of abuse: just as we have seen in *Sterne*, style functions as a negotiation of shame. The text is close to the narrator’s mind and body, but also at a distance, creating a level of abstraction: Duras, whom Enright mentions, writes clinical yet fragmented or cumulative prose; her texts refuse to delve into the psyche of the characters yet relay a charged atmosphere. Duras and McBride are both proponents of writing fast, offering a direct, unpolished, raw prose: even their writing process emphasizes immediacy, urgency (*A Girl* was written in six months). *A Girl* links lexical failure to woman experience, and the text is striving towards the *mot-trou*,³¹ rather

³¹ See Duras:

Il y aurait une écriture du non-écrit. Un jour ça arrivera. Une écriture brève, sans grammaire, une écriture de mots seuls. Des mots sans grammaire de soutien. Egarés. Là. Ecrits. Et quittés aussitôt.” (Duras 1993, 86)

And:

J’aime à croire, comme je l’aime, que si Lol est silencieuse dans la vie c’est qu’elle a cru, l’espace d’un éclair, que ce mot pouvait exister. Faute de son existence, elle se tait. Ç’aurait été un mot-absence, un mot-trou, creusé en son centre d’un trou, de ce trou où tous les autres mots auraient été enterrés. On n’aurait pas

than the Flaubertian *mot juste* – towards a language liberated from the classical constraints, from the demands of grammatical coherence.³²

Ultimately, the inventive and idiosyncratic language of the narrator remain restricted by the structure of the *Bildungsroman*, which sketches a progression (ending in successful socialization) or anti-progression (ending in solipsism or destruction). As Hector Ramírez proposes,

McBride herself seems genuinely frustrated with the limitations and conventions of the Irish *bildungsroman*. She breaks the language apart not to demonstrate some arbitrary linguistic pyrotechnic skill—she does it to demonstrate the limitations of the form she nevertheless feels obliged to deploy in order to tell her story. *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* is a frustrated novel, as it should be. (17)

As we see in *A Sentimental Journey*, the novel hinges on the anxiety of a false self-presentation, of inauthentic expression. The text displays a contradictory attachment to the ethics of transcribing the bodily experience of a victimized character (and this turning her into an object of sympathy), and the ethics of representing a character who is seen as a fallen woman but wants to have enough agency to escape the burden of shame through linguistic performance.

pu le dire mais on aurait pu le faire résonner. Immense, sans fin, un gong vide, il aurait retenu ceux qui voulaient partir, il les aurait assourdis à tout autre vocable que lui-même, en une fois il les aurait nommés, eux, l'avenir et l'instant. (Duras 1976, 48-49)

³² The invocation of Duras could also point to an inversion between *A Girl* and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*: while *A Girl* follows the half-formation of the female narrator, who is brought back to her status as a deject and a sexual object, *Lol* is described through the eyes of a man, who speculates and imagines her life, thus attempting to create a (half-fictional) subject out of a woman-object he wants to possess. The tension between intimacy and distance echoes the tension between the difficulty of female individuation through a first-person account, and her objectification through her relations with men.

B. Losing Face

The events that build up to the final scene, where the Girl drowns, show her metaphorically losing (her) face and then, and briefly, recovering it. The following passage takes place after her last rape by her uncle:

See my invisible face. i'm drowned i'm awake i'm drowned. [...] i go i off to the room where i lie and lie down on my face. (198)

She struggles to resist invisibility after this attack, but soon after, she has to resist the hypervisibility of her marked face in the morning, which prompts a shaming speech from her mother, who refuses to look at her:

Your brother's dead and all you can think about is. Before everyone. Before everyone you came here and displayed yourself looking for sympathy. From me? From me? You dirty. Don't now our uncle says. Says she you keep your nose out if nothing else. I've only so much patience and I've bitten my tongue too long. You have shamed yourself and me and your brother most of all. I can't even look at you. (199)

By contrast, her drowning acts like a recovery of the face that has been lost, denied, beaten: "I see. That face mine in the water. I'm. Crying laughing always happy where water is" (202). She imagines the face of her brother underwater and their dialogue starts again, the faces mirroring each other in a narcissistic play and remembrance of a happier, untainted past.

In the last paragraph, her name disappears, but not her face, described in detail, as if she were looking at herself from the outside:

Turn. Look up. Bubble from my mouth drift high. Blue tinge lips. Floating hair. Air famished eyes. Brown water turning into light. There now. There now. That was just life. And now.

What?

My name is gone. (203)

The Girl implicates the reader by taking the place of the third-person narrator, thus simultaneously letting her face appear and opening the possibility of a dialogue, of a reciprocal gaze – according to Levinas, the face, in all its vulnerability, prompts an ethical response, where words have failed and disappeared:

[I]n its expression, in its mortality, the face before me summons me, calls for me, begs for me, as if the invisible death that must be faced by the Other, pure otherness, separated, in some way, from any whole, were my business. (Levinas 83)

The last sentences of the novel open an ambiguous space of shame, which calls to mind the figure of Narcissus: like him, she falls into the deathly stasis of shame, not only by drowning but also by recreating the closed loop of looking at her own face from the outside. This is why the naked face on which the novel ends does not imply a possibility for the reparation of shame, nor should be read as an ode to the ethics of alterity, precisely because there is no designated Other who may respond and repair. The novel offers no diegetic solution to shame but expands the reach of the affect by implicating the reader's witnessing of the intolerable. The tragic death of the protagonist encapsulates the ambiguity of shame as an affective experience that escapes the individual, and that even escapes death.

Conclusion

McBride's novel is built on different levels of incommensurability:

- formal incommensurability, i.e. the tension between experience and expression, sensation and form

- Girl/*Bildung* (since the Girl is structurally excluded from *Bildung*): by the end of the novel the character is left without a formation (an arc of development rather than degradation) or a form (a name).

- the limitations of identificatory empathy

The affect of shame that results from the protagonist's misalignment has different valences in each novel, and both novels expose a formal inadequacy: for the man of feeling, shame signals his unresolved investment in sentimental encounters, his malleability yet autonomy, but also his status as a bourgeois character. As for the Girl, her shame that permeates the text is a malignant shame that gnaws at her and is the result of an amalgamation of socio-historical factors and experiences.

What does it mean to deny a protagonist an arc of redemption and to acknowledge that her formation will be incomplete? Up until the twentieth century and the publication of openly feminist novels that portray women as complex, desiring subjects (Angela Carter or Jeannette Winterson among others), women protagonists are often bound to a specific sexual shame. To be cast outside the circuit of shame, for better or for worse, a woman has to be unsexed, disguised as a boy or fully inhabiting the body and persona of the whore, the seductress, the self-serving opportunist (from early modern female *pícaras* to its nineteenth-century instantiations, like Becky Sharp in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*), often from a male authorial perspective.

A widening of perspectives can be observed in contemporary novels that increasingly question the bounds of sexual shame for female protagonists. This translates into reclamation and resistance, where sexual shame is repurposed, weaponized, transformed; as we have seen with *A Girl*, the shamelessness of the shamed protagonist takes the shape of the overexposure of the female body, which attacks and subverts the taboos around sexuality and femininity. While this novel ends on the victory of shame and trauma, other contemporary novels are also invested in modes of resistance to shame that directly engage with female sexuality, desire and bodily functions.³³

A more extreme example of shame reversal would be Sayaka Murata's 2018 disturbing, uncanny novel, *Earthlings*, which follows young Natsuki's quest for normalcy and integration into "the Factory" (i.e. society). While the initial trauma of sexual abuse leads to homicidal revenge, Natsuki's trajectory doesn't hinge on her transformation into a (shameless, brazen) murderer. Rather, sexual abuse justifies a motivated turn to the non-human, which offers an original path of (re/de)formation and, through dystopian horror, a way out of the circuit of shame: the novel ends on Natsuki's creation of a cannibalistic triad of half-eaten outcasts, opposed to the patriarchal system of reproduction, to bodily integrity and to the individual self.³⁴ In Murata's novel, the shame of the abused/abjected female body and the shame of a m(is)aligned subjectivity in a highly hierarchical and conservative social system bleed together to precipitate a particularly disturbing ending. Shame is the affect that translates the tension between positions, but is not as clearly linked to particular scenes of embarrassment.

³³ For instance, Raven Leilani reclaims the predominantly male genre of black comedy in *Luster*; Melissa Broder frames shamelessness as an unequivocal embrace of fatness and female desire in *Milk Fed*.

³⁴ Chapter 4 will be looking more closely at the relationship between shame and the posthuman/non-human.

However, in those examples, shame is the result of social violence, and more specifically sexual abuse; few novels feature a female protagonist who rejects the gendered implications of shame, i.e., where woman isn't merely synonymous with sexual(ized) and potentially abused body. This raises the question of the female picaresque novels that center on complex female characters that are not defined by sexual shame and trauma or by their reaction to it, but rather develop as uninhibited, desiring, sometimes conniving characters: one rare example *Orchid and the Wasp* by Caoilinn Hughes (2018) and its wily protagonist Gael Foss.

Chapter Two

Shame and Englishness: The Gentleman and the Butler

Introduction

“Is it beautiful or not beautiful to begin a novel with a question?” With this provocative retort to the famous opening line of *Daniel Deronda* (“Was she beautiful or not beautiful?”), Alex Woloch initiates his analysis of Eliot’s “late form” with a discussion of the novel’s “incipient self-consciousness” (166). Self-consciousness appears in the diegesis in a key passage where Gwendolen’s blush functions as a signifier of self-perpetuating embarrassment; the passage takes place “across the threshold of the volume division” (166), from book I, which ends on her introduction to Grandcourt, to book II, as Grandcourt comes forward:

Mr. Grandcourt's wish to be introduced had no suddenness for Gwendolen; but when Lord Brackenshaw moved aside a little for the prefigured stranger to come forward and she felt herself face to face with the real man, there was a little shock which flushed her cheeks and vexatiously deepened with her consciousness of it. (95)

If we consider shame to be the affect of self-conscious misalignment – encompassing vexation, shock, embarrassment, and somatized through the blush – what Woloch points out is the self-perpetuating circularity of shame, and the role of shame as a meta-critical affect between the diegesis and the novel as form – especially as it seems to create a correlation between Gwendolen being interrupted, disagreeably taken by surprise, and the novel’s own break and deferral between two books:

The elaboration of Gwendolen's oxymoronic "little shock" describes and generates the effect of intensification that we might see at work in the opening of the novel. Gwendolen's sense of consciousness is alienated from but also implicated in the flush that provokes it. The "deepen[ing]" operates like a pair of mirrors producing a continuous structure of reflection: Gwendolen's "vexatio[n]," at suddenly noticing the flush on her cheeks, only works to produce more vexation. Flush, vexation, shock, and consciousness blur together and reinforce – or "deepen" – one another. And yet this process takes place in an instant, rendered more conspicuous by the suspension of this moment across the break between books. (167)

We may add that this sentence about Gwendolen's shame of her own shame is particularly revealing with regards to her character. Indeed, while the phenomenon described here is a common occurrence for people suffering from erythema, the blush of shame seems more acute for Gwendolen when she is aware of blushing precisely because she is determined to control herself to the utmost: she has (already) failed to keep her cool in front of the gentleman she expects to master.

If Gwendolen's flush speaks to the self-consciousness of the text itself, it specifically emphasizes the tension between self-control and unpredictability, mastery and vulnerability. This tension is key to the structure and the politics of *Daniel Deronda* as a whole, if we consider the asymmetry of plots that generally but not exclusively maps onto Daniel's and Gwendolen's parallel journeys (Jewish and English, religious and matrimonial, national and domestic, male and female). It is also key to the construction of its main characters in relation to the expression of, absence of, or resistance to shame.

Daniel Deronda demonstrates, perhaps more than any of Eliot's other novels, how the *Bildungsroman* – as both the development of an individual striving for coherence and self-understanding, and the individual's insertion in the national body and bourgeois class – is bound up with shame. Shame as form – the metafictional self-consciousness that erupts in the diegetic blush and in the messiness of the novel (a baggy, heterogenous monster) – follows several levels of disjunction: between the Jewish plot and the English plot; between Gwendolen's messy undoing and Daniel's awakening to his hidden identity and slow conversion to Judaism; and, on the level of character, between the ideal of the English gentleman and Daniel's forging of his own un-English ideal; between Gwendolen's ideal of embodying the English master (capable of controlling her inner turmoil and taming her husband) and her degraded reality as a powerless, abused wife.

Indeed, instantiated or diegetic shame attaches to the characters in relation to both Jewishness and gender expectations, especially in the case of docile Mirah and headstrong Gwen, who are struggling with the fact that they are at the mercy of cruel men and inflexible laws and customs. Deronda experiences shame as moments of self-aware embarrassment or disgust, when he is associated with racial or social otherness (i.e. when he is mistakenly identified as Jewish, or when he is implicitly feminized). The English gentleman is the ultimate signifier of social superiority for Daniel; yet this very ideal is presented as problematic, undefinable, consistently opposed to Daniel's irresistible, grandiose Jewish destiny. Gwendolen and Mirah, on the other hand, keenly feel their loss of agency, and feel shame at being turned into objects, puppets. However, this shame takes a very different shape and direction for each character, the most obvious difference being Mirah's thwarted suicide attempt and Gwendolen's constant attempts to rebuke

men, resist and negate shame. Shame as a strong affective state permeates the novel, as the characters struggle on their journey towards cohesion, mapping onto the national, colonial project.

Daniel Deronda as a whole is concerned with the elaboration of character in relation to shame, which, as I explore in this chapter, has to do with the construction of the English gentleman. This chapter thus focuses on the ideal of the English gentleman that underlies the tensions of the characters' construction. Shame, which translates formally into the awry construction of the character-space, the imbalance of plots, is ultimately related to the failure to embody the ideal of English formation. In that sense the English plot and the Jewish plot are not as heterogeneous as they may seem at first glance: Daniel and Gwendolen's journeys evolve in relation to – both towards and against – the figure of the English gentleman.

By contrast, shame as metafictional symptom and diegetic affect manifests itself between the lines of a self-professed resistance to feeling in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*. This (un)sentimental journey, in the form of a first-person travelogue, traces the contours of butler Stevens' psyche, as his tergiversations, inconsistencies, and claims of transparency reveal his deep-rooted sense of shame, which has to be defined in relation to his master, an English lord. As Stevens reflects on his life and career, he indirectly addresses two events – or non-events – in his life: his inability to acknowledge and confront his employer Lord Darlington's entanglement with Nazis on the eve of World War II (those are described, at best, as well-intentioned lapses of judgement), and his failed romance with Miss Kenton, the former housekeeper. Shame is at the core of his social function – he is torn between the robotic servility and concealment of the subaltern, and the timid emergence of his individual voice and lover's discourse as he progresses through the countryside and through his jumbled memories.

Ishiguro's novel will serve as a contemporary counterpoint to *Daniel Deronda*, insofar as it similarly relies on the ill-defined figure of the English gentleman as *Bild*, as the gold standard according to which the narrator understands and shames himself – for Stevens, the English gentleman is the epitome of “dignity” and “greatness,” which is meant to rub off onto his loyal servants and dictate their mode of subservience. While Daniel leaves for Palestine on a mystical and political quest, reclaims his Jewish identity, and thus renounces the *Bild* of the English gentleman, and while Gwendolen half-heartedly embraces the values of feminine domesticity and sentiment, Stevens justifies his self-destructive idolization of the English gentleman by framing his debasement as a source of pride, thus overturning the logic of social shame. Indeed, unlike *Daniel Deronda*, whose two protagonists are members of high society and (*in extremis* for Gwendolen) spared the humiliation of having to work for a living, *The Remains of the Day* is essentially about the ideological justifications of the enduring class divide in democratic societies. It thus draws implicit parallels between the paradoxical yet complementary demands of individual betterment and the imperative of increased productivity for the profit of a happy few, through the ambiguous, unreliable figure of the butler.

I. *Daniel Deronda* by George Eliot

1. Building Character, Spreading Shame

A. Gwendolen's Shame

Daniel Deronda's characters are overdetermined and affected by others, porous to their influence – as we see in the beginning, Gwendolen starts to lose when she meets Daniel's eyes, which plays a part in her decision to marry Grandcourt for financial reasons:

But in the course of that survey her eyes met Deronda's, and instead of averting them as she would have desired to do, she was unpleasantly conscious that they were arrested--how long? [...] Deronda's gaze seemed to have acted as an evil eye. Her stake was gone. (6)

More specifically, the female protagonists, Mirah and Gwen, experience entrapment, shame, and a sense of stunted growth because they are treated like objects, debased, manhandled by elder relatives. Mirah is deprived of a real childhood, exploited, and starved from the love of her family; Gwendolen may have experienced abuse at the hands of her stepfather³⁵ and will endure a similar fate with Grandcourt. Marriage, in the novel, is presented as a particularly dangerous institution for women, since it can destroy their sense of independent individuality.³⁶

³⁵ This interpretation has been explored by several scholars: see Wilt; Penner; Reimer.

³⁶ In her introduction to the 2020 edition of *A Madwoman in the Attic*, Lisa Appaganesi observes:

Eliot's uniquely powerful representations of midcentury English life, the authors argue, depict women who are decidedly critical of the patriarchal settlement, particularly where marriage is concerned. Gwendolen in *Daniel Deronda* is married to a man whose "words had the power of thumbscrews and the cold touch of the rack." She is fearful of her "own hatred," her own murderous designs. Even that supreme idealist Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* who wants to worship at the shrine of knowledge and so chooses the scholarly Casaubon as a husband – wishing to be a partner to his project of writing "The Key to All Mythologies" – finds herself imprisoned in a sterile marriage to a "dried bookworm" a "death's head," "no better than a mummy," a marriage so coercive, Gilbert and Gubar write, that she oscillates between "murderous anger and suicidal self-punishment." (xiv)

Gwendolen surveils herself and is described during encounters with shame. She carefully curates a persona for others and herself, which raises questions of interpretation both for the reader and the other characters. The opening question points to the text's self-consciousness, but also starts a line of questioning, which is attributed to Daniel Deronda, and which raises doubt as to his own moral appraisal of another character:

Was she beautiful or not beautiful? and what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil; else why was the effect that of unrest rather than of undisturbed charm? Why was the wish to look again felt as coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents? (3)

Beauty as an aesthetic category is interwoven for Daniel with the possibility of deception. Daniel and other onlookers suspect some lingering, underground evil, and Gwendolen is often likened to a beautiful but manipulative serpent, a metaphor that recurs in relation to literary references. This passage, in turn, determines Daniel's own relationship with Gwendolen through a moment of shame. Gwendolen is externally constructed as a cold, beautiful, deceptive, perhaps already devious young woman:

The sylph was a winner; and as her taper fingers, delicately gloved in pale-gray, were adjusting the coins which had been pushed toward her in order to pass them back again to the winning point, she looked round her with a survey too markedly cold and neutral not to have in it a little of that nature which we call art concealing an inward exultation. (6)

However, she is faced with the sudden shattering of her carefully curated façade, as she sees herself through Daniel's unnervingly inscrutable eyes. Daniel sees her as a "problematic sylph," i.e. a figure of alterity, an enigma to be resolved – or, more precisely, the joining of exotic animality

and feminine mystery. Gwendolen perceives his gaze to be disapproving in this moment of shame; this short exchange will have important consequences on the eventual construction of Daniel as her moral guide and anchor.

The triangular pattern of shame – Daniel looks at Gwendolen, Gwendolen looks at Daniel, Gwendolen sees herself through Daniel’s eyes – is complicated by the chapter’s epigraph which precedes Daniel’s stream of consciousness, a metafictional meditation about men’s dependence on narrative structures, which creates a distance from Daniel’s (male) gaze and the tropes through which he reads Gwendolen:

Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning. Even science, the strict measurer, is obliged to start with a make-believe unit, and must fix on a point in the stars' unceasing journey when his sidereal clock shall pretend that time is at Nought. His less accurate grandmother Poetry has always been understood to start in the middle; but on reflection it appears that her proceeding is not very different from his; since Science, too, reckons backward as well as forward, divides his unit into billions, and with his clock-finger at Nought really sets off in medias res. No retrospect will take us to the true beginning; and whether our prologue be in heaven or on earth, it is but a fraction of that all-presupposing fact with which our story sets out. (3)

There is a stark contrast in the sudden shift of perspectives from Daniel to Gwendolen – between Daniel’s moralizing, openly Rousseauist ideas about the corruption of society and his abstract interrogation about Gwendolen as an exotic being, and Gwendolen’s immediate sense of being judged, her extreme self-control that leads her to repress a blush:³⁷

³⁷ Her immediate shame is implicitly opposed to the gentle, innocent, fawn-like demeanor of Mirah, who, later in the novel, doesn’t respond or even comprehend Daniel’s gaze when he first sees her: she walks away with “no blush, no special alarm” (166).

It did not bring the blood to her cheeks, but it sent it away from her lips. She controlled herself by the help of an inward defiance, and without other sign of emotion than this lip-paleness turned to her play. (6)

After having lost her money, Gwendolen receives a letter by her mother, and learns that their family is ruined. Since she only has “four napoleons left in her purse” (12), she decides to sell a necklace, which is mysteriously returned to her as she prepares to leave Leubronn and go home to Offendene. When she guesses that Daniel is the one who returned the necklace, she feels doubly shamed – she is reminded of Daniel’s gaze and interprets the gesture as a disrespectful reiteration of that gaze:

Gwendolen reddened with the vexation of wounded pride. [...] He knew very well that he was entangling her in helpless humiliation: it was another way of smiling at her ironically, and taking the air of a supercilious mentor. Gwendolen felt the bitter tears of mortification rising and rolling down her cheeks. No one had ever before dared to treat her with irony and contempt. (16)

The novel then insists on her self-control. Indeed, Gwendolen is presented as always susceptible to shame, unrooted, fundamentally homeless: “She had disliked their former way of life, roving from one foreign watering-place or Parisian apartment to another” (18). She then continuously hardens herself in expectation of disagreeable changes:

Pity that Offendene was not the home of Miss Harleth's childhood, or endeared to her by family memories! A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth, for the labors men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar unmistakable difference amid the future widening of knowledge: a spot where

the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection, and--kindly acquaintance with all neighbors, even to the dogs and donkeys, may spread not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood. (16)

Her nomadic upbringing exaggerates her feelings of shame and pride, of belonging nowhere yet of believing herself to be “exceptional.”

B. Character Construction and Self-Consciousness

As we have seen earlier, Woloch alludes to a continuity between Gwendolen’s diegetic shame and the novel’s explicit, experimental self-consciousness, which he reads in relation to Eliot’s previous works. He argues that *Middlemarch* successfully negotiates the *Bildungsroman*’s contrapuntal dynamic,³⁸ a balancing act *Daniel Deronda* openly refuses to perform. As the *Bildungsroman* of an English gentleman, the novel is distended and distorted both thematically and formally. This is due, in large part, to Gwendolen’s pull on the narrative, the force of her egotism (173) and, one may add, her shame. As an “anti-hero” in structural terms, she disrupts and disorients the physics of the novel. Hilary Schor also points out that Gwendolen projects her shame onto everything she encounters; for instance, when she imagines Daniel’s unknown mother as a copy of Lydia Glasher:

Gwendolen is obsessed with the wrong she has done Lydia, the fear that she has married Grandcourt simply for money, and the anxiety that everyone knows it; for this reason, she sees everywhere reminders of her own shame. (62)

³⁸ “*Middlemarch* famously balances public and private, psychological depth and social expansiveness, perspective and immersion; it seals together the individual and the social and intertwines the vertical movement of the *Bildungsroman* with the horizontal inclusiveness of the social-realist novel.” (168)

While the analysis of Gwendolen as a phagocyte that ultimately fails to subsume Daniel, precisely as he exits her world and turns to Judaism, accounts for the overarching character dynamics (i.e. the asymmetrical relation between Gwendolen and Daniel), the imbalance in the character-space can be expanded to the novel's characters at large, who are defined relationally and create asymmetries throughout the novel. If we look at the relationship between Gwendolen and her husband for instance, we see that egotism becomes the attribute of Grandcourt; Gwendolen becomes an unwilling puppet, and Grandcourt effectively takes the mantle of the anti-hero, diverting Gwendolen's affective energies and autonomy. His predatory behavior towards Gwendolen is predicated on the expansion, manipulation, and weaponization of her shame (of being bankrupt, of having betrayed and taken advantage of Lydia Glasher, Grandcourt's longtime spurned lover). He is described as actively looking for others' emotional investments in order to exert his power. According to the narrator's analysis of his character, feeling elicits and encourages his provocative absence of feeling, just as unfeeling tends to elicit feeling. Unfeeling ("not-caring") is thus as powerful a force as desire:

It is true that Grandcourt went about with the sense that he did not care a languid curse for any one's admiration: but this state of not-caring, just as much as desire, required its related object--namely, a world of admiring or envying spectators: for if you are fond of looking stonily at smiling persons--the persons must be and they must smile--a rudimentary truth which is surely forgotten by those who complain of mankind as generally contemptible, since any other aspect of the race must disappoint the voracity of their contempt. (516)

We may also wonder to what extent the motif of performance, key to Gwendolen's being in the world, interrogates the very logic of character construction. At the end of his analysis of theatricality in Eliot's work, David Kurnick argues that *Daniel Deronda* is invested in sustaining

the performance of a collective world, to the point of characters losing the bounds of their individual selves:

[I]nsofar as those characters resemble a cast, as Mirah intimates, they are haunted by a sense of their potential interchangeability—their status as members of a collective body we could call George Eliot’s lot. The novel’s most startlingly egalitarian vision derives from its suggestion that the mutual participation of its “players” in constructing their world undermines their interest in erecting characterological boundaries. (103-104)

While Kurnick focuses on the novel’s indebtedness to the “collective possibility” (104) of theater and its author’s own melancholic attachment to the genre, we may shift this focus to what this implies for novelistic character construction. Indeed, I have defined shame in relation to an ideal and to social integration: here, social integration is defined by confrontations with better or degraded doubles³⁹ – those confrontations tend to blur the lines between characters, most explicitly with Mordecai’s soul transfer to Daniel: Daniel, rather than completing his journey of self-actualization in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, becomes a composite character, whose vague yearnings for leadership are fertilized by Mordecai’s mystical vision for the Jewish people.

Moreover, the novel introduces a meditation on the very purpose and possibility of a character’s knowability. By comparison to Gwendolen’s striving for self-control, this is how Grandcourt is described shortly after her “shock”: “there was not the faintest smile on his face as he looked at her, not a trace of self-consciousness or anxiety in his bearing” (95). The passage then

³⁹ Daniel is defined in relation to Sir Hugo (a gentleman) and to Mordecai (a mystical Jew); Gwendolen is defined in relation to Mirah (her rival in love and in musical talent), to Miss Arrowpoint (her better in class, accomplishments, and privilege), and is echoed in the figure of the dying Princess, i.e. a figure of who she may have become. Hans, a secondary character, is defined against Daniel and props up the latter’s qualities: in all his sarcastic glibness and artistic idealism, he lacks Daniel’s far-reaching sympathy and Jewish heritage that make Daniel an obvious match for Mirah.

interrogates the structuring psychological logic of the modern novel, which raises questions about the point of creating characters in the first place:

Attempts at description are stupid: who can all at once describe a human being? even when he is presented to us we only begin that knowledge of his appearance which must be completed by innumerable impressions under differing circumstances. We recognize the alphabet; we are not sure of the language. I am only mentioning the point that Gwendolen saw by the light of a prepared contrast in the first minutes of her meeting with Grandcourt: they were summed up in the words, "He is not ridiculous." (95-96)

Gwendolen's shock and subsequent shame comes from the "reversal of her expectations," which nevertheless doesn't yield any clear picture of Grandcourt's character. In turn, the text expands on the difficulty of character construction – which is correlated to the formal ambiguities, contradictions, entanglements of the English gentleman. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that this often-quoted passage about the limitations of character readability and construction is about Grandcourt, the only English gentleman identified as such at length (with the exception, perhaps, of the placid and benevolent Sir Hugo Mallinger); we will examine later the particular contradictions of this character/figure. However, even though Grandcourt is the only character that elicits such an explicit "metafictional comment on the act of description itself" (Hunter 18), this extends beyond him, since the novel starts with the difficult appraisal of Gwendolen, and expands on Daniel's ambiguous, unreadable difference. As Ceri Hunter argues,

[O]ne of the problems exposed by *Daniel Deronda* is the extent to which language can 'know' a character. This problem finds its paradigm in the character of Deronda, whose dual inheritance defeats the social discourse of polite society. Simultaneously insider and outsider, both English gentleman and Jew, he cannot be easily described using the available

terms. Sir Hugo articulates his anomalous status in a language of labelling: “you would not ticket him off easily.” (18)

Daniel Deronda acknowledges that characters may resist definitions and characterization, that impressions may resist synthesis, that the alphabet itself may resist the coherence of an organized, understandable idiom.

If *Daniel Deronda* reflects on the construction of its characters, and if its characters are extremely conscious of how they appear to others, this self-consciousness and surveillance doesn't lead to Gwendolen's lucidity, since she cannot understand Grandcourt beyond his superficial acceptability: Grandcourt is appraised, “summed up” through a negation, “not ridiculous” – i.e. acceptable enough for Gwendolen to associate with him, to be seen in his company. Gwendolen ultimately sees who Grandcourt is, but too late. In a sense, she is always too late: the novel relies on the belatedness of her relationships (with Daniel in particular) and of events (her mother's letter reaching her after she has lost her money gambling, her mediocre singing voice, which it is too late to remedy, etc.). By contrast, Daniel's evolution is marked by a perfect alignment of events (despite his own belated story in relation to Gwendolen) – as if in a romance, with secondary characters as stylized figures (virtuous and pretty Mirah, Mordecai the Mystic); as if there were a mysterious plan to turn him into a Jewish leader. This progression and Daniel's characterization make him seem otherworldly – “not a man at all” according to Henry James (35) –, androgynous and angelic, oscillating between conventional *Bildung* and spiritual transformation.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ “Not seraphic any longer: thoroughly terrestrial and manly; but still of a kind to raise belief in a human dignity which can afford to recognize poor relations.” (35)

C. Belatedness and Self-Consciousness

As we have seen, diegetic shame is put in relation to textual self-consciousness. But the novel also challenges narrative and characterological coherence and continuity by dissociating diegetic origin and narrative beginning. Belatedness, flashbacks, and a generally confusing interweaving of timelines infer that temporality is out of joint in the novel. They also interrogate the concept of origin itself – which, as we will see, is directly related to the anxiety of ethnic and national origin for Daniel, and his disjointed, unstable *Bildungsroman*.

The first chapter's epigraph functions as a problematic beginning that meditates on its own purpose and on the idea of determinism. It is followed by a beginning *in medias res* that makes sense as a determining moment in Gwendolen's life, but not in Daniel's, and challenges us to understand whether, or in what degree, diegetic origin and narrative beginning overlap, and whether this first meeting of Gwendolen and Daniel foreshadows a particular ending (a love story, for instance).

As Gillian Beer emphasizes, the novel problematizes the ideas of origin and teleology:

In this novel George Eliot surveys the range of prescience – from that dependence on luck or 'system' which Gwendolen shows in the gambling scene at the beginning, to Mordecai's fulfilled confidence in the enactment of proleptic imagery. And the book moves into that central problem focused by Darwinian theory: is there a foreknown or an ultimate plan? Is teleology itself a fiction? – do we self-protectively interpret as providence that which is chance? (178)

The text thus questions the relationship between (narrative) beginning and origin⁴¹ – origin referring here to the narrative logic determining the importance of this event, i.e. the birth of Dan's

⁴¹ In *Inceptions*, Kevin Ohi explores "the non-coincidence of temporal and conceptual beginnings; the tension and interference among inception, beginning, birth, and origin" (5) and focuses on the word "inception" because it

consciousness of a possible evil (concealed by a beauty that produces “unrest”), and the birth of Gwendolen’s shame and desire through Dan’s gaze – an importance which is only given by the chronological “beginning,” whose contingency the narrator has only just exposed.

Beer points out that the reordering of narrative logic and chronology manipulates our understanding of, and investment in, the relationship between Daniel and Gwendolen as “the original one”:

[T]he sequence of the narrative confers prior rights on their relationship over that between Gwendolen and Grandcourt. This narrative authority is set against the authority of chronology or of social ties and brings into consciousness another kind of generation and descent: that of the text and its ordering. This ordering does not rely upon cause and effect, nor upon moral discrimination, but poises itself exactly at the point where chance and intention intersect. We *happen* to hear about them first. But we happen to hear it first because the author chose to tell it that way.” (194)

Beer details the incoherence of the opening paragraphs by pointing out that the epigraph already raises doubt as to which text counts as a beginning.⁴² Andrew H. Miller, on the other hand, focuses on the idea of deferral, and argues that the novel defers its own beginning through free indirect discourse:

Are these questions— questions that suspend the present tense as they unfold, ward off both the arrival of past-tense narration and the passing of represented time itself— are these

establishes “a form, institution, or consciousness; beginning, in contrast, can have the more neutral sense of merely locating a first moment in time.” (5).

⁴² “The epigraph is a secondary beginning – but its presence makes the opening of the main text also only problematically a beginning. [...] By the teasing formal relationships of these first paragraphs George Eliot signals from the outset that the source of authoritative statement is to be problematised. In the epigraph the direct authority of narrator is withdrawn and an assumed impersonality is substituted without a source; in the first sentences of text, interrogation is placed doubtfully between narrator and character’s consciousness, and between full consciousness and the meditative speculations of an attention not yet fully focused on its object.” (179)

questions raised by the narrator or by a character as yet unknown to us? [...] Beginning, Deronda defers its beginning, as if to ask again what it is to begin, but also to ask before what ever beginning it achieves, a coeval question: Who—or what— speaks these questions? (*The Burdens of Perfection* 91)

The unresolved metafictional questions that the novel raises about beginning and origin are echoed in the way Daniel's story is introduced and framed. The story of Daniel's background and childhood, i.e. the expected beginning in a *Bildungsroman*, appears late in the novel (Chapter XVI), which interrogates the very idea of a beginning and of a protagonist. Despite this unconventional, deferred structure, the chapter uses recognizable *Bildungsroman* tropes. Indeed, it sets up the first instance of Daniel's shame about his illegitimate origin⁴³ when he realizes, while talking to his tutor, that his uncle Sir Hugo might actually be his father:

He sat perfectly still with his back to the tutor, while his face expressed rapid inward transition. The deep blush, which had come when he first started up, gradually subsided; but his features kept that indescribable look of subdued activity which often accompanies a new mental survey of familiar facts.

According to Beer,

The novel condenses much significant anxiety from the shared preoccupations of the time. In the 1870s the search for origins, the enquiry into their nature and into their relationship to development had become an intellectual obsession. (182)

Indeed, Daniel is invested in knowing (rather than searching for, like he does for Mirah) the truth of his origination, so that he can become the Jewish leader he is meant to be. However, he also rejects the idea of being an ancestor, and is keen on forging his own path, when Sir Hugo attempts

⁴³ A foundational trope for the novel, if we follow Marthe Robert's analysis in *Roman des origines, origines du roman*.

to nudge him forward. The text therefore establishes a temporal disjunction not only between origin (Daniel's *Bildungsroman*) and beginning (Daniel's appearance in the first chapter and his subsequent disappearance), but also between Daniel's desire to know who he is, his Hamlet-like deferral of confrontation, and his refusal to be labelled, inserted into a lineage, assigned to a predetermined role within English society. These disjunctions function as the necessary formal consequence of a critique of the English gentleman as a particular figure, and of Englishness as a more general category.

2. The English Gentleman: The Ideal

Sentimentalism in *Daniel Deronda* dictates the trajectory of sympathetic *Bildung*: Deronda directs his sympathy toward Mirah and Mordecai, but also toward the tormented Gwendolen, and, in turn, directs her to expand her sympathy to others – and thus to become a domesticated woman of feeling rather than an unfeeling snake. However, the ideal of fellow-feeling, linked to the eighteenth-century conceptualization of the English gentleman, is what ultimately makes both Daniel and Gwendolen deviate from and renounce the ideal of the English gentleman (defined primarily in racial and national terms for Daniel, in terms of mastery and masculine power for Gwendolen). The figure of the English gentleman is thus posited as an impossible ideal for both Daniel and (implicitly) for Gwendolen, which fuels their sense of shame at their own inadequacy.

Indeed, Gwendolen can be read, much like the Jane Austen's "handsome," authoritative, and capricious Emma Woodhouse, as a woman who has the aspirations of a man and is punished for it – a woman who subverts expectations of feminine meekness, and who can be cruel, inconsiderate, arrogant. As Wendy Lee points out: "The charge of insensibility in this case is an understatement" (2018, 163). She openly despises English gentlemen but aspires to their freedom,

power, and distances herself from stereotypically Victorian attributes of appropriate femininity (the angel in the house) – unlike the delicate, childlike, shy Mirah. Gwendolen experiments with variations of femininity, aware of the contradictions that she presents. For instance, when talking to her mother, she states that she is dissatisfied with her turned-up nose, as she wants to appear majestic:

I wish you had given me your perfectly straight nose; it would have done for any sort of character – a nose of all work. Mine is only a happy nose; it would not do so well for tragedy. (23)

Her nose, which gives her the appearance of innocence and girlhood, had been commented on in the first pages of the novel by onlookers in Leubronn:

“A man might risk hanging for her--I mean a fool might.”

“You like a nez retroussé, then, and long narrow eyes?”

“When they go with such an ensemble.”

“The *ensemble du serpent*?”

“If you will. Woman was tempted by a serpent; why not man?”

“She is certainly very graceful; but she wants a tinge of color in her cheeks. It is a sort of Lamia beauty she has.”

“On the contrary, I think her complexion one of her chief charms. It is a warm paleness; it looks thoroughly healthy. And that delicate nose with its gradual little upward curve is distracting.” (8)

A straight, long nose is generally seen as a sign of nobility, a marker of high class, and conventional, English beauty. By contrast, Gwendolen’s “happy nose” has already been read

against and in relation to evil femininity – she is both a “Lamia beauty,” mysterious, treacherous, and dangerous, and a healthy-looking, attractive, pretty girl, rather like *Adam Bede*’s Hetty Sorrel.

When the text details Gwendolen’s rejection of matrimony, it encapsulates the tension at the heart of Gwendolen’s doomed *Bildung*:

Of course marriage was social promotion; she could not look forward to a single life; but promotions have sometimes to be taken with bitter herbs--a peerage will not quite do instead of leadership to the man who meant to lead; and this delicate-limbed sylph of twenty meant to lead. For such passions dwell in feminine breasts also. (32)

The “problematic sylph” that Daniel saw in the first pages, recurs here as the embodiment of an actual problem the novel poses: how can a “delicate-limbed sylph” – a woman with an all-too-feminine, ethereal, decorative constitution – “lead”? In her article about Gwendolen’s autoeroticism, Thierauf reads her willfulness as thwarted by society and Deronda’s patriarchal sentimentalism, and points out different ways in which Gwendolen, who feels limited by her body and female embodiment, “plays at being a man”:

Gwendolen, with her flock of subservient females and her distaste for the “insipidly feminine” (24; ch. 3), plays at being patriarch herself, a pursuit unmistakably tied to her masterful horsemanship. [...] Although she is unprepared for the reality of men’s sexual egoism and excess (and sexual intercourse in general), Gwendolen plays at being a man with her archery, hunting, and gambling (445-453)

As a lady left unmarried, with no other prospects but to live with her mother and sisters, Gwendolen is excluded from *Bildung*, which, for ladies, would be the success of the marriage plot; she is stuck in an eternal middle. Hilary Schor’s more optimistic reading of Gwendolen’s fate

insists on the epistemological and ethical consequences of such a structural disorientation, since Gwendolen is not “forced into an ending” which would traditionally be that of marriage:

George Eliot closed *Middlemarch* with the seemingly wise statement that “every limit is a beginning as well as an ending,” but she went on to make clear what she meant: “marriage, which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a great beginning.” Gwendolen Harleth is spared both such an ending and such a beginning; instead, she is offered something far more radical, a chance to continue as she is. There may be nothing more interesting, after all, for a heroine (or for that matter, a novel) to do than to choose to live in the necessary, illusory, make-believe middle. (Schor 72-73)

Since marriage has already been defined as the ending that would stunt Gwendolen’s growth, her inchoate state at the end of the novel points to the limitations of traditional, matrimonial *Bildung* for women, and thus encourages the absence of an ending, even of a happy one, while also excluding her for a position of leadership and power.

The English gentleman, as a category, is fundamental to the plot, yet rarely and vaguely defined in the novel – it is mostly introduced in relation to what is excluded from that category. *Daniel Deronda* alludes to the category of the English gentleman man through the enumeration of types, which include the “English aristocratic and English plebeian” (4). Although there were a few detailed descriptions of the English gentleman as a type in the nineteenth century,⁴⁴ that

⁴⁴ For instance, Alison Younger quotes “an 1867 tract by Samuel Roberts Wells, who uses a combination of culturally accepted pseudo-sciences including physiognomy, phrenology and anatomy to classify the English gentleman” in her chapter on monstrous masculinities:

The English cranium is large [. . .] brain is power; and the more you have of it the better, provided it be in the right place and you have the physical system to sustain it (as the Englishman has).

Physically the Englishman is broadly built, stout, and amply developed throughout. He has a full chest, a good stomach, an active liver, a large heart. His digestion, circulation and nutrition are perfect; and the supply of vitality is always equal to the demand. He is hale, rosy and rotund.

Mentally he is proud, self-sufficient, combative, ambitious, energetic, aggressive, persevering, practical, acquisitive, economical, cautious, secretive, firm, affectionate, benevolent and religious. He is often rough in his manners and bluff in his speech but is at heart kind and tender. (Wells, quoted in Young 129)

category was primarily defined *against* non-Englishness, femininity, physical and mental weakness, according to (sometimes overlapping) gender, racial, and religious differences:

[T]he ideal appearance of the English male (the tall, strong, clean-cut English man) specifically excluded those who were stunted, narrow-chested, excitable, easily wearied, or inefficient – qualities associated with women, the lower classes, Jews, Papists, Spaniards, the French, and colored peoples. (Krishnaswamy 292).

The English gentleman expresses moderation, privilege, worldly ease, and a certain emotional restraint; his education provides him with “a passport in life” (157), as Sir Hugo puts it. According to Mr. Gascoigne, the English gentleman is practical, utilitarian even, religious but not fanatical, “free from nonsense” (25). Following those principles, Sir Hugo cautions Daniel against any extraordinary course of action (“I recommend you not to be extravagant – yes, yes, I know – you are not inclined to that; but you need not take up anything against the grain”), but also against any excessive academic endeavor that would turn him into a “machine”:

The truth is, unless a man can get the prestige and income of a Don and write donnish books, it’s hardly worth while for him to make a Greek and Latin machine of himself. (156)

According to David W. Toise, the novel highlights two different models of the English gentleman, which function *with* rather than against each other:

Sir Hugo, Daniel’s adoptive uncle, represents early-modern aristocratic control of the passions and Deronda figures as the man of culture, whose emotionally suffused self-denial resembles female sentimentality but operates in the modern spheres of nation and race. Eliot’s novel allows us to see, for example, how Victorian sentimentality is one recasting of aristocratic ideology and how the man of culture is, in turn, a recasting of Victorian

sentimentality. Through a dialectical process, each form of identity continually builds on what comes before, without simply replacing the older model. (129)

Daniel's "plenteous, flexible sympathy" (319) is framed as excessive, even self-destructive. Indeed, his "disease of sympathy" (Carroll) – or, perhaps, lack of egotism and sustained individualist ambition – prevents him from focusing on his own development and aspirations: he helps Hans to his own detriment, spends energy on helping Mirah, the Cohens, Mordecai, Gwendolen.⁴⁵

Daniel's excess of sympathy is key to his ambiguous relation to the category of the Englishman or English gentleman. For instance, in the passage where Gwendolen first observes Daniel, she exoticizes him while labelling him as an Englishman, in name and demeanor: she paradoxically inserts him into and excludes him from the category of Englishman. Indeed, while Daniel reads Gwendolen as "probably evil," this scene also interrogates, through Gwendolen's own gaze, "the secret of form or expression" in Daniel's eyes (3). When she asks Mr. Vandernoodt if Daniel is an Englishman, she has already found him to be superior to others: "[H]e was of different quality than the human dross around her" (6). While Julia Kuehn insists on the "exotic eroticism" that drives the encounter between Gwendolen and Daniel, the passage insists on the idea that he sees through her; her interrogation about who he is has more to do with how *he* sees *her* than how she sees him, which means that she is more invested in how he may be ethically different from the English gentlemen she knows, and not just "ethnically different" (Kuehn 20). Daniel's appeal as an ambiguous English gentleman is related to the fact that Gwendolen has

⁴⁵ This has consequences on Daniel's *Bildung* and on the novel as a whole: the novel's awareness of the irresolvable disjunction between *Bild* and *Bildung*, on the level of narrative and logical structure, on the level of character construction, and in the diegetic philosophical discussions that oppose English and Jewish identities according to a set of binaries (immortal/mortal, predetermined/contingent, moderate/fanatic, etc.) can be traced back to its (and Daniel's) insistence on the expansion of sympathy, on the understanding of "other points of view," which results in a dizzying multiplication of perspectives.

been repeatedly disappointed, abused, underestimated by English gentlemen (her uncle, her abusive stepfather, her suitors). Later, she is thus indifferent and oblivious to his practice of Hebrew, his connection to Mirah and to Judaism, but is invested in something she doesn't recognize.

While sentimentality and aristocratic ideology are intertwined rather than neatly opposed, I would add that Daniel's sentimentality, which hearkens back to the eighteenth-century model, is influenced and renewed by his exposure to Judaism, and thus othered, positioned beyond words and rationality (going back to his mother's origins, he believes in his sacred connection with Mordecai and his destiny as a leader of his race). Sympathy becomes morally ambiguous, racialized, exaggerated to a mystical point, as we can see in his relationship with Mordecai. It becomes the right outlet for queer feeling, and contrasts with Sir Hugo Mallinger's emphasis on practicality and his defiance of fanaticism, Grandcourt's extreme indifference and insensibility, but also with Hans Meyrick's levity and superficial professions of love.

In other words, the trajectories of Sir Hugo and Daniel tend to exaggerate the differences between them, thus putting forward two contradictory embodiments of the English gentleman: one who is able to feel with/for someone else, to the point of a confusion of identities and a racialized, religious, homoerotic bond which puts him at odds with the category of English gentleman; one who projects a caricature of English pragmatism.

The novel sets up a series of binaries that opposes the tentative characteristics of the English gentleman to those of the Jew, and that highlights Daniel's gradual distancing from the category of the English gentleman: rational/ineffable, mortal/immortal, contingency/destiny, blending of cultures/proto-Zionism, pragmatic/religious. As the novel reiterates common stereotypes about Jews, it thus endows them with a mystical power that opposes English

pragmatism and defiance of the mere hint of fanaticism. This opposition results in a language barrier insofar as the ineffable connection between Daniel and Mirah as Jews is opposed to a fundamental separation between Daniel and Gwendolen. While, according to Ceri Hunter, “Deronda’s and Mirah’s affinity is grounded not in Hebrew, but in a shared transcendence of language” (21), the text emphasizes a break in intelligibility between Daniel and Gwendolen:

[H]e could not go on easily – the distance between her ideas and his acted like a difference of native language, making him uncertain what force his words would carry. (703)

In this passage, this break is compared to a language barrier between characters: the comparison reinforces Daniel’s conversion to Judaism and Jewish culture, which draws him away from the culture he once shared with Gwendolen. Similarly, the novel opposes the recent history, traditions, and origins of the English gentleman, and the long, immemorial Jewish history – its “slow deposit of eighteen centuries” (466) – that predates, encompasses, and can discard “Englishness” as it appears in the novel.

Despite the positive attributes associated with Judaism, the Jewish characters are put in relation to common stereotypes:⁴⁶ Klesmer ironically refers to himself as the wandering Jew, even though he is integrated into high society, far from the stereotype of the penniless vagabond and the Ashkenazi peddler; Mirah is often opposed to her family, which is part of the Jewish neighborhood in Whitechapel, and Mirah’s father (his behavior, his appearance) remains her primary source of shame. When Daniel visits a synagogue and is asked his mother’s maiden name, he has, by his own standards, an odd reaction:

⁴⁶ “[L]ike the Wandering Jew of legend, they are to be seen as perpetual aliens whose *raison d’être* may only be signalized through their difference from the host group and their apparent incapacity to assimilate...[t]heir outlandish garb and lowly status are to be seen as markers of their perpetual alienation, the fulfillment of biblical prophecy that in the countries to which they have been dispersed they may find no ease or rest.” (Felsenstein 64-65)

Deronda had a strong resistant feeling: he was inclined to shake off hastily the touch on his arm; but he managed to slip it away and said coldly, "I am an Englishman." The questioner looked at him dubiously still for an instant, then just lifted his hat and turned away; whether under a sense of having made a mistake or of having been repulsed, Deronda was uncertain. (323)

While the setting and the exotic descriptions of racialized Jews suggest that Daniel reacts in disgust and refuses to associate himself with the Jewish community in London, the text insists on his shame at not knowing himself well enough to provide a true answer. Daniel's fundamental shame, which determines his irresistible yet very slow pull towards Judaism, points to a contradiction in his upbringing by Sir Hugo, who insists on his having a foreign name yet raises him as an English gentleman; who offhandedly suggests Daniel could be interested in singing for the stage (which, by Daniel's estimate, casually excludes him from "the class of gentlemen") but also in going into politics, as any English gentleman might do. Daniel experiences shame when imagining himself "dressed up" as a "wonderful toy" (150) – feminized and thus made illegitimate⁴⁷ – but is not drawn to English politics either, a career described as fit for wealthy, land-owning English gentlemen who have nothing else to do. In his awkward position, Daniel resists exhibitionism (like Mirah) and tries to conceal himself (for example, when he tears off his signature in his note to Gwendolen, or when he hums opera on the river while refusing to perform in public, or when he works in the shadows to find Mirah's family), but he also wants to be a leader, a conqueror. The tension between exhibitionism and concealment is precisely the tension inherent to shame, which maps onto the identificatory tension between his Englishness and Jewishness.

⁴⁷ "Daniel's fear of illegitimacy comments upon, rather than supersedes, his fear of theatricality: if to be theatricalized is to be feminized, to be feminized is almost automatically to be rendered illegitimate—if not in the strict legal sense, then in the more disturbingly inclusive sense of the almost sexually unfitting "play" in which Lydgate, Laure, Gwendolen, and, most spectacularly, Daniel's mother, the diva, are engaged." (Litvak 168)

As a result, Daniel openly criticizes and problematizes the category of the English gentleman, by implying that it fosters a close-mindedness and a lack of curiosity towards difference, which has both moral and epistemological consequences:

I want to be an Englishman, but I want to understand other points of view. And I want to get rid of a merely English attitude in studies. (162-163)

A contradictory sense of shame is at work here: Daniel feels shame of not living up to the expectations of the English gentleman; but, as soon as he is claimed by gentleman-making institutions, he also feels preemptive shame at being limited by this category, at adopting a “merely English attitude,” which foreshadows his growing interest in Judaism. This contradictory stance comes to a head when he meets his mother, where the Princess’ shame in being a Jew is overturned by Daniel’s pride at reclaiming his heritage, without rejecting his identity as an English gentleman.

3. The English Gentleman: The Monster

Grandcourt is not an outlier, but an extreme, Gothic, monstrous version of the English gentleman. For instance, Grandcourt is initially defined against the “correct Englishman”:

[W]hen he raised his hat he showed an extensive baldness surrounded with a mere fringe of reddish-blond hair, *but* he also showed a perfect head; the line of feature from brow to chin *undisguised by beard* was decidedly handsome, with only moderate departures from the perpendicular, and the slight whisker too was perpendicular. It was *not possible for a human aspect to be freer from* grimace or solicitous wriggings: also it was perhaps not possible for a breathing man wide awake to look less animated. The correct Englishman, drawing himself up from his bow into rigidity, assenting severely, and seeming to be in a state of internal drill, suggests a suppressed vivacity, and may be suspected of letting go

with some violence when he is released from parade; but Grandcourt's bearing had *no rigidity*, it inclined rather to the flaccid. His complexion had a faded fairness resembling that of an actress when bare of the artificial white and red; his long narrow gray eyes expressed *nothing but* indifference. (95, my emphasis)

Despite this opposition between rigidity and flaccidity, the implication here is that the habit of rigidity, repression, and self-control – of a lack of passion – can lead to this negative being that Grandcourt embodies: unfeeling, indifferent, inanimate to the point of flaccidity rather than firmness.⁴⁸ Flaccidity, as the necessary consequence of a lack or a restraint of passion, becomes Grandcourt's main characteristic, inflecting his motivations and mannerisms, from his languid drawl⁴⁹ to his indifference to politics. Grandcourt is feminized and theatricalized (as we see here with the comparison to an actress), but also depicted as cruel and inflexible in his treatment of women, and not prone to hiding his nature ("undisguised"). In the passage quoted above, Grandcourt's defects and qualities are conditional, and the description relies on lack and negation. The English gentleman is suggested as an ideal form to which Grandcourt doesn't completely adhere, even as he *is*, in fact, an English gentleman.

Indeed, the novel combines two contradictory ideas: Grandcourt embodies the refined stage, the ideal evolutionary result of a noble lineage, and he also embodies its degeneration. When the novel explains Sir Hugo Mallinger's ancestry, which originates in the Norman conquest, going back to "a certain Hugues le Malingre, who came in with the Conqueror--and also apparently with a sickly complexion which had been happily corrected in his descendants" (89), it emphasizes an

⁴⁸ The other prominent representative of English gentlemen, Sir Hugo Mallinger, is also positioned outside of the process of formation, conflated with his ancestor and his almost (French) namesake, benevolent but content, not driven to grow or evolve.

⁴⁹ The words "languid" and "languidly" are primarily associated with Grandcourt in the novel, but occasionally to Gwendolen and her mother – both of whom are victimized by English gentlemen, perform different versions of distance, delusion, and self-control, and struggle with their inability to access the financial and sexual freedom of English gentlemen.

original (perhaps French) defect that is later erased as the descendance is progressively “revised and embellished,” “refined.” As we have seen earlier, a straight nose is a sign of nobility, and this is the sign the narrator traces in order to identify Sir Hugo and Mallinger as relatives – Grandcourt, rather than a degenerate and thus atypical English gentleman, is its perfect incarnation:

In Sir Hugo's youthful portrait with rolled collar and high cravat, Sir Thomas Lawrence had done justice to the agreeable alacrity of expression and sanguine temperament still to be seen in the original, but had done something more than justice in slightly lengthening the nose, which was in reality shorter than might have been expected in a Mallinger. Happily the appropriate nose of the family reappeared in his younger brother, and was to be seen in all its refined regularity in his nephew Mallinger Grandcourt. (146)

On the other hand, the novel also draws attention to Grandcourt's defects as an “heir”:

Grandcourt's appearance when he came up with Lady Mallinger was not impeached with foreignness: still the satisfaction in it was not complete. It would have been a matter of congratulation if one who had the luck to inherit two old family estates had had more hair, a fresher colour, and a look of greater animation; but that fine families dwindled off into females, and estates ran together into the single heirship of a mealy-complexioned male, was a tendency in things which seemed to be accounted for by a citation of other instances. It was agreed that Mr Grandcourt could never be taken for anything but what he was – a born gentleman; and that, in fact, he looked like an heir. (391)

While he is not foreign, the text insists on his association to a generalized dwindling – of hair, color, animation, and male DNA. Looking “like an heir” is thus the culmination of a lack of personal attributes and volition, since he has only, as Beaumarchais would say, “put himself to the trouble of being born” a gentleman.

The earlier passage about the impossibility of description therefore needs to be read in relation to the uneasy otherness of Grandcourt. Indeed, if this description leads the narrator to wonder “Attempts at description are stupid: who can all at once describe a human being?”, this may be because Grandcourt is portrayed as contradictory. The unclear rhetorical figure of the Englishman (as a failed, undecipherable, contradictory text) thus subsumes and allows the figure of Gothic corruption to emerge through metaphor, through the interstices of negation and circumlocution.

The association of Daniel with both Christian sentimentalism and Jewish mysticism, idealistic benevolence, foreignness, and, simultaneously, the association of a quintessentially English gentleman like Grandcourt with Gothic tropes of non-human, unfeeling predatory behavior undercuts the binary logic of Englishness being threatened by a racially foreign, unnatural power, which is a major trope in late Gothic fiction (second half of the nineteenth century). Indeed, the identification of Gothic sensationalism within the construction of the English gentleman may allow us to displace the articulation of “competition between theory and sensationalism” (Litvak), which has structured analyses of the novel.⁵⁰ Before nuancing Eliot’s rejection of theater and examining her rejection of abstraction and sublimation in *The Spanish Gypsy*, David Kurnick summarizes:

If Eliot is keen to specify the nontheatrical status of her writing, modern critics have argued that she does so to insulate it from the vulgarity of the theater. The tendency of critics who treat Eliot and theater is to place her firmly on the side of abstraction, disembodiment, and sublimation. (70)

⁵⁰ See Cynthia Chase, Catherine Gallagher, Joseph Litvak, David Kurnick.

While sensationalism has primarily been studied in relation to vulgar, bad Jewishness⁵¹ (which both Daniel and Mirah reject) and the Gothic in relation to Daniel's association with Jewishness and queerness,⁵² I emphasize the role of Gothic sensationalism in the novel's construction of Englishness: the English gentleman is suggested to be a corrupted, vampiric, colonial figure.

Grandcourt is consistently portrayed as cold-blooded, lizard- or alligator-like, pushing the passivity of the gentleman to an extreme, since he doesn't do anything but destroy those around him: "his negative mind was as diffusive as fog, clinging to all objects, and spoiling all contact" (517). The text insists on his reptilian presence, and his predatory, vampiric⁵³ relation to others.

Through Grandcourt, the novel synthesizes the brute force that underlies the autonomy, independence, and self-mastery of the English gentleman. As an ideal, the English gentleman starts as the mere negative of femininity, non-whiteness, non-Anglican affiliations, and is enforced through prejudice and violence – Grandcourt stands out as the epitome of the English gentleman. This exoticization of the Englishman as a Gothic monster thus goes hand in hand with Grandcourt's characterization as a colonial master.

⁵¹ According to Joseph Litvak, the novel repudiates bad Jewishness; responding to Leavis' famous opposition between the good part and the bad part of the novel, he points out that "especially as personified by Gwendolen [...] the 'good part' is already tainted by bad Jewishness, and can be saved only by the good Jewishness of the 'bad part.'" (183)

⁵² *Daniel Deronda* has been read in relation to the Gothic tradition because of Daniel's journey of conversion, which, according to Royce Mahawatte, reworks the vampire narrative and the paranoid male trope – Mahawatte's analysis focuses on the articulation of the Gothic and homosexual panic. More generally, the Gothic is often linked to imperialist rhetoric and to depictions of racial, socio-cultural otherness: Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, but also Trollope's *The Prime Minister*, which follows the political attempts of an ethnically ambiguous character. Those themes foreshadow the late nineteenth-century imperial Gothic (Suzanne Daly), and the modernizing of Gothic that Stephen Arata associates with Stoker, Stevenson, and Wilde - which bring "the terror of the Gothic home" (621). Given this context, we may argue that the novel has Gothic undertones; it prefigures Dracula, with its fascination and anxiety about miscegenation and racial improvement, and, more specifically, its fascination with Jewishness.

⁵³ The text most explicitly overturns the metaphor of the vampiric Jew through a monologue by Mordecai, where he describes the alienating, self-hating double consciousness of the assimilated Jew, "who sucks the blood of mankind" precisely because he is being deprived of community and recognition – a vampiric condition brought on by the idealization of the English gentleman, which the Jew attempts to mimic:

What is the citizenship of him who walks among a people he has no hardy kindred and fellowship with, and has lost the sense of brotherhood with his own race? It is a charter of selfish ambition and rivalry in low greed. He is an alien of spirit, whatever he may be in form; he sucks the blood of mankind, he is not a man, sharing in no loves, sharing in no subjection of the soul, he mocks it all. Is it not truth I speak, Pash? (466)

The novel's several exploitative, dehumanizing relationships elicit comparisons to slavery, most explicitly when Gwendolen and the Princess bitterly reflect on the female condition, one that resists attempts at male sympathy. For instance, this is how the Princess addresses Daniel:

No You are not a woman. You may try – but you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl. (554)

Similarly, when Gwendolen recounts her despair as she is forced to follow her husband to Genoa and sail with him, she describes herself as a “galley-slave” (610), a comparison which evokes older forms of forced labor (including in Genoa) and therefore avoids an explicit allusion to the nineteenth-century slave trade.⁵⁴ Grandcourt, who considers the “Jamaican Negro” a “beastly sort of baptist Caliban,” is implicitly compared to a colonial master. He easily manipulates, crushes, and terrifies Gwendolen:

Every slow sentence of that speech had a terrific mastery in it for Gwendolen's nature [...]

He knew the force of his own words... (523)

In her marriage with Grandcourt, Gwendolen thus places herself in a contradictory position: as we have seen, she feels the shame of being tainted because of her original sin of having betrayed Lydia Glasher and having chosen the financially and socially privileged side of the master; but she also feels shame because she is tamed by her master, has lost her gamble and has become his slave.

The other victim of Grandcourt's sadistic tendencies is his mistress, Lydia Glasher, whose racialization suggests a parallel between her condition and that of enslaved or colonized persons, as well as of Jewish characters. According to Kathleen Slaugh-Sanford,

⁵⁴ This comparison of the female condition to slavery has a long history and has an important (and problematic) role in modern feminist discourse since the seventeenth century in Europe (from Mary Wollstonecraft and Hubertine Auclert, to Simone de Beauvoir and the MLF anthem, among other examples) and in the U.S., especially during the antebellum period (see *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation* (2007) by Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer Stewart).

Eliot strategically positions Lydia as a member of a non-Anglo race to emphasize her figurative role as a colonized woman under the control of Henleigh Grandcourt. More importantly, the blending of Lydia's figurative impurity with her literal white skin questions the homogeneity and superiority of the "British Race" as constantly promoted by racial hierarchies. (402)

Slaugh-Sanford examines the way "Lydia's physical transformation subtly mirrors nineteenth-century fears of degeneration articulated in the 1880s and 1890s by Francis Galton, Cesare Lombroso, Max Nordau and others" (404). However, if this is suggestive of degeneration, Lydia's "sunken pallor" seems to result from her mistreatment at the hands of Grandcourt, as a discarded, inconvenient lover, and may be equally suggestive of Grandcourt's own embodiment of racial and moral degeneration. Lydia would thus be the image of Gwendolen's future degeneration. In that sense, Lydia's transformation finds a parallel in Gwendolen's own changes, which suggest that she is gradually poisoned, corrupted by Grandcourt.

While Lydia Glasher may be reminiscent of a tamed, fairly restrained Bertha Mason, Gwendolen is in a state of constant tension. Her trajectory in the novel is determined by her desire to remain independent, untouched, untainted – especially by men. The most remarkable aspect of Gwendolen's character is her attempt to change her very nature, and more specifically her expression of emotions, in order to become, quite literally, cold-blooded, as we have seen in her attempt to hijack the sentimentalist circuit of the blush. The way she is consistently compared to a snake, but also to the mythical figures of Melusina and Lamia, alludes to her essential ability to exert a form of self-preservation, while presenting the appearance of a cold-blooded seductress. Indeed, the unequivocal association of the serpent to sin is complicated by the comparison to Lamia who embodies the projection of vampiric, destructive sexuality, and Melusina, who is betrayed by

her husband. Lamia, the sinful woman turned into a monster, finds its echo in Medusa, to whom Lydia is compared (533), and also brings to mind the dead face of Grandcourt staring at Gwendolen, petrifying her. The novel thus sets up a series of echoing images that literally and figuratively stop Gwendolen in her tracks, and create patterns of shame and horror.

The mythological metaphors that liken Gwendolen to a toxic seductress point to dehumanization and animalization as a general consequence of her need for self-control throughout her life. However, the recurrence of those metaphors and of particular objects (the “poisoned” diamonds he gave her after retrieving them from Lydia, the letter from Lydia, her green attire) suggest that her life was contaminated as soon as she met Grandcourt. The comparison to Keats’ “Lamia” is particularly interesting since she is contradictory and demands to be read as such – neither entirely good, nor evil, and relying on what others project onto her. Moreover, Gwendolen’s ability to control herself becomes a tool that her husband wields to torture her, as we see with the redirection of shame when they cross paths with Lydia Glasher, or when Grandcourt tests her reactions: her self-control, which was her only defense against the outside world and societal expectations, progressively becomes a tool of torture turned against her.

If the ideal which *Daniel Deronda*’s characters seek is portrayed as defective and monstrous, *The Remains of the Day* depicts the English gentleman from the unreliable perspective of a butler. The English gentleman as master is thus conveyed as an idealized figure through the lens of an alienated figure that projects extreme self-control as a form of personal and professional dignity. The explicit expression of shame in that context would thus function as an admission of weakness and threaten the very logic of the butler’s alienated existence. Where Gwendolen’s storyline suggests that acknowledging and expressing shame is the condition for change and

redemption, Stevens strives to convey his lack of shame and regret, which makes his shame and regret all the more perceptible.

II. *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro

1. Shame, Greatness, Dignity

The Remains of the Day starts as Stevens is about to embark on a journey, suggested by his new employer, Mr. Farraday, an American who encourages the butler to explore his own country, and prompted by a letter he received from Mrs. Benn, a former housekeeper he knew as Miss Kenton, whom he hasn't seen in years and he may have secretly loved. This is the occasion for Stevens to question the distinction between the microcosm of the house, where he "did actually 'see' more of England than most" (4) and the rest of England, which he never got to explore. We already get a glimpse of Stevens' understanding of England, Englishness, and its greatness, embodied by English gentlemen, English butlers, and English houses – a closed, traditional, elitist, exclusive environment which perpetuates, disseminates and justifies colonialist, imperialist, classist practices. Early in his expedition, Stevens discovers the beauty of the English countryside, which he quickly links to the "greatness" he embodies as an English butler:

[T]he English landscape at its finest – such as I saw it this morning – possesses a quality that the landscapes of other nations, however more superficially dramatic, inevitably fail to possess." [...] We call this land of ours Great Britain, and there may be those who believe this a somewhat immodest practice. Yet I would venture that the landscape of our country alone would justify the use of this lofty adjective.

And yet what precisely is this ‘greatness’? Just where, or in what, does it lie? I am quite aware it would take a far wiser head than mine to answer such a question, but if I were forced to hazard a guess, I would say that it is the very lack of obvious drama or spectacle that sets the beauty of our land apart. What is pertinent is the calmness of that beauty, its sense of restraint. It is as though the land knows of its own beauty, of its own greatness, and feels no need to shout it. In comparison, the sorts of sights offered in such places as Africa and America, though undoubtedly very exciting, would, I am sure, strike the objective viewer as inferior on account of their unseemly demonstrativeness. (28-29)

Stevens’ definitions and attachment to the words “greatness” and “dignity” establish strict oppositions, which the novel will then muddle and expose as hypocritical or self-defeating. Through its exposition of the merits of the English landscape, he opposes modest, understated beauty to spectacle, class to vulgarity, moderation to excess.

The idea of “greatness,” applied to Stevens’ profession and formulated by the Hayes Society (an exclusive organization to which Stevens doesn’t belong), subsumes “dignity” as a set of behaviors and a particular state of mind: the privileging of restraint over emotion, judgement over sentiment, good manners over spontaneity, self-effacement over individual willfulness, discipline over profligacy. Those binaries connect in turn to the broader oppositions between civilization and decadence or corruption, island and continent, Englishness and foreignness. The question of what constitutes greatness and dignity for a butler recurs as an obsessive topos throughout the novel. A particularly striking example Stevens uses in order to illustrate his definition is the following anecdote, told repeatedly by his father:

The story was an apparently true one concerning a certain butler who had travelled with his employer to India and served there for many years maintaining amongst the native staff

the same high standards he had commanded in England. One afternoon, evidently, this butler had entered the dining room to make sure all was well for dinner, when he noticed a tiger languishing beneath the dining table. (36-37)

Stevens proceeds to recount the butler's calm, composed demeanor, as he asks his master's permission to shoot the tiger and, upon doing so, announces: "Dinner will be served at the usual time and I am pleased to say there will be no discernible traces left of the recent occurrence by that time" (37), a comment that provokes both Stevens senior's laughter and admiration. Dignity for a butler thus means hiding one's humanity, being subservient: for Stevens, dignity as a butler means having no dignity as an individual with thoughts, feelings, or a sense of self-preservation.

The characteristically Indian anecdote about the tiger also introduces the problem of an English butler's complicity with colonialism and imperialism, since it shows how English gentlemen must be protected from the aggression of the world they have conquered. Moreover, Stevens extends the principles derived from the ideal of the English gentleman and ascribed to Englishness as ethnic exceptionalism to theorize about the particularity of English butlers:

It is sometimes said that butlers only truly exist in England. Other countries, whatever title is actually used, have only manservants. I tend to believe this is true. Continentals are unable to be butlers because they are as a breed incapable of the emotional restraint which only the English race are capable of. (44)

This passage replicates and expands on the racial differences developed by the peace-seeking, Nazi-sympathizing world actors consorting in Darlington Hall, who insist on the brutal, barbarous, vengeful temperament of the French. The superiority of the English landscape thus parallels the superiority of the English race, a view espoused by Churchill, who is referenced as a great man throughout the novel.

Indeed, dignity as a life principle also has inhuman consequences on others. When Lord Darlington decides to have his Jewish staff – two maids – fired, Stevens dutifully obliges, but Miss Kenton is “outraged”: their conversation thus proceeds to oppose Stevens’ logic of duty and morally dubious, subversion of sentiment (as if sentiment were necessarily negative; as if Lord Darlington’s prejudice were a rational conclusion), and Miss Kenton’s moral principles:

“Does it not occur to you, Mr Stevens, that to dismiss Ruth and Sarah on these grounds would be simply – *wrong*? I will not stand for such things. I will not work in a house in which such things can occur.”

“Miss Kenton, I will ask you not to excite yourself and to conduct yourself in a manner befitting your position. This is a very straightforward matter.” (157)

Their ethics puts them at odds, since Stevens trusts his master’s superior logic while Miss Kenton makes up her own mind. Miss Kenton attempts to shame Stevens for his lack of moral compass, but Stevens attempts to shame her instead for “exciting herself,” for being a hysterical woman rather than a poised professional like himself. Miss Kenton’s moral high ground is thus framed as undignified. Since she told him she would resign if he fired the maids, he also teases her later for not following through, a criticism she takes to heart. Shame has thus transferred onto her:

“You probably have no idea, Mr Stevens,” she said eventually, “how seriously I really thought of leaving this house. I felt so strongly about what happened. Had I been anyone worthy of any respect at all, I dare say I would have left Darlington Hall long ago.” She paused for a while, and I turned my gaze back out to the poplar trees down in the distance. Then she continued in a tired voice: “It was cowardice, Mr Stevens. Simple cowardice. Where could I have gone? I have no family. [...] Whenever I thought of leaving, I just saw myself going out there and finding nobody who knew or cared about me. There, that’s all

my high principles amount to. I feel so ashamed of myself. But I just couldn't leave, Mr Stevens.” (161)

In this passage, Stevens’ refusal of shame and insistence on unfeeling has intensified Miss Kenton’s shame, precisely because she bears the burden of responsibility on her own. Both are shamed for compromising themselves in order to keep their jobs, but Miss Stevens alone acknowledges this burden when Stevens justifies his choice by referring to a butler’s duty to trust his master’s decisions.

While Stevens becomes complicit in his master’s antisemitism, his subaltern status makes him an ambiguous figure. Is Stevens a colonial subject? The anecdote of the tiger shows a butler accommodating the colonizer by erasing himself: “He is hardly a human being. He tends rapidly toward becoming an object” (130), as Albert Memmi defines the colonized in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965). But the butler is also a subaltern imitation of the gentleman. As Homi Bhabha points out about the colonized, he is produced as “a subject that is almost the same but not quite” (86) – for instance, Stevens reuses Lord Darlington’s old suits:

I am in the possession of a number of splendid suits, kindly passed on to me over the years by Lord Darlington himself, and by various guests who have stayed in this house and had reason to be pleased with the standard of service here. Many of these suits are, perhaps, too formal for the purposes of the proposed trip, or else rather old-fashioned these days. But then there is one lounge suit, passed on to me in 1931 or 1932 by Sir Edward Blair – practically brand new at the time and almost a perfect fit – which might well be appropriate for evenings in the lounge or dining room of any guest houses where I might lodge. (11)

Through “mimicry,” Stevens effectively – perhaps unconsciously – transgresses the gentleman’s authority and superiority: since his master passes down his clothes to him, he looks (but also talks

and behaves) like a gentleman – even though he is only a *gentleman's gentleman* – and is taken for one by villagers during his journey, a situation he doesn't rectify.

When Stevens meets Harry Smith, a villager involved in local politics who mistakes him for a learned and influential gentleman, the ambiguity of dignity as a concept is exemplified by his disdain for Smith's values. Dignity, for Stevens, is the subservience of "ordinary people" to the English gentleman who knows better, which goes against Smith's association of dignity and civic rights:

If Hitler had had things his way, we'd just be slaves now. The whole world would be a few masters and millions upon millions of slaves. And I don't need to remind anyone here, there's no dignity to be had in being a slave. That's what we fought for and that's what we won. We won the right to be free citizens. And it's one of the privileges of being born English that no matter who you are, no matter if you're rich or poor, you're born free and you're born so that you can express your opinion freely, and vote in your member of parliament or vote him out. That's what dignity's really about, if you'll excuse me, sir. (196)

Stevens inwardly counters Smith by recounting an episode of personal humiliation (which he didn't seem to experience as such), where he was asked a series of questions about foreign policy in order for Lord Darlington's friend to make a point about democracy being obsolete. Even though his robotic and repeated admissions of ignorance make him the butt of the joke, he doubles down on the idea that he has no business having an opinion about matters beyond his butler's duty to his master. Stevens' refusal to acknowledge shame means burying his shame to the point of being blind to one's own oppression and to that of others (classist exploitation, colonialism, antisemitism).

By contrast to Smith's definition of dignity as civic and political autonomy and freedom of speech, Dr. Carlisle, who quickly understands Stevens' real status as a manservant, defines dignity as "access to the best services." Faced with these definitions, Stevens can only simplify and reduce his own:

"It's rather a hard thing to explain in a few words, sir," I said. "But I suspect it comes down to not removing one's clothing in public." (221)

This definition would not necessarily be antithetical to either Smith's or Carlisle's, as it doesn't apply to larger social hierarchies and rights at all; it is much more focused on individual privacy and is a synthesis of the impulse of shame. Indeed, Stevens states the importance of covering oneself, thus concealing any stronger opinions on the topic, while justifying his already forgiven lie by omission: he is wearing a gentleman's clothes, and admitting to his status as a butler would have been the equivalent of removing those clothes. Stevens needs to stay clothed, in every way (from concealing his feelings and thoughts, to never engaging in physical relations).

As we can see, Stevens' understanding of dignity is rooted in a conservative world order, one that seems increasingly out of touch with the world in which he actually lives: the novel starts in July 1956, which is precisely when Nasser nationalizes the Suez Canal. As the United Kingdom grapples with its lost status as a world power and empire to the benefit of the United States and – in a small measure – of decolonized territories, the American Mr. Farraday heralds in a new order for Stevens. Stevens thus writes in a postcolonial world, where the traditional, well-kept yet understaffed English house are what remains of its heyday. The house itself is already trying to reproduce a myth and project its own past for the Romantic appreciation of Americans, as we can see when Farraday is alarmed that the house may seem fake.

2. The Tragi-Comic Figure of the Butler

“Excuse me for asking, sir. But may I take it Mr. Smith is considered something of a comic figure?”

“Hmm. That's taking it a little too far, I'd say.” (220)

In Stevens' world, where subservience and debasement are disguised or transmuted into dignity, a figure like Harry Smith seems comically absurd. However, Stevens' anachronistic views, as well as his pernickety and – at times – tedious narration, account for a growing impression of ridicule. Several passages are explicit instances of situational comedy; for instance, Stevens' inability to get to the point when trying to explain sex to a young man about to be married, which only exaggerates the absurdity of the situation in the first place – Lord Darlington asks his butler to explain to his twenty-three-year-old friend's son, Mr. Cardinal, what to do on his wedding night. Stevens' abstract language (“ladies and gentlemen differ in several key respects”) leads Mr. Cardinal to believe he is talking about the conference discussing European interwar relations.

Shortly after, during the conference, another situation forces the narrator to reckon with two events separate events. M. Dupont, a French politician who attends the conference, complains about “painful sores on his feet” (94) and asks for medical assistance; Stevens' father has also become severely ill. Those events are brought together by the doctor, who comes to Darlington Hall for Stevens' father but is dispatched at the feet of M. Dupont since the former has died by the time he arrives. This tragicomic superposition of events, in the midst of a conference that suggests Lord Darlington's German sympathies, emphasizes the narrator's privileging of duty to the point of ridicule, since he views that night as a “triumph.”

The self-important Mr. Stevens is, indeed, a comic figure, much like the anxiety-ridden Prufrock.⁵⁵ Even Stevens and his father are able to note that there is something ridiculous about the dignity they so admire, which is precisely why they find the tiger anecdote amusing. There is something robotic about Stevens' constant composure, about his inability to feel which, as Wendy Lee analyzes in *Failures of Feeling*, invites a lot of different affects (annoyance, worry, aggression, laughter, shame). The butler can thus become a threatening figure, precisely because of his absence of passion, his refusal to be anything but obliging and polite. In the following anecdote, Stevens' father is driving obnoxious, demanding passengers who are insulting him and his employer, and suddenly stops the car:

As Mr. Charles described it, all three passengers seemed to be overcome as one by the realization of what an imposing physical force my father was. Indeed, he was a man of some six feet three inches, and his countenance, though reassuring while one knew he was intent on obliging, could seem extremely forbidding viewed in certain other contexts. According to Mr. Charles, my father did not display any obvious anger. He had, it seemed, merely opened the door. And yet there was something so powerfully rebuking, and at the same time so unassailable about his figure looming over them that Mr. Charles's two drunken companions seemed to cower back like small boys caught by the farmer in the act of stealing apples. (40)

The unfeeling butler turns into a silently shaming parent observing a tantrum. Indeed, the absence of feeling can be upsetting, unnerving, which is key to the silently deteriorating relationship

⁵⁵ "Deferential, glad to be of use,
 Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
 Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
 At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
 Almost, at times, the Fool." (Eliot 7)

between Stevens and Miss Kenton. After Miss Kenton has resigned herself to a platonic, professional relationship with Stevens, accepted a proposal of marriage by someone else, she tries to elicit a reaction of jealousy, or surprise, to no avail. She then proceeds to tease him, by describing him as an object of ridicule, the butt of jokes with her fiancé, to which he fails to react, even as a narrator:

“Did you know, Mr. Stevens, that you have been a very important figure for my acquaintance and I?”

“Really, Miss Kenton?”

“Yes, Mr. Stevens. We often pass the time amusing ourselves with anecdotes about you. For instance, my acquaintance is always wanting me to show him the way you pinch your nostrils together when you put pepper on your food. That always gets him laughing.”

“Indeed.” (230)

The absence of reaction that follows is frustrating for both Miss Keaton and the reader; in that sense, the comic dimension of the butler, rooted in an English tradition where the butler is a stock character, a caricature,⁵⁶ is one we understand to be only a reductive facet of his character, since Stevens is undoubtedly capable of feeling.

The tragi-comic decline of pre-war English traditions and of the aristocratic way of life is usually explored from the perspective of a gentleman (for instance, Tietjens in Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End*), but the butler as a figure of both submission and of refined, conservative, high-class civilization, functions as a lens through which the novel examines extreme forms of alienation. As a mythic figure, the butler may even be extracted from this specific English context: Stevens has thus been read in relation to traditional Japanese themes (honor, order, deference,

⁵⁶ The most famous example is Jeeves, the reliable, obliging valet in P.G. Wodehouse – ironically, he is not technically a butler.

acute awareness of class hierarchies) and the novel has been read in relation to the *bushido* (the samurai's moral code that binds them to their lord) – according to John Rothfork, “*The Remains of the Day* expresses a Buddhist criticism of Confucian ethics” (82).

While Rothfork's reading has limitations given the text's focus on a particular time period, the novel does present a character who is already clinging to an anachronistic understanding of honor in the interwar years, which maps onto Lord Darlington's own misguided ideals: where the latter believes in good form and bad form, civility amongst gentlemen, honorable and hospitable behavior, the former believes in trusting one's master to the point of justifying the unjustifiable. Stevens thus embodies the monster of unfeeling imagined in the eighteenth century as the counterpart of the man of feeling, which bears an ambiguous relation to the gentleman. Indeed, Lord Darlington's pro-Nazi stance stems from a perversion of the sentimentalist gentleman ideal – as Mr. Cardinal argues:

He's a gentleman, and he fought a war with the Germans, and it's his instinct to offer generosity and friendship to a defeated foe. It's his instinct. Because he's a gentleman, a true old English gentleman. And you must have seen it, Stevens. How could you not have seen it? The way they've used it, manipulated it, turned something fine and noble into something else – something they can use for their own foul ends? (234)

If, in the last pages of the novel, it is made clear that the sentimental Lord Darlington has become a pawn for Hitler's hateful propaganda, Stevens refuses to express any curiosity or outrage. The opposition between the aristocratic control of the passions and the sentimental gentleman, which we observed with Sir Hugo and Daniel Deronda, finds another iteration with Stevens and his master; the key difference here is that Stevens' self-control is a façade of mastery that directly

responds to the butler's subaltern position and, which, as we've seen earlier, is disguised as "dignity."

Indeed, the novel describes professional management and workplace techniques that find an echo in the contemporary corporate world: the butler enacts a form of "perverted professionalism" as Rob Atkinson argues, "somewhere between the perfectionist and the nihilistic" (180). Ishiguro is interested in subordination, in how we give up our autonomy, our individuality:

What I meant when I said "I think we are all butlers" was simply this: that most of us are not in positions of great power, we don't run huge corporations. We are not presidents of countries. We do our jobs. We do small jobs, big jobs; we do our jobs. And we do our little jobs as best we can and we take our pride and dignity from doing them well. And we offer this up, usually to somebody up there... that is our little contribution... And so that is what most of us do most of our lives. We try to do our little thing very well, we try to get a sense of it being important and so on. And we offer it to somebody upstairs. But we are often at the mercy of whoever it is upstairs as to whether our contribution is going to be used for something good or for something not so good. (Ishiguro 2000)

The idea that individuals are defined and overdetermined by their class and their background is, Ishiguro suggests, not specific to old-fashioned butlers, samurais, clones, or robots. Stevens' opposition of the wheel⁵⁷ and the ladder conveys his lower-class, degraded ambition that relies on the deference to a superior class of beings:

⁵⁷ The metaphor of the wheel may be a reference to Yeats' 1919 "The Second Coming" whose third line was referenced most notably in Achebe's 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart*. More generally, postcolonial/decolonial texts have questioned this dichotomy of the center and the margins:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,*

For our generation, I believe it is accurate to say, viewed the world not as a ladder, but more as a wheel. [...] What occurs under the public gaze with so much pomp and ceremony is often the conclusion, or mere ratification, of what has taken place over weeks or months within the walls of such houses. To us, then, the world was a wheel, revolving with these great houses at the hub, their mighty decisions emanating out to all else, rich and poor, who revolved around them. It was the aspiration of all those of us with professional ambition to work our way as close to this hub as we were each of us capable. (121)

While one may climb the ladder up to a certain point, the metaphor of the wheel emphasizes that Stevens becomes an obsolete entity, and experiences the loss of his social circle as obsolete parts being replaced – his acquaintances, which only exist through his work, are discarded by their employers, which results in suddenly lost relationships. For instance, the sudden disappearance of Mr. Graham makes Stevens briefly realize that their relationship was entirely conditional, dependent on his service of Sir James:

[S]ome two months ago, I was most happy to learn that Sir James was to visit Darlington Hall. I looked forward to the visit not only because visitors from Lord Darlington's days are most rare now – Mr. Farraday's circle, naturally, being quite different from his lordship's – but also because I presumed Mr. Graham would accompany Sir James as of old, and I would thus be able to get his opinion on this question of bantering. I was, then, both surprised and disappointed to discover a day before the visit that Sir James would be coming alone. Furthermore, during Sir James's subsequent stay, I gathered that Mr.

*The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

Graham was no longer in Sir James's employ; indeed that Sir James no longer employed any full-time staff at all. (19-20)

Moreover, the novel presents Stevens as a double of his father rather than a son, insisting on the absence of filial and fatherly love, replaced solely by duty and repetition (no mother is ever mentioned). Mr. Stevens remonstrates Miss Kenton's first-name address to his father, an under-butler, because he was once Mr. Stevens, a great butler. Under Stevens' insistence, two Mr. Stevens work in Darlington Hall, which induces a confusion of responsibility when Mr. Stevens senior starts blundering and forgetting his duties. It seems as if Stevens had been robotically generated by his similarly cold and restrained father. Stevens himself acknowledges his father's lack of warmth:

I had rarely had reason to enter my father's room prior to this occasion and I was newly struck by the smallness and starkness of it. Indeed, I recall my impression at the time was of having stepped into a prison cell, but then this might have had as much to do with the pale early light as with the size of the room or the bareness of its walls. (67)

However, this appraisal merely foreshadows Miss Kenton's disapproving description of his own room as a prison cell:

Really, Mr. Stevens, this room resembles a prison cell. All one needs is a small bed in the corner and one could well imagine condemned men spending their last hours here. (174)

Mr. Cardinal meditates on another possibility for the human condition, which seems to parallel Stevens' life:

I wonder if it wouldn't have been better if the Almighty had created us all as – well – as sort of plants. You know, firmly embedded in the soil. Then none of this rot about wars and boundaries would have come up in the first place. (112)

In this fantasy of complete immobility – of which Stevens is quickly excluded, as Mr. Cardinal adds that “we would still need chaps like you taking messages back and forth, bringing tea, that sort of thing” (113) – one would be free from the impulse of positioning himself, physically and morally. But paradoxically, this inhuman refusal of feeling is the result of a subjectivity. Indeed, Ishiguro’s concern with loss of autonomy translates here into the shame of being too human, too unpredictable, and into attempts to separate oneself from any human impulse or passion: this is the character’s impetus for action and self-fashioning, his paradoxical *Bildung*. In her analysis of Stevens’ character, Monika Gehlawat argues that his “drive for self-mastery/self-renunciation” shows his ambition rather than his limitations; she rather identifies a contradictory dialectic, a project whose ideal goal would be the complete erasure of the self:

[H]owever we may criticize Stevens's life goals, they are the result of an active and intentional subjectivity. Thus the dialectic of agency that I recognize in Stevens's project maintains its momentum so long as Stevens's achievement of his goal remains elusive. However, if he ever succeeds in becoming the abstraction he desires, his own objectification would be complete and there would be no self left, and thus no self capable of mastery. The endless circuit of performances and failed attempts at improvisation, then, are necessary for Stevens's survival and that of his life's work. This dialectic helps to explain why, for such a perfectionist, Mr. Stevens does in fact make so many errors throughout the course of the novel. (500)

The novel, which recounts his slippages, little failures, misunderstandings, thus reveals Stevens’ intense shame and self-consciousness, his acute awareness of possible errors, missteps, as a way to sustain his subjectivity.

By the end of the novel, Stevens is a tragic figure who possibly grapples with the shame of having been complicit in acts of injustice, and, more largely, of his entire life having been a mistake. After Mr. Cardinal explicitly confronts Stevens about Lord Darlington's loyalties, and as Stevens ignores Miss Kenton's heartbroken teasing (she has just accepted her friend's proposal of marriage and desperately wants Stevens to react), Stevens describes a peculiar change of mood:

At first, my mood was – I do not mind admitting it – somewhat downcast. But then as I continued to stand there, a curious thing began to take place; that is to say, a deep feeling of triumph started to well up within me. I cannot remember to what extent I analysed this feeling at the time, but today, looking back on it, it does not seem so difficult to account for. I had, after all, just come through an extremely trying evening, throughout which I had managed to preserve a 'dignity in keeping with my position' - and had done so, moreover, in a manner even my father might have been proud of. (238)

Gehlawat points out that Stevens, precisely as he stands like a statue for several hours, fails at his erasure of the self, since his "ego reemerges just as he feels welling up within him the triumph of having refused it" (518). We may also add that Stevens indicates the unreliability of his own account by mentioning that he may not have interpreted his feelings in that way at the time; he may be exaggerating, lying, or displacing the shame of having thus denied his heart and his conscience by going back to his narrow understanding of dignity.

Shame therefore functions as an affect that needs to be read between the lines of Stevens' defensive performance of dignity, a performance we also notice on the night his father dies, since he similarly focuses on his pride for having handled himself with the utmost professionalism rather than expressed any emotion. For instance, after he has trouble with his car and stops at the garage

of a large house,⁵⁸ Stevens chats with the chauffeur, and lies about not having known the now disreputable Lord Darlington; he then ponders on his reply, and defends himself against the reader's imagined accusation:

Of course, there are many people these days who have a lot of foolish things to say about Lord Darlington, and it may be that you are under the impression I am somehow embarrassed or ashamed of my association with his lordship, and it is this that lies behind such conduct. Then let me make it clear that nothing could be further from the truth. The great majority of what one hears said about his lordship today is, in any case, utter nonsense, based on an almost complete ignorance of the facts. Indeed, it seems to me that my odd conduct can be very plausibly explained in terms of my wish to avoid any possibility of hearing any further such nonsense concerning his lordship; that is to say, I have chosen to tell white lies in both instances as the simplest means of avoiding unpleasantness. (132)

In this instance, Stevens doesn't consider that "avoiding unpleasantness" might be avoiding the shame of being associated with such a figure. A little later, Miss Kenton discovers that Stevens likes to read sentimental romances, and he becomes defensive about it. He first justifies his reading habits as practice to "maintain and develop one's command of the English language," then as an activity he mildly enjoyed at the time – the shame of reading sentimental stories turns into the shame of being ashamed:

⁵⁸ "You mean you actually used to work for that Lord Darlington?"

He was eyeing me carefully again. I said:

"Oh no, I am employed by Mr John Farraday, the American gentleman who bought the house from the Darlington family."

"Oh, so you wouldn't have known that Lord Darlington. Just that I wondered what he was like. What sort of bloke he was." (126)

I do not mind confessing today – and I see nothing to be ashamed of in this – that I did at times gain a sort of incidental enjoyment from these stories. I did not perhaps acknowledge this to myself at the time, but as I say, what shame is there in it? Why should one not enjoy in a light-hearted sort of way stories of ladies and gentlemen who fall in love and express their feelings for each other, often in the most elegant phrases? (177)

The revelation of Miss Kenton's shaming presence shows her functioning as his disavowed conscience, but also one he retrospectively becomes ashamed *of*.

At the end of the third day of his journey, in the last third of the novel, Stevens fights back against the reader's possible speculation about his shame, and it is precisely this insistent defensiveness, combined with the half-truths and minimizations throughout the novel, that reveals his repressed shame – precisely as he rejects shame as “illogical”:

It is hardly my fault if his lordship's life and work have turned out today to look, at best, a sad waste – and it is quite illogical that I should feel any regret or shame on my own account. (211)

If the figure of the butler and his repressed consciousness ultimately reveals Lord Darlington's own blindness, we can see that Ishiguro's idea that “we are all butlers” means that we are all liable to forsake critical thinking for the sake of abstractions we understand as self-fashioning ideals – we are all the pawn of someone else. This means that shame, in the novel, also functions as a collective affect. For Stevens, since subservience is expressed as dignity, shame is therefore expressed as pride, as a sense of “triumph”; but, since the novel is set in the 1950s, long after Lord Darlington has been disgraced, Stevens also carries and conceals the shame of his master, of England's pre-War hierarchies – as the narrator and as this anachronic, tragic scapegoat. This explains Stevens' reluctance to openly acknowledge who he is and to identify his former master,

but also his tendency to overturn shame into pride, by bragging to villagers about having known Churchill or about his influence on the global stage.

3. Narrative Disjunctions and Belatedness

The unreliability of Stevens as a butler who strives to stand by his worldview also has to do with the disjunction between different timelines: those chronological disjunctions are also key in conveying shame as the affect of a fundamental obsolescence, anachronism, and belatedness.

Indeed, the unreliability of the narrative has to do with the manipulation and the repression of information, the denial or minimization of ethical problems, all of which are primarily expressed through the juxtaposition of timelines – the incursion of a related and telling anecdote, a brief reminiscence, etc. Stevens' shame of being complicit is most visible when he conveys delayed, piecemeal information, which is sometimes clarified pages later. A striking example is the casual way he introduces the subject of Lord Darlington's anti-Semitic actions as an unexplained "very minor episode":

Lord Darlington came to abhor anti-Semitism; I heard him express his disgust on several separate occasions when confronted with anti-Semitic sentiments. And the allegation that his lordship never allowed Jewish people to enter the house or any Jewish staff to be employed is utterly unfounded – except, perhaps, in respect to one very minor episode in the thirties which has been blown up out of all proportion. And as for the British Union of Fascists, I can only say that any talk linking his lordship to such people is quite ridiculous. Sir Oswald Mosley, the gentleman who led the 'blackshirts,' was a visitor at Darlington Hall on, I would say, three occasions at the most, and these visits all took place during the early days of that organization before it had betrayed its true nature. (146)

The explicit mention of Mosley already hints at Stevens' disingenuous interpretation – indeed, perhaps unlike Mosley's first "New Party," the openly Mussolini-inspired BUF "betrayed its true nature" at its inception. Moreover, Stevens expands on this not-so-minor accident in the next chapter, i.e. the next day – presumably after he had time to mull over the implications of such a biased dismissal of the facts. Despite his earlier denial, he mentions anti-Semitic comments by his master that surprised him – as if he had been unable to notice a pattern of behavior by then – and finally explains in more detail that Lord Darlington asked him to fire the two Jewish maids.

When it comes to Mr. Stevens' repressed feelings, the text suggests fragments of those feelings through allusions:

During this time, I also spent many minutes examining the road atlas, and perusing also the relevant volumes of Mrs. Jane Symons's *The Wonder of England*. If you are not familiar with Mrs. Symons's books – a series running to seven volumes, each one concentrating on one region of the British Isles – I heartily recommend them. They were written during the thirties, but much of it would still be up to date – after all, I do not imagine German bombs have altered our countryside so significantly. Mrs. Symons was, as a matter of fact, a frequent visitor to this house before the war; indeed, she was among the most popular as far as the staff were concerned due to the kind appreciation she never shied from showing. It was in those days, then, prompted by my natural admiration for the lady, that I had first taken to perusing her volumes in the library whenever I had an odd moment. (11-12)

In this passage, Stevens casually ("as a matter of fact") reveals that he has met Mrs. Symons, and therefore that his intellectual interest in her books might be related to an interest in her, a form of affection hinted at by the general statement of her popularity among the staff. Again, this

displacement of the truth through a belated addition and a dilution of feeling suggests the narrator's attempt not to acknowledge personal feelings.

This is the way the novel suggests Stevens' unspoken longing for Miss Kenton: through allusions, additions, and minor revelations, it conveys Miss Kenton's heartbreak at being rejected, and Stevens' inability to admit his feelings, except through nostalgic reminiscences. After being confronted by both Mr. Cardinal and Miss Kenton and feeling a sense of triumph, Mr. Stevens passes by Miss Kenton's door:

And that was the moment, I am now sure, that has remained so persistently lodged in my memory – that moment as I paused in the dimness of the corridor, the tray in my hands, an ever-growing conviction mounting within me that just a few yards away, on the other side of that door, Miss Kenton was at that moment crying. As I recall, there was no real evidence to account for this conviction – I had certainly not heard any sounds of crying – and yet I remember being quite certain that were I to knock and enter, I would discover her in tears. I do not know how long I remained standing there; at the time it seemed a significant period, but in reality, I suspect, it was only a matter of a few seconds. (223)

This confused memory hinges on a dilation of time, both syntactically – the first sentence delays the information about Miss Kenton crying, while simultaneously insisting on this mere moment, frozen in time and in Stevens' memory – and in terms of Stevens' own warped sense of time, a few seconds being extended in his consciousness. But it is also a memory of something which may never have happened, more present and clearer to him than events he has actually witnessed. Rather than conveying his feelings about Miss Kenton's engagement, Stevens chooses to convey his certainty as truth, a sudden emergence of his imagination which betrays his sense of

helplessness, his awareness of having hurt Miss Kenton and of being unable – despite the short physical distance – to go to her and declare himself.

While the novel's style allows for few flights of fancy, occasional images point to such displacements of feeling. One example can be found after the death of Stevens's father, as the butler finally enters the room:

I had expected the room to smell of death, but on account of Mrs. Mortimer – or else her apron – the room was dominated by the smell of roasting. (114)

The smell of roasting signals a displacement: the smell of enticing food hiding the smell of death (i.e. the distance from the abject created by domestic refinement). The displacement seems to remove Stevens from the reality of death and loss.

The temporal disjunction, and more specifically the sense of belatedness that permeates the novel is linked to shame, as Bewes defines it: Stevens feels shame for having been reduced to a form, an object, for being obsolete. When Jed Esty analyzes the idea of unseasonability in the *Bildungsroman*, he specifies that it “refers to youth out of joint—endlessly adolescent or suddenly aged, sophomoric or progeriac [...]” (16). Stevens is a progeriac protagonist, in part because of the book's analeptic, memoir-like structure, but more importantly because of Stevens' own petrified state: his resistance to *Bildung* – to sentimental journeys, sexual encounters, etc. – which seems to presuppose a seamless transition from boyhood to adulthood, from Master Stevens to Mister Stevens. His identity is rather fully encompassed by his position as a butler – a position, rather than a job, which is key to his characterization: Stevens tries to resist shame by being assured of his positionality, physically and ideologically.

The novel proposes a dislocation of time as belatedness on three different levels: *chronos*, *aeon*, *kairos*. It is precisely this threefold dislocation of time that makes shame emerge from the

interstices of the story, as Stevens, for brief moments, escapes the bounds of a timeframe dictated by work and framed by the rhythms of his master. *Chronos*, i.e. chronological, sequential time, is dislocated because of the multiple, intersecting timelines: the progression of Stevens' trip in 1956, and the flashbacks, which can often be identified because of the historical context (the 1923 conference after the Treaty of Versailles; the rise of German resentment and fascism in the early thirties).

Chronos is also dislocated insofar as Stevens struggles to understand his life as a meaningful sequence of events: he rather tells specific episodes of his life as they come to him and as his memory is triggered in the 1956 timeline. The novel plays with particular images and metaphors that suddenly restore the past to the narrator in all its immediacy, without showing us Stevens grasping the significance of those metaphors; for instance, the jewel metaphor used by Miss Kenton – as she reminisces about their time together in her letter to him – gives us a mirror image of the novel itself, of Stevens' own process of self-examination of the remains of his day:

I will never forget that time we both watched your father walking back and forth in front of the summerhouse, looking down at the ground as though he hoped to find some precious jewel he had dropped there. (52)

The precious jewel unravels a story about Stevens' father falling, and poses the question of what he may become as an aging butler – of what remains of his days. Indeed, this memory elicits a long flashback on the introduction of Stevens' father as an under-butler, his slow loss of cognitive and physical abilities, first noticeable in small errors, and made spectacular in his fall:

The lawn climbs a slope several yards in front of the summerhouse, and in those days, as today, four flagstones embedded into the grass served as steps by which to negotiate this climb. It was in the vicinity of these steps that my father fell, scattering the load on his tray

– teapot, cups, saucers, sandwiches, cakes – across the area of grass at the top of the steps.

(66)

We see here a simultaneous dilation and contraction of time, which is reminiscent of Proust's endeavor to search for lost time.⁵⁹ The metaphor of the jewel thus functions on different levels: as Miss Kenton's metaphorical projection – her feelings of having wasted her life, of having looked for Stevens' love in vain – but also as a metaphor for the novel as a whole, Stevens' attempt to look over his entire life, as if unconsciously looking for something precious that eluded him.

Aeon, as a long time period – an age, era – contrasts the timeline of England as an empire and world power, its traditions and customs that seem fixed in time, almost immemorial, and the nostalgia of a lost age in a postcolonial, America-dominated world. We have seen that Stevens' views are anachronistic, not just with regards to the novel's publication but also to the post-World-War-II diegetic timeline (as can be most explicitly seen in his interaction with Harry Smith). But the novel also introduces conflicting ideas about the conservative values of Lord Darlington and his butler. Indeed, in contrast to Harry Smith's understanding of democracy as modern, Lord Darlington sees democracy as an old, ineffectual practice that needs to be retired:

We're always the last, Stevens. Always the last to be clinging on to outmoded systems. But sooner or later, we'll need to face up to the facts. Democracy is something for a bygone

⁵⁹ The reference to uneven paving stones may read as a Proust reference – a passage in *Le Temps retrouvé* where, as in the famous madeleine episode, the narrator suddenly feels the past revive around him in a synesthetic reminiscence:

En roulant les tristes pensées que je disais il y a un instant j'étais entré dans la cour de l'hôtel de Guermantes et dans ma distraction je n'avais pas vu une voiture qui s'avavançait ; au cri du wattman je n'eus que le temps de me ranger vivement de côté, et je reculai assez pour buter malgré moi contre les pavés assez mal équarris derrière lesquels était une remise. Mais au moment où, me remettant d'aplomb, je posai mon pied sur un pavé qui était un peu moins élevé que le précédent, tout mon découragement s'évanouit devant la même félicité qu'à diverses époques de ma vie m'avaient donnée la vue d'arbres que j'avais cru reconnaître dans une promenade en voiture autour de Balbec, la vue des clochers de Martinville, la saveur d'une madeleine trempée dans une infusion, tant d'autres sensations dont j'ai parlé et que les dernières œuvres de Vinteuil m'avaient paru synthétiser. Comme au moment où je goûtais la madeleine, toute inquiétude sur l'avenir, tout doute intellectuel étaient dissipés. Ceux qui m'assaillaient tout à l'heure au sujet de la réalité de mes dons littéraires et même de la réalité de la littérature se trouvaient levés comme par enchantement. (445-447)

era. The world's far too complicated a place now for universal suffrage and such like. For endless members of parliament debating things to a standstill. All fine a few years ago perhaps, but in today's world? (207-208)

The contradiction with which the novel grapples is a different understanding of progress and tradition in relation to two different understandings of time – the *longue durée* that saw the birth of democracy in 5 B.C. Athens, and, much later, of the early modern English aristocracy and the twentieth-century resurgence of democratic principles; and the shorter history of England, marked by the French revolution and the debates about aristocratic institutions. If Lord Darlington's errors in judgement stem from this anachronistic definition of modernity, Harry Smith is similarly caught in conflicting worldviews, one that reveres great men, virile courage, and English traditions, and another which seeks democracy, equality and dignity across class differences. In that sense, Dr. Carlisle's description of Smith as a "muddle"⁶⁰ – in its implicit reference to E.M. Forster – goes back to the roots of Modernism as primarily concerned with belatedness, with a critical appraisal of both the past and promises of progress.

Kairos, i.e. the opportune time for action, timeliness, is the third figure of time that betrays Stevens' belatedness in the novel. It most notably appears in his difficulty at mastering the skill of bantering, which he attempts to do to please his new American employer. But Stevens' inability to express levity and humor precisely comes from his inability to improvise. After Farraday asks him about a mysterious "crowing noise," his butler proceeds to explain his reaction:

I therefore set about thinking of some witty reply; some statement which would still be safely inoffensive in the event of my having misjudged the situation. After a moment or

⁶⁰ "You shouldn't mind him. He's entertaining enough to listen to for a while, but really, he's all in a muddle. At times you'd think he was some sort of Communist, then he comes out with something that makes him sound true blue Tory. Truth is, he's all in a muddle." (219)

two, I said: “More like swallows than crows, I would have said, sir. From the migratory aspect.” And I followed this with a suitably modest smile to indicate without ambiguity that I had made a witticism, since I did not wish Mr Farraday to restrain any spontaneous mirth he felt out of a misplaced respectfulness. (17)

While the execution of his observation fails to elicit an amused reaction (perhaps because it contrasts with his rigid exterior and usual self-presentation), it also fails narratively, since Stevens overly details his process to the point of losing any suspense or spontaneity.

The novel shows both a failure to act and a failure to write. Indeed, just as Stevens attempts to go forward with the expedition yet is always looking back, he also fails to draw and synthesize from the past, to acknowledge a gap between the extradiegetic narrator (when he is speaking from the present about his past self) and the homodiegetic narrator (both character and narrator). The threefold dislocation of time in the novel thus puts forward shame as the affect of belatedness, synthesized and exaggerated by the out-of-step figure of the butler:

[S]hame is experienced as an existence out of joint, as a condemnation to a permanent *chronological* discrepancy; shame is a state of simultaneous prematurity and belatedness. (Bewes 77).

In “Ishiguro at the Limit,” Chris Holmes explores the tension between “the limits of the novel” and the “the limitlessness of the corporate state of mind” (387), and he applies the idea of “limit thinking” to Ishiguro’s novels, which put forward the characters’ inadequacy in the world:

Novels increasingly attempt to formulate institutions apart from the privatizing drive that seeks to corporatize all civil society. This ambition to differentiate the novel from the primary ideology of this period has been marked by the emergence of a particular mode of critical rejoinder to the pervasive corporatist mind-set, a mode that I call limit thinking, in

which novels draw attention to themselves as texts with which to produce new forms of thinking rather than as storehouses of information or political treatises. Novels operating in this mode are characterized by engagement with two types of limits, the first being representations of characters at the boundary of their ability to conceptualize their place in the machinery of the world. The second is a narrative limit: a linguistic, stylistic, or temporal limitation that emerges in response to the first type of epistemological limit as a formal expression. (386)

The Remains of the Day may therefore be read as a text that produces different types of limitations and disjunctions – from 1956 Stevens’s limited and flawed appreciation of his younger self, to a style which conceals shame through elaborate processes of justification, minimization, arrogance or misplaced pride, hesitation, lengthy exposition, etc.

As both a sentimental and unsentimental journey, the novel’s trajectory is one of disillusionment. Stevens finally seems to change his mind about dignity after his surprisingly honest confession to Mrs. Benn,⁶¹ and to finally discard the half-spoken dream that she might want to come back to Darlington Hall. He thus gives subtle hints towards the end of the novel that his interpretation of the letter (Mrs. Benn is unhappy and ready to return to him) was indeed flawed, or incomplete. But if the novel seems to end in an epiphany, Stevens nevertheless returns to Mr. Farraday to give him the remains of his day.

⁶¹ “His lordship was a courageous man. He chose a certain path in life, it proved to be a misguided one, but there, he chose it, he can say that at least. As for myself, I cannot even claim that. You see, I *trusted*. I trusted in his lordship's wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile. I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really – one has to ask oneself – what dignity is there in that?” (256)

Conclusion

In *Daniel Deronda*, Daniel and Gwendolen are not reducible to types, nor alien to them; they are always ambiguously related to the snake-like seductress, the mystical Jew, and for both of them, the masterful English gentleman. Types, or non-novelistic figures, foster decadence, decay: Mordecai experiences a surplus of religious fervor that kills him, while Grandcourt is the most refined, and therefore paradoxically most degenerate, inhuman incarnation of a dying line. This ambivalence of characterization in relation to types is key to the tension in Eliot's words between reference and realization, as demonstrated by Catherine Gallagher, who insists on Eliot's skill at navigating and using this tension.⁶² Shame as form in the novel therefore appears as the discontinuity between protagonist development and non-linear structure, but also as the unresolved tension between the mystic/mythic figure or the traditional *Bildungsheld*, for both Gwendolen (the mythical seductress/the abused Victorian wife and daughter) and Daniel (the Messianic leader/the English gentleman in the making).

Those contradictions are not entirely unresolved for Daniel, insofar as the novel offers us two options. On the one hand, the novel resolves the asymmetrical English and Jewish plots by having Daniel pick a side: as a Jew who can never be fully realized as an Englishman, he is excluded from the narrative and from England, and embraces his identity as an improved Mordecai. However, the way Daniel secularizes Jewish mystic idealism means that he can only become the leader he was meant to be by embracing both his Jewish and English heritage; that, in

⁶² "Fictional characters may *refer* to people in the world by conforming to type, but they only *resemble* people in their *nonconformity*. The impulse toward reference and the impulse toward realization are thus not only separate but also deeply opposed, and their tension, rather than cooperation, might be said to define realism.

George Eliot masters this tension not by easing, concealing, or even self-consciously reflecting on it; she masters it, rather, by harnessing its energy and making it the dynamo of her narratives. She converts the strife between type and instance, between reference and realization (strife belonging primarily to characterization), into a vigorous narrative friction between probability and surprise." (66)

order to be a successful Jewish leader, he needs to remain an empathetic English gentleman. In an ending where Eliot plants the seeds of Zionism as a fundamentally European, English colonial project, nationalism thus functions as the pinnacle of individual and collective *Bildung*, and combines the teleology of the *Bildungsroman* as well as that of Biblical messianism: Daniel is both a new Moses and an English colonizer.

In *The Remains of the Day*, shame hinges on Stevens' attachment to the English values of dignity and greatness, which leads to a shame imposed by inhuman demands in a classist society, and a shame linked to regret, loss, and repressed desire. While the figure of the English gentleman as an ideal for the subordinate figure of the butler may seem just as obsolete as the butler, it is portrayed as both anachronistic and endlessly renewed. The novel thus investigates a particular modality of submissiveness, rooted in the idealization of the English gentleman, through a reworking of the travelogue, the sentimental journey, the memoir, the estate novel, and the novel of manners.

Ishiguro's novels often explore the relation between an alienated protagonist and the posthuman, i.e. the figuration of an ontology that escapes the bounds of humanity, especially as the protagonists often privilege affectlessness or the repression of feeling. For instance, *Klara and the Sun* follows Klara, an AF (Artificial Friend), who is bought to accompany a teenager, Josie – Josie has been “lifted” (genetically improved) but consequently suffers from health issues. This novel seems to have more in common with the dystopian *Never Let Me Go* than with *The Remains of the Day*, but is also in continuation of *The Remains of the Day*, since these novels are first-person narratives of meek slave-like figures, content and striving for excellence in servitude. If Stevens is fueled by shame while affecting unfeeling, Klara's affective space is pre-programmed; and yet, moments of discrepancy or inadequacy – functioning as limitations and conditions of

Bildung – liken her to Stevens in that she strives to be better, while she acknowledges and even admires the hierarchy that places her at the bottom. The next chapter will therefore turn to the novel form's confrontation to the posthuman and its chronotope of fatigue.

Chapter Three

Shame and the Chronotope of the Posthuman

Introduction

In his 1978 seminar on the Neutre at the Collège de France, Barthes frames fatigue as a figure, among many others, of the Neutre, and he delineates fatigue's impossible social position. He introduces his analysis with the etymology of fatigue: fatigue, through its Latin etymology (*fatigo*: faire crever les chevaux, make horses die), evokes both death and puncture. Barthes, quoting novelist André Gide, uses the example of the deflated tire (“un pneu qui se dégonfle”), and this image leads him to articulate the fundamental temporal paradox of fatigue: “Et c’est là – chose très importante – l’infini paradoxal de la fatigue: elle désigne le processus infini de la fin. Je n’en finis pas de finir : c’est ça, la fatigue” (68).

Chronos becomes a problem for the fatigued who, like Tennyson's Tithonus, experience time simultaneously as human and beyond the human, at the “limit of the world.”⁶³ When does fatigue end? Fatigue is the *mise en abyme* of waiting, in which the very possibility of an ending or an endgame becomes dubious; it is a Beckettian epanorthosis, a progression (or perhaps regression) from the apodictic to the problematic:

Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished.

(Pause.)

⁶³ “Me only cruel immortality
Consumes; I wither slowly in thine arms,
Here at the quiet limit of the world,
A white-hair'd shadow roaming like a dream
The ever-silent spaces of the East,
Far-folded mists, and gleaming halls of morn.” (Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “Tithonus”)

Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap. (Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*)

According to Barthes, being fatigued, which is itself an experience of being out of step with the world temporally, means being outside of the social world. Indeed, fatigue is not socially possible or recognizable; it has no place, no code. “Un signe sans référent,” Barthes says (71). One cannot be exhausted and maintain oneself in a social world, and fatigue arises precisely from the tension between the desire to float in space and the shaming pressures to find a place (72-73).⁶⁴

Building on Barthes’ analysis, fatigue can be read as an experience, an instantiation of shame. Indeed, it could be inferred that what the deflated tire symbolizes – a gradual emptying – is an experience of shame, which counters the ideal of productivity, action, energy: shame can be read between the lines of that particular analogy, since *se dégonfler* (to deflate) refers to the physical loss of air, but also to the loss of courage. Moreover, fatigue is both a shameful abdication (being fatigued, indeed, means being at the end of one’s rope) and a dogged persistence in the absence of an ending (there is still, somehow, a rope to hold), which mimics the double movement of shame, going outward and retracting. Fatigue therefore presents both a structural and thematic similarity with shame.

This chapter considers fatigue as an experience of shame in novels about the posthuman. The posthuman, a term coined by Peter Sloterdijk, was conceptualized at the end of the twentieth century, and initially reflected on the relation between the human and technology. Indeed, the human seemed to be entering a new, perhaps final era, since it could potentially be challenged by AI, cyborgs, androids, or clones. The posthuman as a category is used within different movements,

⁶⁴ In his *Histoire de la fatigue*, Georges Vigarello contends that the development of the autonomous individual self in Western societies explains the development of fatigue as the frustrated reaction against the pressures of the social world.

from transhumanism (the enhancement of the human through technology), to philosophical movements that attempt to deviate from anthropocentric thought, to the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement, which supports human extinction in order to save the planet. This chapter refers to the posthuman as a category that pertains to the experience of the nonhuman as well as the experience of a chronotope beyond human temporality: the novels don't simply present confrontations to the nonhuman, but, more importantly, the experience of a future that might, in time, exclude humanity.

Indeed, the temporal paradox of fatigue is explicit in novels that are concerned with the posthuman, as we will see in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick (1968), *The Lathe of Heaven* by Ursula Le Guin (1971), and *Annihilation* by Jeff VanderMeer (2014). Fatigue is an experience of shame, as it is an experience of incommensurable timelines, and more specifically of belatedness: the shame of being merely human in a posthuman world, of running out of (human) time. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* for instance, fatigue is the experience of shame in a world where every entity – organic or not – is threatened by rapid obsolescence and decay.

As we have seen in the introduction and in the previous chapter, belatedness is both the temporal mode of *Bildung* (Castle, Esty) and of shame (Bewes). Novels about the posthuman are imbued with a sense of belatedness, both from the perspective of the fatigued characters, but also in the structures of the novels, which negotiate the shameful persistence of the protagonist on the one hand, and the Earth sinking into entropy or deformation (i.e. the fatigue of the Earth – deformed, unformed, inadequate to the survival of humanity) on the other.

Fatigue expresses the experience of incommensurable timescales, of human and pre/posthuman temporality. In that sense, fatigue is the experience of the Anthropocene:

The Anthropocene poses a radical new answer to an old question: where do humans fit in the story of deep time? As a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene comes freighted with the Enlightenment origins of the geological time scale, an escalation so profound that it dislocated time itself into a spatial register: deep time. (Heringman 56)

In this definition of the Anthropocene, Heringman puts forward the paradox of the “Anthropocene,” which suggests both a human scale and a geological one that long predates human time: deep time. “Deep time” was coined precisely to evoke time beyond human temporality:

Following John McPhee, Stephen Jay Gould and other theorists have adopted the term “deep time” to mark the incommensurability between geological and historical time scales, between the earth’s gradual changes over hundreds of millions of years and the rapid changes occurring in even a century of human history. (57)

Fatigue thus functions both as a recurrent affect for the protagonists, and as a temporal paradox in terms of plot and narrative structure (both highlight the internal limitations of *Bildung*). Each section will therefore move from the protagonists’ experience of fraught, stunted, or paradoxical *Bildung*, to the way the fatigue of the world mutates into exhaustion, disorder, and dissolution of forms: the fatigue of the characters parallels the tension between form, formation, and formlessness in the novels.

In *The Forms of the Affects*, Eugenie Brinkema argues: “Repetition without difference can have the stultifying effect of invoking, in the end, only the affective modality of tedium” (xiii). Tedium evokes fatigue, boredom, weariness, even disgust and irritation; it therefore opens up a vast affective field. If we understand fatigue and tedium as synonymous, this chapter takes issue with Brinkema’s assumption that fatigue is necessarily bound up with sameness; indeed, difference

and disruption can enter in a relation with fatigue, if difference has no human horizon. Difference detached from repetition can invoke fatigue, or rather, be its simultaneous cause and effect. However, this chapter doesn't contradict Brinkema's assertion, if we understand tedium to mean boredom and if we consequently make a clear distinction between fatigue and boredom. Boredom is bound up with hope, the hope that stagnation in sameness and repetition is a temporary, disagreeable state one has to put up with (*ennui* is etymologically related to "annoyance"). Fatigue is not boredom: because of its paradoxical articulation in time, it invites renewal. Indeed, fatigue, beyond the characters' experience of lassitude and lethargy, also translates to the paradoxical creativity of "the infinite process of the end": the profusion and exhaustion of possibilities, from trash gaining agency in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* to multiverses collapsing and disintegrating in *The Lathe of Heaven*, and to the endless exhaustion of biological, symbiotic possibilities with *Annihilation*'s grotesque chimeras.

The novels under study paradoxically evoke a posthuman temporality within an Anthropocenic, anthropocentric narrative form, and the threat of formlessness in a structure invested in the process of *Bildung*. I will be examining how the three novels meditate in different ways on the incommensurability of human and posthuman chronotopes. For instance, while *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is invested in the undoing of form to the point of playing with the limits of narrative representation, *The Lathe of Heaven* explores the tension between the novel form and the mythic by presenting the ethical dilemma of a protagonist who fears his superhuman powers of destruction and creation, and *Annihilation* experiments with tone and genre to unsettle the traditional trajectory of character formation.

I. Human, Machine and Obsolescence (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* By Philip K. Dick)

1. Mercerism and Sentimentalism

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? opens on a domestic squabble: Iran, Rick Deckard's wife, resists the idea of scheduling a positive mood on her "Penfield mood organ." She defends her right to be depressed and apathetic, voluntarily so:

"Keep your hand off my settings." Her voice held bitter sharpness. "I don't want to be awake." (3)

In her view, despair and fatigue – understood as the "absence of appropriate affect" – are necessary. Iran's action is profoundly shocking to her husband; it is amoral and contradicts the logic of the box as a tool of self-regulation; but Iran's gesture is still placed within a structure of control, since she decides to tinker with the box and find an actual setting for those feelings rather than let them occur naturally:

Examining the schedule for January 3, 1992, he saw that a businesslike professional attitude was called for. "If I dial by schedule," he said warily, "will you agree to also?" He waited, canny enough not to commit himself until his wife had agreed to follow suit.

"My schedule for today lists a six-hour self-accusatory depression," Iran said. (4)

This scene, where even the fatigue of feeling is relegated to a box, reconfigures the question of repetition and difference. Indeed, Iran's chaotic, disruptive refusal to abide by the structures of predetermined moods merely results in choosing a counterintuitive setting instead of forsaking the box altogether. Escaping the repetition of patterns is a fantasy, which takes the shape of a negative affect for Iran (the all-too-human bout of depression), but which finds a parallel in her husband

Rick Deckard's desire for a real sheep (rather than a mere electric animal) to elevate his social status in a world where organic life is all but extinct. Those two desires are about possessing the unattainable outside of reproduction: the original, irreducibly authentic sheep for Rick; the unyielding, human feeling of despair for Iran.

However, Iran still attempts to foreclose the human body by integrating despair and fatigue into the mechanical process of a consumer product, an accessory that resembles a prosthetic radio or a musical instrument that can be fine-tuned: even negativity needs to be incorporated into the logic of capitalism. As she acknowledges herself, she plans for this bout of depression to eventually end; her box thus enables her to feel differently, transgressively, without dealing the psychological complexity and debilitating dimension of those feelings:

“But a mood like that,” Rick said, “you're apt to stay in it, not dial your way out. Despair like that, about total reality, is self-perpetuating.”

“I program an automatic resetting for three hours later,” his wife said sleekly. “A 481.

Awareness of the manifold possibilities open to me in the future; new hope that -” (5)

This opening scene could be read as a relatively isolated instance of absurd humor in the novel, which nevertheless colors the way we are supposed to understand affect as fundamentally unreliable, always mediated by machines.

The characters are beholden to a sentimental order that frames empathy as the primary metric of humanity and marker of differentiation between humans and androids, which, in turn, impacts the ontological and moral value ascribed to specials and animals. Two particular structures codify empathy as a metric: the Voigt-Kampff test, which is used to determine whether a person is an android or a human through the measurement of their ability to feel empathy, and Mercerism as an organized religion.

Mercerism attempts to bridge the gap between the human and the machine by using technology to mediate and organize feeling. This religion relies on feeling pain with Wilbur Mercer – an old man attacked by mysterious killers who stone him as he climbs a hill – through an “empathy box.” The televised performance of Wilbur Mercer is, as we discover later in the novel, a sham – a bad Hollywood performance by “an elderly retired bit player named Al Jarry”⁶⁵ (183). The practice of empathy with Mercer is U.N.-approved, as it claims to reduce crime “by making citizens more concerned about the plight of their neighbors” (65).

[N]ew scales of achievement, for example the Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test, had emerged as criteria by which to judge. An android, no matter how gifted as to pure intellectual capacity, could make no sense out of the fusion which took place routinely among the followers of Mercerism – an experience which he, and virtually everyone else, including subnormal chickenheads, managed with no difficulty. (27)

Those scales are essential to Deckard’s activity: he is a bounty hunter who “retires” androids, which entails identifying them and killing them; a key tension at the heart of the novel is whether or not Rick himself is actually human or android.

In this sentimentalist perspective, empathy is voided of its meaning and is a contrived, organized societal affect, a mandatory performance. Crucially, empathy relies on a sentimental order that explicitly puts androids at the bottom of society (even Roy Baty, a rebellious android, tries to experience empathy with mind-fusing drugs). This system whereby empathy functions as a metric of humanity is, ultimately, a fantasy: humans, in the novel, are actually the least empathetic characters. By contrast, Isidore, a dehumanized “special,” feels and expresses too much

⁶⁵ This may be a reference to playwright Alfred Jarry, best known for his absurdist play *Ubu roi* (1896).

empathy towards everyone and everything – including androids and electric animals. This indiscriminate empathy reinforces his position outside of the sentimental order.

Mercerism thus allows no space for depression, for fatigue; it rather relies on a form of toxic positivity that delegitimizes ugly feelings, queer affects. To do so, it paradoxically promotes a type of fatigue that has a goal, an ending (empathy), sometimes to the point of fusion with Mercer. The goal of empathy/fusion can be achieved through redemptive identificatory work, which uses the framework of fatigue – an endless experience of the ending, which is reminiscent of the punishment of Sisyphus, climbing the hill again over and over again. Fatigue thus reads like a badge of honor, a mark that signals Deckard's successful fusion with Mercer at the end of the novel (it is unclear whether this really happens or if it is a hallucination):

“Mr. Deckard, you look awful. So tired. And god, your cheek is bleeding.” Putting his band up he felt the blood. From a rock, probably. More than one, evidently, had struck him.

“You look,” Miss Marsten said, “like Wilbur Mercer.” “I am,” he said. “I’m Wilbur Mercer; I’ve permanently fused with him.” (200)

And yet, throughout the novel, fatigue is always the mode of work for Deckard: while he aspires to own a real sheep, its financial and moral cost turns it into a pipe dream. Deckard, even as he works for a specific goal, is caught in the temporal paradox of fatigue, of which work itself is a manifestation. Fatigue, for Deckard, is the understanding that work is endless, as Barthes points out: “La fatigue me permet de travailler avec l’idée même que mon travail est infini et qu’il ne peut jamais finir” (Barthes 77).⁶⁶ It is Deckard's recurrent affect: “I probably can't retire them, he realized. Even if I try; I'm too tired and too much has happened today” (154). When Deckard asks Isidore to help him find the androids in the building, the text also emphasizes his fatigue, which

⁶⁶ “Fatigue enables me to work with the very idea that my work is infinite and that it can never end.”

seems to grow as he gets closer to completing his mission: “There’re over a thousand separate apartments; you can save me a lot of time.” His voice dipped with fatigue.” (187)

Going back to postcolonial shame as it is defined by Bewes, shame is structural to the novel because the protagonist, and the text itself, cannot escape complicity with unjust structures. Fatigue expresses Deckard’s fundamental disjunction with his surroundings, his uneasy commitment to the system that requires him to kill androids. Even as it is simultaneously performed by and erased from the sentimental order of Mercerism, fatigue expresses Deckard’s complicity with and resistance to that order, as a bounty hunter positioned between the everyman and the police. Shame as fatigue is the affect that structures Deckard’s experience of a world in decay, as the human protagonist. However, fatigue is a pervasive affect that extends beyond Deckard, insofar as all the characters and entities are in a state of programmed obsolescence, regardless of their ontological status.

2. Shame and Degeneration

In *The Shame Machine*, Cathy O’Neil explores how shame is manufactured, weaponized on a global level. What she calls the “shame industrial complex” benefits systems of power: they shame individuals for failings for which those systems are responsible (addiction, poverty, homelessness, obesity, etc.). In the novel, society shames, for example, mental deficiency: “specials” are deprived of rights merely because of their score on an IQ test. We will see that *The Lathe of Heaven* points to a similar logic of pathologization and criminalization with George Orr, who is mistrusted, doubted, and coerced because he tries to self-medicate – he is then treated by a patronizing psychiatrist.

On a more general level, the shame industrial complex in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* relies on processes of dehumanization, which dictate the various distinctions between humans, “specials,” androids (“andys”), real and electric animals, and “kipple” (stuff or trash that grows exponentially). Those hierarchies of marginalization are essential to Mercerism, as we can see with androids and living animals – androids are supposedly different from humans because they can’t feel empathy and, on the other hand, animals are used by humans to perform empathy:

In order to keep the myth of human exceptionalism alive, androids must remain culturally and ontologically marginalized, enabling a cultural displacement of the inherent absence in the human onto the android. To offset this ideological sleight-of-hand, the animal must be positioned as the android's opposite: it becomes the transcendental marker of humanity's unique ability to feel for or with the other. (Vinci 93)

The distinctions between electric animals and real animals, and between human and “specials” rely on two key interrelated concepts: authenticity and degeneration. Electric animals and androids are fake replicas, and therefore less valued than living animals and humans because they are inauthentic (but as we just saw, the authenticity of living animals is only valued in relation to human empathy). On the other hand, humans will degenerate if they remain on Earth, and those who already have (“specials”) are treated as second-class citizens, as though they were no longer authentically human. Specials experience degeneration as a shameful programmed obsolescence that attacks their cognitive and biological functions, and bear the brunt of the institutional, organized shaming of those who remain behind.⁶⁷

The different levels of marginalization and commodification in the novel allude to slavery, and anti-Black, antisemitic tropes, especially if we consider the word “degeneracy,” which often

⁶⁷ Their status is reminiscent of the “unlifted” in Ishiguro’s *Klara and the Sun*, the humans who haven't been genetically enhanced.

refers to political, economic, cultural degeneration and can be found in white supremacist rhetoric. Through a familiar framework of racialization and dehumanization, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* displaces anxieties about social and ethnic degeneration by attending to what would be referred to today as eco-pessimism. In the novel, degeneracy is linked to the fate of the human characters, doomed to become “specials,” contaminated by pollution: “Emigrate or degenerate!” That is the *mot d’ordre* in the novel, the propaganda disseminated on government leaflets: emigration means progress, but it is correlated to the disillusionment of a human future on Earth. This rewrites the logic of ethnic nationalism that is wary of immigration, and for which human progress would mean reclaiming a fantasized authentic homeland. As Gerry Canavan observes:

In generic terms, such necro-futurological fictions trace a path away from the New Frontier of outer space to the No Frontier of a blank future, perhaps a Planet Earth devoid of human life entirely. The super-historical era that is now commonly called ‘the Anthropocene’ [...] thus always generates a structure of feeling about the deep future that is being created out of our present. (212)

Fatigue – which might then be correlated to nostalgia and melancholia – is thus the necessary affect that structures the characters’ lives on Earth, as they are all, already, too late, on the brink of death, collapse, or decay – and therefore, outside of *Bildung*. By definition, they can’t evolve: the androids are bound to be “retired” after a short lifespan, the humans who decide to stay are choosing to degenerate (either to die off or to lose their cognitive abilities and turn into “specials”), the “specials” are restricted to menial jobs and have fewer rights, living animals are almost extinct, and electric ones are bound to malfunction eventually and turn into kipple.

It is not certain what the diminished humanity of the specials entails, but the novel suggests that their state is caused by the toxins in the polluted environment. However, as we see with Isidore, specials seem to have a different awareness of the world around them, feel more keenly the kippleisation of the world, and readily consider non-living entities worthy of dignity and respect. If we follow Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's critique of binaries that oppose human to animal in order to define anti-Blackness,⁶⁸ we may consider that "specials" are not merely dehumanized through a strict opposition to humans, but framed as abject human kipple, as kipple (i.e. a defective, degraded entity) within human form. Contrary to kipple, the animal in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* doesn't function as a bridge towards a lesser humanity, but is completely commodified: "unlike the android, the animal is made invisible not because of its subhuman status but because of the overburden of semiotic weight that it carries" (Vinci 100).⁶⁹

Deckard, after his fusion with Mercer, finds a living toad, which dissipates his fatigue and sense of disjunction with the world: "Now all the weight had left him, the monumental oppressive fatigue" (205). Upon Iran's discovery that the toad is actually electric, Deckard reflects on the value of electric lives:

⁶⁸ "Binaristic frameworks such as humanized versus dehumanized, and human versus animal are insufficient to understand anti-Blackness, because racism has developed social technologies of humanization, in order to refigure Blackness as abject human animality, and extends human recognition, in an effort to demean Blackness as the animal within the human form." (Jackson 2020)

⁶⁹ By contrast, the text emphasizes the autonomy of kipple as an assemblage of organic and inorganic objects; it thus implies that the human body is threatened and bound to turn into an object too. As Jack Halberstam suggests about "wildness":

[T]he disorder of things speaks not only of chaos but also of the reduction of bodies to things. In other words, the archive of wildness is also an archive of *things*—wild things, things that fall apart. The thingliness of this archive references the indeterminacy of bodies and beings outside of what has been understood as order (the order of things) but also conjures the life of objects, the racial cleaving of subjects from objects, and what Fanon calls the facticity of racial fetishism. (24)

“I’ll be okay.” He shook his head, as if trying to clear it, still bewildered. “The spider Mercer gave the chickenhead, Isidore; it probably was artificial, too. But it doesn’t matter.

The electric things have their lives, too. Paltry as those lives are.” (207-208)

In those lines, Deckard simultaneously acknowledges the reality of electric, nonhuman lives, while reasserting an anthropocentric hierarchy (“paltry” is etymologically related to trash).

The novel thus presents a contradictory valuation of the human and the non-human, which stems from the contradiction of promoting both callous productivity and selective empathy. On the one hand, the human is the superior category, determined through its difference with objects, animals, and the lesser humanity of the specials. On the other hand, the novel exposes the hypocrisy of this sentimental order and suggests that the human characters feel keenly the limitations of being human – the limitations of their own “paltry” lives, which can barely be differentiated from electric ones.

The structural fatigue of a world that has become hostile to humans is mapped onto the modern subject’s experience of shame. Shame, as it emerges in the dystopian world of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, is the shame of being human, i.e. of not being a machine, in a world overwhelmed by imitations and virtual reality. For instance, when he takes the side of the androids that come to his building, John Isidore fantasizes about becoming a killing machine, a non-human thing. This fantasy contrasts with his characterization as a guileless, infatuated, stammering special:

“Then,” Isidore said, “you better do what h-h-he suggests.” His voice broke with hope and tension. “I think it would be t-t-terrific, Pris, if you 1-l-lived with me. I’ll stay home a couple of days from my job - I have a vacation coming. To make sure you’re okay.” And maybe Milt, who was very inventive, could design a weapon for him to use. Something

imaginative, which would slay bounty hunters . . . whatever they were. He had an indistinct, glimpsed darkly impression: of something merciless that carried a printed list and a gun, that moved machine-like through the flat, bureaucratic job of killing. A thing without emotions, or even a face; a thing that if killed got replaced immediately by another resembling it. And so on, until everyone real and alive had been shot. (135-136)

The description starts with Isidore imagining a gun, and swiftly shifts to an “impression” of a non-human entity, whose humanity, encapsulated in its “face” and “emotions,” has been erased. In David Bernard’s reading of *L’envers de la psychanalyse* by Jacques Lacan, shame, i.e. the shame of living is a reminder of the speaking body – in Isidore’s case, a stuttering, failing body.⁷⁰ Bernard reads Lacan with Günther Anders, who defined modern shame in similar ways in *The Obsolescence of Mankind*: what Anders calls “Promethean shame” or the “Promethean disjunction” is the shame of being irreplaceable, of not being a thing.⁷¹ This idea was conceptualized in the context of growing industrialization, where technical progress started overtaking human skills. The dystopian world of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* undoes the implicit idealization of the machine on which this theory of shame relies, but nevertheless reveals an unresolved tension between the denunciation of excessive reproduction of replaceable, worthless objects in a consumerist world on the one hand, and the rejection of the human as flawed, cruel, and petty, of perhaps lesser worth than its electric counterpart on the other.

As we have seen in the last two sections, fatigue is the experience of shame in a world where every entity is threatened by obsolescence and decay. The novel extrapolates from concerns

⁷⁰ “J’en déduis que la honte de vivre est un rappel du corps parlant, un affect retour de cette volonté première, entretenue par le discours contemporain, d’élider l’impossible. Il y a un affect de honte propre à notre modernité par lequel se rappelle dans le lien social contemporain l’expérience du corps parlant que l’on voulait forclure.” (72)

⁷¹ “Sa honte d’être un exemplaire unique, et périssable. Sa honte, non pas d’être remplaçable, mais d’être *irremplaçable*, *a contrario* des produits de marque que nous délivre en masse l’industrie moderne.” (73)

that were contemporary to Dick, and are still familiar to us in 2024: the myriad ways both pollution and technology threaten our quality of life and our identity. But, if obsolescence/degeneration affects humans, animals, and machines, it also affects objects in a particular way. With the concept of kippleisation, Dick pushes the concept of fatigue to its extreme, and explores its productive dimension, outside of human perception and understanding.

3. A New Ontology: What is Kipple?

Philip K. Dick's 1962 uchronia *The Man in the High Castle* introduces a Benjaminian meditation on the historicity of objects, which gives them status beyond mere stuff, junk, by inscribing it within human history:

She said, 'what is "historicity"?''

'When a thing has history in it. Listen. One of those two Zippo lighters was in Franklin R. Roosevelt's pocket when he was assassinated. And one wasn't. One has historicity, a hell of a lot of it. And one has nothing. [...] You can't tell which is which. There's no "mystical plasmic presence", no "aura" around it.' (66)

However, later in the novel, another dimension comes into play, as a Japanese customer observes a particular quality to metal jewelry, which is opposed to historicity:

To have no historicity, and also no artistic, aesthetic worth, and yet to partake of some ethereal value – that is a marvel. Just precisely because this is a miserable, small, worthless-looking blob; that, Robert, contributes to its possessing wu. [...] One experiences awareness of wu in such trash as an old stick, or a rusty beer can by the side of the road. [...] The name of it is not art, since it has no form, nor religion. [...] We evidently lack a word for an object like this. (171)

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Philip K. Dick builds on this meditation about worthless objects as being more than what they seem; but rather than elaborating on a spiritual value of trash, as he does in *The Man in the High Castle*, he rather explores what it could mean for trash to have a life of its own. With kipple, Philip K. Dick gives another meaning to fatigue: renewal to no human end. “Kipple” is trash, inorganic waste that grows like an organic, living being:

Kipple is useless objects, like junk mail or match folders after you use the last match or gum wrappers or yesterday's homeopape. When nobody's around, kipple reproduces itself [...] It's a universal principal operating throughout the universe; the entire universe is moving towards a final state of total, absolute kipplesation. (56-57)

Trash looms large in our collective consciousness, as the endless production of waste in wealthy countries becomes apparent in the junkyards, the landfills, the dumps – from the Great Pacific Garbage Patch to the mounds of fast-fashion garments sent to African countries. The concept of kipple prefigures the looming threat of waste colonialism, and is linked to a critique of waste-producing consumerism.

Kipple imagines the consequences of waste as a self-perpetuating, invasive ecosystem: kipple thus figures the fatigue of post-consumerist Earth, and, in turn, evolves as new life, new non-human agency. This is emphasized by the word itself: “kipple” is a neologism or nonce word that refers here to a new order of being; the description also insists on the incursion of the unfamiliar with the word “homeopape,” a hapax. Kipple looks like decay, but is paradoxically creative since it points to an exhaustion of possibilities, to endless degeneration, regeneration, reproduction, combination; kipple literalizes the fatigue of a consumerist world, both because it is trash taking over, and because of its posthuman temporality – its exponential growth cannot be observed or measured.

Indeed, while kipple may seem closer to a state of inflation than deflation, since it entails reproduction and growth, that reproduction is always degraded and tends towards the dissolution of recognizable forms:

He saw the dust and the ruin of the apartment as it lay spreading out everywhere – he heard the kipple coming, the final disorder of all forms, the absence which would win out. It grew around him as he stood holding the empty ceramic cup; the cupboard of the kitchen creaked and split and he felt the floor beneath his feet give... In the depression caused by the sagging of the floor, pieces of animals manifested themselves, the head of a crow, mummified hands which might have once been parts of monkeys. (181-182)

Even though kipple could be defined as a new, post-human lifeform, it is rather formless matter, matter that dissolves forms into incoherent parts of forgotten wholes, contrary to androids – which are pure forms, purportedly devoid of human flesh and emotion. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* imagines non-human agency, self-perpetuating stuff, detached even from the simulacrum; matter which – following Descartes' distinction between *imaginer* and *concevoir* – one can theoretically conceive but not imagine (which is perhaps why it was not represented in the *Blade Runner* films).⁷²

Indeed, kipple, just like fatigue, is impossible to represent, since it is indefinite (both temporally and spatially), indeterminate, and formless. Any description must be reduced to the status of synecdoche, since there is always more stuff that cannot be contained. In that sense, kipple is associated with silence, an invisible, intangible, threatening force that Isidore experiences in his empty building, and which seems to emerge from the objects themselves:

⁷² By contrast, in the episode entitled “The Dump” (2019) from the TV series *Love Death and Robots*, the dump acquires agency, but goes from being invisible, mysterious and formless, to being given an anthropogenic form that harkens back to giants of fairy tale lore, and ends on the comparison of this monstrous entity to a tamed beast: a faithful, obedient dog.

Silence. It flashed from the woodwork and the walls; it smote him with an awful, total power, as if generated by a vast mill. It rose from the floor, up out of the tattered gray wall-to-wall carpeting. It unleashed itself from the broken and semi-broken appliances in the kitchen, the dead machines which hadn't worked in all the time Isidore had lived here. From the useless pole lamp in the living room it oozed out, meshing with the empty and wordless descent of itself from the fly-specked ceiling. It managed in fact to emerge from every object within his range of vision, as if it – the silence meant to supplant all things tangible. Hence it assailed not only his ears but his eyes; as he stood by the inert TV set he experienced the silence as visible and, in its own way, alive. Alive! (18)

Silence, the absence of signifier par excellence, is – like kipple – experienced by Isidore as “the absence that would win out,” an absence made alive, an excess of life where there should be death.

This novel, which is often read as a neo-noir detective story, is therefore also a *Bildungsroman* invested in *Verbildung* (deformation) rather than *Bild* (form), i.e. a *Bildungsroman* which acknowledges that *Bildung* is not only always inadequate, but needs to be overturned. It is the ambiguous movement that results from this emphasis on formation and deformation that I link to both shame and fatigue. As I mentioned previously, Rick Deckard's dream is to own a real, living sheep and give it to his wife. A possible subtext to that plot about the desire for a sheep could be *The Little Prince*, the 1943 novella by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, in which the Prince asks the narrator to draw a sheep for him. After several failed attempts, the narrator finally draws a box, and tells the Prince it contains a sheep. The only way the sheep can escape commodification is to be drawn inside a box, and therefore escape the realm of mimesis. In that sense, we could say that the plot of the novel is articulated between kipple, which stands for the destruction of form, and the sheep, which stands for an impossible desire for formalization.

The novel therefore explores two dimensions of fatigue: one the one hand, Rick Deckard's shameful persistence in the face of degeneration and his desire for something he cannot have and that might not exist anymore; his impossible, "socially untenable" position (Barthes 44), which tires him psychologically and physically. On the other hand, the fatigue of the Earth itself, producing or being produced by kipple, questions the place of the human. The novel makes an explicit link between fatigue and the endless flow of objects and information. This is where the paradox of fatigue is articulated: fatigue is linked to degraded repetition and simulacra, but also to production, creation, newness and, more importantly, autonomy and agency.

Fatigue constitutes the shock of a constant disjunction, that is, the endlessly renewed experience of the impossibility of ending: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* formalizes the experience of the paradox of fatigue, its temporal aberration. That very paradox of fatigue, that cognitive dissonance which is bound to repeat, constitutes a shock, precisely because it offers neither reparation nor destruction, neither (new) beginnings nor unequivocal endings. Indeed, the novel doesn't exactly show us a dead, sterile environment (on the contrary, it overflows with life-as-matter) nor does it imagine the complete impossibility of human relationality (it rather paints a bitter, cruel picture, where empathy is understood to be crucial but misplaced). And yet, it also overturns the slightest glimmer of hope in the restoration of a humanity and of a sentient world we may recognize. While the novel, published in the 1960s, could be read as influenced by postmodernism, it nevertheless opposes the optimism of postmodern aesthetics according to Umberto Eco – that is, a series of potentially infinite variations presented as a victory of life, innovation and repetition. In Philip K. Dick's world, we are beyond optimism or pessimism, and already out of time.

A world going awry and running out of (human) time: this is the primary anxiety in *The Lathe of Heaven*, a novel by Ursula Le Guin, which is explicitly invested in the confrontation of human and posthuman scopes. Kipple as ever-growing matter whose temporality escapes human understanding can be contrasted to Le Guin's exploration of multiverses. Indeed, kipple relies on linear time that merely escapes measurable *chronos*; however, multiverses escape human temporal scales by challenging the idea of a singular timeline. In *The Lathe of Heaven*, the infinite process of the ending takes the form of the multiplication of timelines, which the protagonist is forced to endure.

II. Posthuman Time: The Fatigue Chronotope (*The Lathe of Heaven* by Ursula Le Guin)

1. Orr, the Paradoxical Protagonist

The Lathe of Heaven is set in Portland, Oregon, and revolves around George Orr, a troubled man who has the ability to dream effectively, that is, change reality by dreaming. William Haber, his doctor and a driven, ruthless oneirologist (sleep researcher), uses Orr's ability for his own humanitarian purposes, despite Orr's scruples and concerns about the nature of reality. Because of his reality-altering abilities, George Orr is caught between two incompatible temporalities, human (one linear timeline) and posthuman (multiple timelines). The novel relies on binaries to frame Orr as a paradoxical protagonist: he is an outsider, beyond the *Bildungsroman* pattern, even as he is portrayed as a protagonist trying to better himself, better the world, and invested in a love plot with a woman called Heather Lelache.

This isn't real. This world isn't even probable. It was the truth. It was what happened. We are all dead, and we spoiled the world before we died. There is nothing left. Nothing but dreams. (106)

This is the revelation, halfway through the novel, that the characters all live in a posthuman world, a world involuntarily made up by Orr in his dreams: even though the characters are concerned with preserving and bettering the world, the “real” world has already ended a long time ago, in April 1998. While Orr experiences survivor's guilt, it tends to be overshadowed by shame as the experience of constant disjunction, since he retains the memories of erased timelines. Indeed, after a few sessions of effective dreaming, he barely knows in which timeline he is and is forced to live in an eternal present:

There were by now so many different memories, so many skeins of life experience jostling in his head, that he scarcely tried to remember anything. He took it as it came. He was living almost like a young child, among actualities only. He was surprised by nothing, and by everything. (126)

Orr is prevented from experiencing any linear continuity, any *Bildung*: he is transformed into a perpetual child. He is often presented as malleable, indefinite, formless and resisting form, neutral: a “lump of clay” (130), who can be endlessly reborn. Orr is a figure of fatigue, compromise, repetition, and suffers from mental illness, which is framed as weakness – he is thus seemingly excluded from *Bildung*. According to Haber's diagnosis, Orr is disconcertingly average in every way:

I believe it's time for you to know that, within the frame of reference of those standardized but extremely subtle and useful tests, you are so sane as to be an anomaly. [Y]ou're median. Your extraversion/introversion score, for instance, was 49.1. That is, you're more

introverted than extraverted by .9 of a degree. That's not unusual; what is, is the emergence of the same damn pattern everywhere, right across the board. If you put them all onto the same graph you sit smack in the middle at 50. [...] Neither dominant nor submissive. Independence/dependence—same thing. Creative/destructive, on the Ramirez scale—same thing. Both, neither. Either, or. Where there's an opposed pair, a polarity, you're in the middle; where there's a scale, you're at the balance point. You cancel out so thoroughly that, in a sense, nothing is left. (137)

Orr initially seems to embody stasis, lack of development or even of will, to the point of signifying absence, formlessness. But it is precisely his ability to be moderate, mediocre even, that puts him into the position of the Everyman, which opposes the arrogant, heroic tendencies of Haber. Moreover, even though Orr seems excluded from *Bildung*, he is invested in the process of formation, as we discover for instance when he imagines his dream job: “what he knew he was best at was design, the realization of proper and fitting shape and form for things” (127). The novel thus hinges on binaries that problematize and contrast *Bildung* and stasis, but also the relatable Everyman and the epic hero.

Insofar as Orr's characterization relies on the tension between inchoative *Bildungsheld* and static being, Orr is in an uncertain, in-between, neutral position, which is derided as “queer” by Haber: “Well, you're a queer fish, George, and the queerest thing about you is that there's nothing queer about you!” (138). That line simultaneously points to the paradoxical position of Orr, who is exceptional precisely because he is so average, and to the fact that what Barthes would call the “Neutre” is inherently queer.

Orr's progression highlights the paradox of fatigue, at the nexus of change and stillness. In the following passage, Heather realizes Orr's quiet strength as he endures extreme fatigue – he refuses to sleep in order to avoid dreaming and affecting reality:

Briefly she saw him thus, and what struck her most, of that insight, was his strength. He was the strongest person she had ever known, because he could not be moved away from the center. And that was why she liked him. She was drawn to strength, came to it as a moth to light. (96)

Fatigue is thus interpreted by Heather as a sign of his integrity and determination, which is only legible through the kind of revelation that she experiences – a reorientation of the gaze. Heather's stream of consciousness functions an exercise of imagination, to understand George as a human being (an exercise Haber is unable to do, when he diagnoses and dismisses George as a hapless specimen), but also to project her own desires onto someone who cannot be categorized:

Are there really people without resentment, without hate, [Heather] wondered. People who never go cross-grained to the universe? Who recognize evil, and resist evil, and yet are utterly unaffected by it?

Of course there are. Countless, the living and the dead. Those who have returned in pure compassion to the wheel, those who follow the way that cannot be followed without knowing they follow it [...]. (100)

Through Heather's mediating and smitten gaze, the text prompts the reader to see Orr as a quiet *Bildungsheld*, following an ordinary, unheroic path, rather than as a mythical hero. He thus refuses to harness his powers the way Haber wants him to, and opts for humility and sacrifice. Indeed, George's initial response to the effective dreams, in the first pages of the novel, is to take drugs that will prevent him from dreaming – an attempt to neutralize, annihilate the source of imbalance

rather than try and master this ability. The novel's progression thus portrays Orr as both solid and pliable – pliable in his refusal to take the center stage, but solid in his staunch moral center, his sacrifice, his resolve, qualities which are conveyed as strength in the shape of weakness.

The binaries embodied by Haber and Orr are racialized and gendered: Orr is seen by Haber as womanly and Orientalized:

“You’re of a peculiarly passive outlook for a man brought up in the Judeo-Christian-Rationalist West. A sort of natural Buddhist. Have you ever studied the Eastern mysticisms, George?” The last question; with its obvious answer, was an open sneer. (82)

While this passage emphasizes Haber's reductive understanding of the East, the novel as a whole relies on an opposition of those two frameworks, as it relies on frequent Taoist quotations as chapter epigraphs (like Philip K. Dick, especially in *The Man in the High Castle*). For instance, “When the Great Way is lost, we get benevolence and righteousness” (51) is a Lao Tse quotation that encapsulates the tension at the heart of the novel. Indeed, the Taoist implications of the novel are that Orr's dreams create an imbalance in the world – “the Great Way is lost” – which means that Orr is forced to emerge as a sentimental protagonist – i.e. to become a benevolent, righteous *Bildungsheld*. The Taoist idea of stasis through change is opposed to the leadership qualities that Haber extols, i.e. to the ambition of shaping the world to one's will. The opening paragraphs of the novel, seemingly outside of the diegesis, articulate the tension with which George – and the entire world with him – grapples:

Current-borne, wave-flung, tugged hugely by the whole might of ocean, the jellyfish drifts in the tidal abyss. The light shines through it, and the dark enters it. Borne, flung, tugged from anywhere to anywhere, for in the deep sea there is no compass but nearer and farther, higher and lower, the jellyfish hangs and sways; pulses move slight and quick within it, as

the vast diurnal pulses beat in the moondriven sea. Hanging, swaying, pulsing, the most vulnerable and insubstantial creature, it has for its defense the violence and power of the whole ocean, to which it has entrusted its being, its going, and its will.

But here rise the stubborn continents. The shelves of gravel and the cliffs of rock break from water baldly into air, that dry, terrible outerspace of radiance and instability, where there is no support for life. And now, now the currents mislead and the waves betray, breaking their endless circle, to leap up in loud foam against rock and air, breaking...

What will the creature made all of seadrift do on the dry sand of daylight; what will the mind do, each morning, waking? (1-2)

The novel thus sets up the ethical dilemma of the novel in those terms: how does one react to unbalance without creating more unbalance?⁷³ This is how shame becomes a structuring affect in George's life, beyond his survivor's guilt: his ability to dream effectively forces him to push against his desire to move in harmony with the world, against his position within a world that far exceeds his understanding, hence the emphasis on disorientation, on the surge of a ground which destabilizes rather than supports. In that sense, this opening description functions as a metafictional genesis of the novel's resolutely Earth-bound protagonist – his journey is neither the timeless and spineless floating of the jelly fish, nor supported by myth, which would already provide the hero with an identity, a purpose, and a ground on which to tread. In this context, Orr rather enacts *Bildung* as a reluctant formation through unenviable, torturous repetition.

Haber, contrary to George and his resilient integrity, shows – or performs – purpose, ambition, strength. As polar opposites, Haber and Orr embody several binaries: strength and

⁷³ This is a major question throughout Le Guin's work, including her fantasy novels: "The principle of balanced powers, the recognition that every act affects self, society, world, and cosmos, is both a physical and a moral principle of Le Guin's fantasy world." (Cummins 26)

weakness, control and panic, ambition and self-complacency, humility and self-aggrandizement, excess and mediocrity, optimism and pessimism. Doctor Haber functions as a counterfigure, a mad scientist who attempts to play God. Haber places himself in a Western tradition rooted in Greek myths, nineteenth-century imperialism, positivism, and utilitarianism. While Orr considers that stillness, withdrawal, even entropy, are necessary parts of life, Haber explains his viewpoint through aphorisms reminiscent of Heraclites and Nietzsche:⁷⁴

[L]ife's not a static object, after all. It's a process. There's no holding still. Intellectually you know that, but emotionally you refuse it. Nothing remains the same from one moment to the next, you can't step into the same river twice. Life—evolution—the whole universe of space/time, matter/ energy— existence itself—is essentially change. [...] We're on the brink of discovering and controlling, for the good of all mankind., a whole new force, an entire new field of antientropic energy, of the life-force, of the will to act, to do, to change!

(139)

The building where Haber works resembles “Napoleon’s Tomb” according Heather, and, in the same conversation, Orr comments on the power-hungry doctor in those terms:

Why can't he stop here? I suppose it's like Alexander the Great, needing new worlds to conquer. I never did understand that. How was work today? (160)

Orr thus simultaneously confronts Haber’s motives by dismissing their underlying self-serving ambitions, and by moving quickly from the epic to the mundane, more specifically to a thoughtful, grounded question about Heather’s day. This example highlights his general refusal to create

⁷⁴ Haber more explicitly refers to Nietzsche a few pages earlier, as he meditates on the will to power as an inexhaustible desire for power and growth:

The quality of the will to power is, precisely, growth. Achievement is its cancellation. To be, the will to power must increase with each fulfillment, making the fulfillment only a step to a further one. The vaster the power gained, the vaster the appetite for more. (131)

hierarchies between people and events – where Haber’s utilitarian perspective tends to dismiss the collateral damage he causes in pursuit of humanitarian progress.

However, as Orr attempts to counteract Haber’s projects and undo the damage caused by the doctor, he begins to dream effectively, with disastrous results. He thus unwillingly becomes a powerful designer of worlds. In that sense the novel creates a parallel with the science fiction novel trope in which the protagonist reaches a level of power that places him outside the bounds of a traditional *Bildung*, and verges onto the epic scale – for instance Paul Atreides in Frank Herbert’s *Dune* (1965) or Hari Seldon in Isaac Asimov’s *Foundation* (1951). Paul Atreides starts off as a typical *Bildungsheld* – progressively orphaned, learning to find his place through trials, displacement, romantic or confrontational encounters – but, as the *Dune* cycle expands, he is named as the incarnation of a long-awaited Messiah, and ultimately turns into an omniscient, inhuman, murderous figure who, much like Oedipus, eventually turns blind and exiles himself.

The Lathe of Heaven similarly plays with the expectations of myth and prophecy, and thus with the expectations of science fiction – both rooted in a pseudo-scientific, realistic treatment of an alternative future, and in the reinterpretation of mythological and Biblical tropes, common in the fantasy genre. The multiplying cosmogonies in *The Lathe of Heaven* obviate the conflict between human and machine which is key in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, or even the conflict between different intelligent species, since the aliens are not fully developed; they function as signifiers of peaceful, enlightened, superior beings, who warn humans about their self-destructive tendencies.⁷⁵ The appearance of aliens in the novel signals the most obvious shift from science fiction to fantasy, for instance when one of them refers to Orr as “iahklu”:

⁷⁵ Le Guin may be playing on a recognizable Cold War trope, which can be found in Robert Wise’s film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), itself adapted from a short story by Harry Bates, “Farewell to the Master” (1940).

“Worthy,” said the Alien, and took a short, checked step toward the couch, as if longing to look. “The individual-person is ‘iahklu.’ The recording machine records this perhaps. Is all your species capable of iahklu?”

“I don’t—don’t know the term, can you describe—” (122)

This passage introduces the idea that Orr – because of his average qualities – belongs to a different order of beings, one that is cosmically “worthy” of adjusting the world to restore its balance. Effective dreaming is thus meant to solve the misalignment between the world and the protagonist, but this power is only available to a restricted category of people. Moreover, Orr is helped in his journey and given a word to pronounce if he is unsure:

“Before following directions leading in wrong directions, auxiliary forces may be summoned, in immediate-following fashion: Er’ perrehnne!”

“Er’ perrehnne,” Orr repeated automatically, his whole mind intent on trying to understand what the Alien was telling him.

“If desired. Speech is silver, silence is gold.” (142)

The novel implies that Orr holds a particular power because of his knowledge of a word that seems to have incantatory properties. We move from science fiction – relying on a semblance of scientific logic, as we’ve also seen in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* with the Voigt-Kampff test – to fantasy, which models itself on fairy tale tropes (the Alien is a donor, a magical helper, if we follow Vladimir Propp’s definition). By definition, science fiction is at the juncture of science and fiction, of rational plausibility and fanciful projections. It is a “mode of awareness” that is characterized by gaps and hesitations.⁷⁶ *The Lathe of Heaven* thus functions as a meditation on

⁷⁶ “One gap extends between, on the one hand, belief that certain ideas and images of scientific-technological transformations of the world can be entertained, and, on the other, the rational recognition that they may be realized (along with their ramifications for worldly life). It is a gap that lies between the conceivability of future transformations and the possibility of their actualization. In its other aspect, SF names the gap between, on the one hand, belief in the

fiction, as it presents an endless *mise en abyme* of fiction within fiction. This contributes to the generic uncertainty of the novel, and leads to disorientation, both for Orr and the reader, as Carl D. Malmgren suggests:

The struggle between Haber and Orr acts out the conflict between science and fantasy that structures this subgenre. [...] The novel's treatment of its own fictional reality undermines its truth claims, transforms Orr's solidity into insubstantiality, leaving readers queasy and disoriented. (321-320)

Ultimately the confrontation of Haber and Orr is a transposition of two literary forms, i.e., the myth and the novel. The bounds of the novel are questioned through references to Greek tragedy, more specifically Orr's inability to change fate, i.e. to predict what his dreams will create or undo – as a novelistic hero, Orr has to accept that he cannot control the outcomes of his dreams and can only act within a limited scope. It is precisely as Orr finds himself at the crossroads between *Bildung* and myth and is forced to take a stand against Haber, that the binaries that structure his opposition to Haber are progressively nuanced. By the end of the novel, Haber – like Tiresias – has turned metaphorically blind, and Orr finds his happy ending, at peace with the articulation of his free will and a destiny he cannot understand.

2. Shame as Form: The Novel as a Sentimental Dream

The Lathe of Heaven presents the problematic characterization of a protagonist who is able to change time(lines), and thus has the power to place himself beyond human choice, human ethics. The novel, through its paradoxical protagonist at odds with his own narrative function,

immanent possibility (and perhaps inexorable necessity) of those transformations, and, on the other, reflection about their possible ethical, social, and spiritual interpretations (ie, about their embeddedness in a web of social-historical relations).” (Csicsery-Ronay)

tackles an ethical dilemma which is central to this dissertation's conceptualization of shame with regards to the novel form. In *The Lathe of Heaven*, dreaming, just like writing, is a deferred, complicit structure – one cannot control the way one's dreams, or one's writing, will expose the flaws in one's lofty ideals. By substituting “dreaming” for “writing,” Orr may ask, as Timothy Bewes does in *The Event of Postcolonial Shame*: “How to [dream] without thereby contributing to the material inscription of inequality?” (11).

Indeed, Orr challenges the idea that dreams may be the appropriate medium to enact justice and order:

You are trying to reach progressive, humanitarian goals with a tool that isn't suited to the job. Who has humanitarian dreams? (86)

Orr points to the fundamentally selfish motives that may drive seemingly humanist ideals – a reality he has experienced before Haber. Indeed, when Orr feels anxiety about being an anonymous individual in a crowd and about gradually losing his freedom and his individual space, this results in him dreaming away overpopulation – thus inadvertently killing billions (59-60). To question the feasibility of Haber's goals, Orr exposes “humanitarian dreams as” an oxymoron: form is, by definition, inadequate to content.

While *The Lathe in Heaven* presents an undoing of time through the collapse of incoherent timelines, the novel's ending attempts to provide coherence and closure for the protagonist through the love plot. After the world-shattering confusion of timelines, normalcy and redemption is thus synecdochally contained within the return of the love plot – that of star-crossed lovers, reunited by destiny. The novel oscillates between a self-conscious excoriation of egoistical humanism, and a sentimentalist text that emphasizes balance, empathy, love, and demonizes individual ambition.

For instance, Heather is, at first, a potential antagonist, abrasive and skeptic, who eventually turns into Orr's a moral compass. When she has the opportunity to suggest dreams to Orr, she is horrified by the power she holds and describes herself as strong enough in her convictions as to be incorruptible:

A person who believes, as she did, that things fit: that there is a whole of which one is a part, and that in being a part one is a whole; such a person has no desire whatever, at any time, to play God. Only those who have denied their being yearn to play at it. (108)

However, she initially opposes Orr's passive stance, and the text emphasizes her unfeeling by repeatedly portraying her as a loud, threatening insect, "snapping" her "pincers" (91), "sibilant" (92), clicking her jewelry (54):

Miss Lelache sat behind the screen of bookcases and files that semi-separated her semioffice from Mr. Pearl's semi-office, and thought of herself as a Black Widow. There she sat, poisonous; hard, shiny, and poisonous; waiting, waiting. And the victim came. (42)

The Black Widow pursues her prey. Why hadn't she been a detective instead of a goddam stupid third-class civil rights lawyer? She hated the law. It took an aggressive, assertive personality. She didn't have it. She had a sneaky, sly, shy, squamous personality. She had French diseases of the soul. (92-93)

The repeated comparison to the Black Widow, as well as the web of derogatory adjectives, associate her animality and dangerous hypersexuality with her Blackness, but also with her status as a cynical, potentially menacing antagonist. Whereas Orr's malleability and neutrality are linked to his whiteness, to his uncomfortable assimilation into the neutral, Heather appears as the Black Other (most explicitly from Haber's perspective but even her own) – hard, unyielding, inhuman. The mention of the "French diseases" (i.e. syphilis) associates her with an eighteenth-century

representation of female sexual workers or a seductive lady's man. However, the text previously defines such diseases as "pique, umbrage, and ennui" (90), which link her to foreign, snobbish forms of emotional distance, distaste of the world, and decadence, but also set up an opposition between her superficial boredom and detachment, and Orr's all-encompassing, physical and existential fatigue.

Like the androids and authentic animals in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Heather functions as a reminder of Orr's own humanity, before she is humanized and turns into his love interest. Given her harsh characterization, the novel's love story seems unexpected and contrived, and thus seems to critique the compulsory love plot and its tropes – Heather and Orr are not only star-crossed lovers but also enemies turned lovers.

3. Clinamen and Chimeras

Because the ability to create alternate timelines lies within a seemingly average protagonist, Le Guin's novel questions the linear structure of *Bildung*: the uncertainty of the protagonist maps onto the uncertainty of genre (allegory, philosophical tale, romance), and the novel explores the tension between formlessness/randomness and predetermined, predictable form.

Indeed, *The Lathe of Heaven* conveys the contradictory coexistence of formation and randomness, of cohesive plot and jumbled forms, of free will and the unpredictable swerve of dreams. It plays with the conventions of alternative history or allostory, precisely as there is no longer one reality and its alternative, but multiple realities replacing each other ad nauseam.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Here are a few examples of the realities brought about by Orr's dreams:

- overpopulation is eliminated, as billions of people are retroactively killed by a plague.
- the Earth is at war with Aliens, after Orr dreams about peace on Earth and Aliens appear on the Moon.
- Portland becomes the capital of the Planet.
- everyone turns gray and Heather disappears, because Orr dreamt of a world "without a racial problem."

This variation on the allostory conveys the idea that fatigue can turn into a creative exhaustion of possibilities. In his seminar on the Neutre, Barthes argues that the non-dogmatic, skeptic Pyrrho created the category of the Neutral with *epoche* (“suspension of judgement”): *epoche* means that there is no imposition of form on perception and it is therefore contiguous with profusion, endless possibility. In that sense, George Orr is the embodiment of *epoche* – he is Either-Or, and can create a new world because of his ability to provoke random creation by dreaming, despite of himself:

Des choses nouvelles peuvent naître de la lassitude. [...] [d]es révolutions peuvent sortir de fatigues. (Barthes 79)

The epigraph of Chapter Seven, a quotation from *Les travailleurs de la mer* by Victor Hugo, emphasizes how dreams can concoct permutations that end in grotesque chimeras, hybrid, absurd creations:

[T]he sleeper, not quite seeing, not quite unconscious, glimpses the strange animalities, weird vegetations, terrible or radiant pallors, ghosts, masks, figures, hydras, confusions, moonless moonlights, obscure unmakings of miracle, growths and vanishings within a murky depth, shapes floating in shadow, the whole mystery which we call Dreaming. (89)

At the end of the novel, Haber induces effective dreaming on himself, with catastrophic consequences. To the shame-inducing model of endless fabrication and reproduction critiqued by *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the last chapters of *The Lathe of Heaven* oppose creation as indeterminate, unpredictable forms, to the point of formlessness:

The funicular was crossing the river now, high above the water. But there was no water.

The river had run dry. The bed of it lay cracked and oozing in the lights of the bridges,

foul, full of grease and bones and lost tools and dying fish. The great ships lay careened and ruined by the towering, slimy docks.

The buildings of downtown Portland, the Capital of the World [...] were melting. They were getting soggy and shaky, like jello left out in the sun. The corners had already run down the sides, leaving great creamy smears. (171)

When Orr forces Haber to wake up, the latter's eyes are empty – perhaps an allusion to Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, who is “hollow at the core” yet projects his beliefs and ideas about the grandeur of Western civilization. Haber's emptiness is similarly projected onto the world, leading to chaos, to the “disorder of all forms” reminiscent of kipple in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. Heather thus feels keenly the horror of nothingness permeating the chaos that surrounds her:

It was the presence of absence: an unquantifiable entity without qualities, into which all things fell and from which nothing came forth. It was horrible, and it was nothing. (172)

The Lathe of Heaven imagines what happens when those alternatives multiply and collapse. The ending is both a conventional, happy ending for Orr, who is reunited with Heather, and an aporia, as the world retains contradictory, conflicting realities – there is no return to a lost order. For instance, the detailed description of the jumbled, incoherent transportation system shows a world made of pieces that don't fit together, which Orr seems to consider more an inconsequential, charming quirk than a devastating problem:

Transportation was still rather confused; pieces, remnants, and commencements of about six different public-transportation systems cluttered up the city. Reed College had a subway station, but no subway; the funicular to Washington Park ended at the entrance to a tunnel which went halfway under the Willamette and then stopped. Meanwhile, an enterprising

fellow had refitted a couple of boats that used to run tours up and down the Willamette and Columbia, and was using them as ferries on regular runs between Linnton, Vancouver, Portland, and Oregon City. It made a pleasant trip. (180)

While there is a partly identifiable logic to what went awry in *The Lathe of Heaven*, VanderMeer's *Annihilation* is a novel that purposely stays with, inhabits the mystery of a posthuman chronotope. The influence of the Second World War and the Cold War is perceptible in Dick's and Le Guin reworking of nuclear threats and mass death; by contrast, VanderMeer's contemporary "New Weird" novel signals an embrace of the posthuman, of the fatigue of the human, rather than a rejection or defiance of it. Following Donna Haraway's terminology, *Annihilation* enacts a fascination with and openness to the chronotope of the Chthulucene, which "entangles myriad temporalities and spatialities and myriad intra-active entities-in-assemblages—including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as-humus" (101).

III. The Human and the Weird (*Annihilation* by Jeff VanderMeer)

1. From Initiation to Dissolution

In *Annihilation*, the first volume in the *Southern Reach Trilogy*, teams of scientists explore and study a mysterious Area X, cut off from the rest of civilization, but to no avail, as it remains closed to human understanding. This space inevitably transforms its trespassers and offers exhausting possibilities of seemingly organic life through endless permutations. The novel is told from the perspective of an unnamed protagonist, a biologist who is part of the twelfth expedition into Area X; she is accompanied by three other women, an anthropologist, a psychologist, and a surveyor.

The Southern Reach trilogy's tone oscillates between the paranoia of a Lovecraftian quest and the horror of a survivalist, mycological adventure in the style of *The Last of Us*.

Annihilation, like *The Lathe of Heaven*, explicitly questions the structure of *Bildung* through the progression of the protagonist in an another, posthuman timeline, but this has different implications: rather than an attempt to remain human, to stay within the structure of *Bildung* (like Orr), the novel puts forward a gradual embrace of the posthuman.

One particular feature of the novel is the absence of names. The characters are identified by their function, their job: the narrator is the biologist; the team also includes the anthropologist, the psychologist, and the surveyor. But the novel also reflects an anxiety about identity through the figure of the Doppelgänger, a common *topos* in the horror genre. The biologist's husband sees another version of himself, who, as the novel implies, returns home in his place. When the biologist finds her husband's diary, she reads about the eerie encounter:

And there before me, myself. I walked so stiffly. I had such a blank look on my face. It was so clearly not me ... and yet it was me. A kind of shock froze both me and the surveyor. We did not try to stop them. Somehow, it seemed impossible to try to stop ourselves—and I won't lie, we were terrified. (195)

This confirms her previous doubts about her husband:

[W]hatever had happened to him in Area X had turned him into a shell, an automaton going through the motions. Someone I had never known. (99)

Those passages reconfigure concerns with the double – which threatens the sense of a coherent, unique, self-contained identity – but also with the human-like machine, the “automaton” characterized by its stiffness and blankness, whose history long predates modern artificial

intelligence: if organisms can be replicated artificially, what fundamentally differentiates us from machines? And how might this threat come from nature, rather than technological advances?

The novel thus expands on the extraordinary possibilities of the natural world, which is particularly keen on mimetic and symbiotic processes, by comparison to the limited abilities of humans. This is the biologist's attempt at rationalizing and explaining what she has witnessed in Area X – an explanation that extrapolates from and pushes to its extreme the idea of assimilation of other bodies:

Think of it as a thorn, perhaps, a long, thick thorn so large it is buried deep in the side of the world. Injecting itself into the world. Emanating from this giant thorn is an endless, perhaps automatic, need to assimilate and to mimic. Assimilator and assimilated interact through the catalyst of a script of words, which powers the engine of transformation. Perhaps it is a creature living in perfect symbiosis with a host of other creatures. Perhaps it is “merely” a machine. But in either instance, if it has intelligence, that intelligence is far different from our own. It creates out of our ecosystem a new world, whose processes and aims are utterly alien—one that works through supreme acts of mirroring, and by remaining hidden in so many other ways, all without surrendering the foundations of its otherness as it becomes what it encounters. (225)

The processes of infection, symbiosis, or colonization of human bodies in the novel extend beyond the figure of the Doppelgänger, but ask a similar question: when do infected persons stop being human and relinquish their individual identity? Rather than posing ethical dilemmas regarding electric versus organic lives, like *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, *Annihilation* imagines the horror-inducing ramifications of natural processes (this calls to mind *The Last of Us*' reliance

on a well-documented fungus that can hijack its host).⁷⁸ The novel thus questions how humans strive to differentiate themselves and assert their inalienable individuality, their irreplaceability. One aspect of the novel's undoing of *Bildung* is the paradoxical (de)formation of the biologist through her infection and transformation: her acceptance and assimilation in a non-human world and therefore her gradual loss of human identity.

The novel follows a clear progression, according to the titles of the chapters: Initiation, Integration, Immolation, Immersion, Dissolution. The first two chapters seem to refer to the traditional progression of a *Bildungsroman*, whereas the last three refer to different modes of destruction by fire and water, which are experienced by the narrator through hallucinations. As the novel progresses, we also discover the characters' unreliability. For instance, at the end of "Integration," a flashback about the biologist's husband reveals the reason behind her involvement: he was part of the previous expedition and came back transformed – or duplicated. At the end of "Immolation," she finds the psychologist: we discover what the psychologist hid from the rest of the team, i.e. the extent to which she manipulated them through hypnosis.

On a structural level, the text undoes the traditional progression of a protagonist, as it remains an open-ended mystery: the novel recounts the narrator's gradual experience of symbiosis/infection/cross-pollination with Area X rather than the resolution and victory of the individual journey against external elements. Indeed, the biologist is subjected to a gradual

⁷⁸ "The most prolific and inventive manipulators of animal behaviour are a group of fungi that live within the bodies of insects. These "zombie fungi" are able to modify their host's behavior in ways that bring a clear benefit: By hijacking an insect, the fungus is able to disperse its spores and complete its lifecycle. One of the best-studied cases is that of the fungus *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*, which organizes its life around carpenter ants. Once infected by the fungus, ants are stripped of their instinctive fear of heights, leave the relative safety of their nests, and climb up the nearest plant—a syndrome known as "summit disease." In due course the fungus forces the ant to clamp its jaws around the plant in a "death grip." Mycelium grows from the ant's feet and stitches them to the plant's surface. The fungus then digests the ant's body and sprouts a stalk out of its head, from which spores shower down on ants passing below. If the spores miss their targets, they produce secondary sticky spores that extend outward on threads that act like trip wires. [...] As much as forty percent of the biomass of an infected ant is fungus." (Sheldrake 107)

assimilation into Area X after she accidentally inhales spores. This makes her immune to the biologist's hypnotizing suggestions, but also has physical manifestations – a green glow in her chest, a growing sense of connectedness with her surroundings. For instance, the text insists on the way the biologist accommodates, withstands fatigue:

Perhaps my only real expertise, my only talent, is to endure beyond the endurable. I don't know when I managed to stand again, to continue on, legs rubbery. I don't know how long that took, but eventually I got up. (216)

While this frames her as a resilient protagonist, bent on her progression in a hostile environment, her extreme endurance already signals her transformation or hybridization: she doesn't understand her own strength, loses track of time, and seems sustained by an unknown force. As the biologist progressively becomes non-human, she also reveals how she was always fundamentally on the margins of the human world.

The biologist, in one of her flashbacks, describes herself as an outsider, unconcerned with politics, with socializing, and nicknamed "ghost bird" by her husband:

But fun for me was sneaking off to peer into a tidal pool, to grasp the intricacies of the creatures that lived there. Sustenance for me was tied to ecosystem and habitat, orgasm the sudden realization of the interconnectivity of living things. Observation had always meant more to me than interaction. (131)

She describes herself going on solitary walks at night rather than getting to know her husband's inner life: "I had let tidal pools and fungi that could devour plastic inside my guard, but not him" (197). This is a mistake she hopes to fix by following what remains of her husband in Area X – whatever form he might take:

I will follow my husband up the coast, up past the island, even. I don't believe I'll find him—I don't need to find him—but I want to see what he saw. I want to feel him close, as if he is in the room. And, if I'm honest, I can't shake the sense that "he is still here, somewhere, even if utterly transformed—in the eye of a dolphin, in the touch of an uprising of moss, anywhere and everywhere. (239)

The novel ends in an aporia: "This part I will do alone, leaving you behind. Don't follow. I'm well beyond you now, and traveling very fast" (230). Those lines suggest to the authorities and to the reader that she is outpacing us, that we can't follow her in space and time. At the end of the trilogy, we discover that she has turned into a hybrid being – human, vegetal, mineral, animal: she eventually turns into a posthuman entity, beyond ontological and epistemic boundaries and norms. The biologist purposely chooses to extract herself from human time – the experience of posthuman time, as we have seen, is thus alluded to by the degraded progression of the contaminated protagonist, but it is also explored through the description of Area X, where the characters experience fatigue as both lethargic stasis, and as the endless exhaustion of biological, symbiotic possibilities.

2. Time In/And Excess

In his article "Queer Love, Gender Bending Bacteria, and Life After the Anthropocene," Eben Kirksey prefaces his study of *Wolbachia* bacteria by observing that Hannah Arendt warned against "our ability to destroy all organic life on Earth" (197) in her 1958 book *The Human Condition*. While *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, published ten years later, echoes those fears and imagines a world where organic life is all but extinct, it also imagines trash as life. *Annihilation* takes a different direction by going back to the natural world, and evoking the ways natural

processes predate and will most likely survive humanity. As Kirksey points out, “the timeline of the Anthropocene [...] seems like a brief and inconsequential blip, against the time scales embodied by the microbial communities that are entombed deep underground” (197). How does the novel challenge the timeline of the Anthropocene, and suggest deep time, even as it follows a human protagonist?

Area X is a space where it is possible to experience the infinite within the finite, as the text shows when it defines Area X against the normal world. Indeed, at the beginning, Area X is described as an excess of life within a tired world:

The air was so clean, so fresh, while the world back beyond the border was what it had always been during the modern era: *dirty, tired, imperfect, winding down*, at war with itself. Back there, I had always felt as if my work amounted to a futile attempt to save us from who we are. (43, my emphasis)

But this opposition between fatigue and vitality is a false dichotomy. Later in the text, this is the association the narrator makes about the normal world:

The dirt and grit of a city, *the unending wakefulness of it*, the crowdedness, the constant light obscuring the stars, the omnipresent gasoline fumes, the thousand ways it presaged our destruction ... none of these things appealed to me. (207, my emphasis)

Can a space be both wakeful and tired? This apparent inconsistency suggests that they both express the same idea, the same affect – the experience of a world whose past, present and future are known, predictable, a world in which seasons and cycles have more to do with unstoppable, exponential human activity than with the ebb and flow of natural processes. On the other hand, the progression of the characters in the unknowable Area X is threatened by a different fatigue, a

looming sense of lethargy, of inertia that suggests the experience of non-human time – of a posthuman, unquantifiable, incommensurable *chronos*, beyond the human lifespan:

The feel of our boots as we advanced step by careful step through that viscous discharge, the way in which the stickiness seemed to mire us even as we managed to keep moving, would eventually end in inertia, we knew. If we pushed it too far. (71)

In Area X, any human is automatically and shamefully out of step, destabilized, misaligned: what the biologist describes is a fragile equilibrium that the characters attempt not to break in order not to be assimilated into their surroundings. The characters' perception of time in Area X is different than in the normal world, and gradually impacts the protagonist in her sense of identity and purpose. For instance; she feels inside a "cocoon of timelessness" (107) at the beginning of "Immolation":

Everything was imbued with emotion, awash in it, and I was no longer a biologist but somehow the crest of a wave building and building but never crashing to shore. [...] The strange quality of the light upon this habitat, the stillness of it all, the sense of waiting, brought me halfway to a kind of ecstasy. (106-107)

While the emotion here is unspecified, the description alludes to a form of oceanic feeling: the character is stripped of her identity ("a biologist") and feels in harmony with the world. The sexually suggestive "ecstasy" implies a sense of wholeness and completion, a state beyond (or that predates) the possibility of shame, but it is paradoxical since it seems brought by the very act of waiting, by the never-ending deferral of an event, rather than by an actual climax. This sense of completeness is paradoxically contained within a state of stagnation, uncertain anticipation, and imbalance.

This journey of stagnation rapidly unravels as the characters disappear or are killed off – in that sense, the expedition offers no clear resolution and the characters become increasingly paranoid and confused. Indeed, the physical journey is endless and draining, but so is the scientific process of the expedition, the detective work that the narrator attempts to achieve. Even when the biologist uncovers the journals left by the previous expedition and seems close to a breakthrough, she emphasizes how this archive, muddled and incoherent, doesn't get her much closer to understanding Area X. It rather emphasizes the pointless inexorability of repetitive expeditions, journeys mimicking each other and disappearing within the deep time of Area X:

We were all in the dark, scrabbling at the pile of journals, and if ever I felt the weight of my predecessors, it was there and then, lost in it all.

At a certain point, I discovered I was so overwhelmed I could not continue, could not even go through the motions. It was too much data, served up in too anecdotal a form. I could search those pages for years and perhaps never uncover the right secrets, while caught in a loop of wondering how long this place had existed, who had first left their journals here, why others had followed suit until it had become as inexorable as a long-ingrained ritual.

By what impulse, what shared fatalism? (140)

As the biologist lets go of the possibility that she might scientifically explain Area X, the novel puts forward her acceptance of the obsolescence of the Anthropocene, and experiments with genre, in particular with the tonal framing of uncanny, beyond horror (as we will see in the next section). The novel's portrayal of deliquescence and posthuman bricolage is thus directly related to the novel's formal characteristics. Indeed, the "New Weird" plays with fantasy, horror, science fiction, speculative fiction, and can be read in the context of a critical conceptualization of the Anthropocene and its aftermath, but also animal studies, ecocriticism, and queer theory.

Annihilation thus presents the culmination of a deconstruction of *Bildung* – as an inconclusive aporetic, mock-*Bildungsroman* reliant on encounters with shame, and producing shame as form. The novel offers a trajectory that rejects shame altogether, by rejecting anthropocentrism.

3. Shame and Formal Deliquescence

In *Annihilation*, a subdued sense of horror seems to rely on a sense of pervading uncertainty; for instance, in the following passage, the narrator feels like she is being observed by a non-human presence, and tries to resist this impression because it has no scientific basis:

The richness of Area X's biosphere was reflected in the wealth of birdlife, from warblers and flickers to cormorants and black ibis. I could also see a bit into the salt marshes, and my attention there was rewarded by a minute-long glimpse of a pair of otters. At one point, they glanced up and I had a strange sensation that they could see me watching them. It was a feeling I often had when out in the wilderness: that things were not quite what they seemed, and I had to fight against the sensation because it could overwhelm my scientific objectivity. (38-39)

But more specifically, horror relies not only on the unimaginable, but on the inconceivable as well – i.e. on what remains alien (unlike kipple, which is difficult to visualize, but is defined and therefore can be conceptualized):

Horror promises the experience of the un-grounding of certain norms, vis-à-vis its transgressive character wherein spaces, characters, and objects traverse the worlds of the perceptible and the imperceptible but also threaten to reach the limits of our conceptual capacities. In this, horror's aim is to produce an experience of alterity that maintains its alien quality; *we will never be at home with the monster*, a guiding principle that offers a

lived experience of the outside and holds the nowhere within the lens of human perception.
(Beech 72)

However, the confrontation with alterity takes a turn in *Annihilation*, as the text undoes the black-and-white opposition between the self and the other, inside and outside, human and non-human.

Deliquescence and posthuman transformation are the crux of the novel, both thematically and formally. With the “New Weird,” the uncanny of Dick’s kipple or the absurd of Kafka’s bureaucracy become the basis for a new kind of sci-fi grotesque: VanderMeer’s novels imagine non-human regeneration, bizarre bricolage. *Annihilation* oscillates between different aesthetic categories, from the grotesque to the uncanny, which opens on wonder and fascination, and a particular aestheticization of the posthuman chronotope (which we can oppose to the characterization of kipple in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*). The novel defuses the horror of both the grotesque and the uncanny; this leaves the reader to consider the uncanny as an everyday, inevitable occurrence (rather than a horrifying monster): this is why the text itself needs to end and turn its narrator into a posthuman entity.

This novel makes a pyrrhonist connection between fatigue as inertia to proliferating, boundless creation. Area X functions as a figuration of fatigue: this alien, hybrid space refuses an ending even as those events of grotesque transmogrification herald the end of the world as we humans know it. Area X is a *Wunderkammer*, a frenzy of signifiers, detached from any stable meaning. The text depicts it as a laboratory of exhaustion which paradoxically conveys an excess of life. In his *New Yorker* review, Joshua Rothman points out: “Everything is too alive.” Just like kipple, the inorganic becomes organic, a surplus of life. We may wonder what “too alive” means: it may suggest an unclear boundary between life and non-life, between human life and post-human life.

This novel further explores the relation between the dissolution of form and boundless hybridity, in particular with its striking creation of chimeras, i.e. interspecies monstrosities, or what I would call “lifeforms,” which seamlessly juxtapose destruction and creation (here, the destruction of a human and the creation of vegetal matter). Indeed, if we consider living bodies as enclosed organic forms, made up of different elements, they turn into ever-evolving chimeras, unmade as they are made through endless transformation and distortion; here, human bodies lose their physical boundaries, gradually merge and fuse with other animal or natural lifeforms:

Gently, I knelt beside the anthropologist. There wasn't much left of her face, and odd burn marks were all over the remaining skin. Spilling out from her broken jaw, which looked as though someone had wrenched it open in a single act of brutality, was a torrent of green ash that sat on her chest in a mound. Her hands, palms up in her lap, had no skin left on them, only a kind of gauzy filament and more burn marks. Her legs seemed fused together and half-melted, one boot missing and one flung against the wall. (74)

The grotesque as an aesthetic category is linked to subversive hybridity and metamorphosis; this description emphasizes the interrupted process of transformation, its violence, its unclear logic: is the human body being colonized, hijacked, or is its grotesque appearance the accidental result of homicidal violence from an unknown agent? The psychologist, too, is later colonized by another lifeform, and the uneasy implication is that she wasn't completely herself anymore in the last conversation with the narrator. This understanding of the grotesque is thus closer to E.T.A. Hoffman than to Rabelais; that is, closer to the disorientation and horror of the uncanny.⁷⁹ However, while the descriptions of hybrid beings are grotesque, the affects related to the grotesque— vertigo, disorientation, horror, disgust — seem absent from the text.

⁷⁹ See Rémi Astruc, *Le Renouveau du grotesque* (2010) on the grotesque as the aesthetic subversion of the world, eliciting a sense of vertigo, disorientation.

In another passage, the characters observe the presence of human characteristics in the living tissue found at the tower and, those fleeting impressions impart no sense of threat or doom:

I also saw a few peculiar eruptions of moss or lichen, rising four, five, feet tall, misshapen, the vegetative matter forming an approximation of limbs and heads and torsos. As if there had been runoff from the material, too heavy for gravity, that had congregated at the foot of these objects. Or perhaps I imagined this effect.

One particular tableau struck me in an almost emotional way. Four such eruptions, one “standing” and three decomposed to the point of “sitting” in what once must have been a living room with a coffee table and a couch—all facing some point at the far end of the room where lay only the crumbling soft brick remains of a fireplace and chimney. The smell of lime and mint unexpectedly arose, cutting through the must, the loam. No sense of peace emanated from that place, only a feeling of something left unresolved or still in progress. I wanted to move on, but first I took samples. (114-115)

The only affect here is the absence of peace, but the text conveys no specific sense of unease or horror. The use of the word “tableau” confers to the scene an aesthetic quality and prompts the narrator’s imagination and curiosity for more tableaux that may aggregate into a bigger picture. The description of those once living shapes, like Pompeii figures, may point to an experience of uncanny nostalgia, but the “emotional way” in which she is “struck” is not specified.

Shortly after, the description of a dolphin eschews horror and insists on the almost familiarity of the animal’s human features:

As they slid by, the nearest one rolled slightly to the side, and it stared at me with an eye that did not, in that brief flash, resemble a dolphin eye to me. It was painfully human, almost familiar. In an instant that glimpse was gone and they had submerged again, and I

had no way to verify what I had seen. I stood there, watched those twinned lines disappear up the canal, back toward the deserted village. I had the unsettling thought that the natural world around me had become a kind of camouflage. (116)

Is the dolphin's humanity painful to watch for the biologist, for the dolphin, or for the human being subsumed into the animal? The passage quickly shifts to the biologist's interpretation of her surroundings as camouflage, i.e. needing to be unveiled, explored, rather than fled. By the end of the novel, the biologist stays in Area X and refuses to classify it as abnormal. Throughout the novel, and more clearly in the end, the narrator thus defuses the horror of those grotesque reconfigurations of the human, of a form-destructing environment. This is where we can see how *Annihilation* deviates from a Lovecraftian tradition of pure horror, as it distances itself from a pessimism rooted in the fear for the integrity of human forms. As Rune Graulund points out:

From a Lovecraftian perspective, such indifference to human life is precisely what constitutes the hollow and horrific core of his cosmic humanist pessimism—of an ancient evil that puts the human under erasure physically as well as semiotically. (58)

The fascination elicited by the grotesque and the uncanny differs from traditional Gothic and horror tropes: the uncanny, as the unfamiliar arrangement of the familiar, becomes an opportunity to rediscover beauty, to undermine normative structures, to the point of undermining form itself. If both Lovecraft and VanderMeer present a zone of exception that challenges “the supposed normativity of anthropocentric thought” (45), their fundamental difference is located in the affects that derive from it:

[W]hereas Lovecraft's zone of exception is one that evokes nostalgia, denial, and eventual paralysis, VanderMeer's revolves around openness, acceptance, and hope that allows for alternate realities to the status quo to emerge. (46)

Rather than relying on terrifying monsters that highlight the insignificance of the human, *Annihilation* insists that “the monstrous has made itself home in what was once a human landscape” (56). Indeed, if the grotesque creates a pervading affect of uncanniness, it does not merely translate as horror, but also as fascination and aesthetic appreciation. For instance, the recognition of the human in a non-human landscape is eerie, but the narrator’s voice doesn’t erase the beauty of nature – the grotesque, i.e. the disturbing hybridity of human and non-human form is thus associated with beauty rather than ugliness. Similarly, the monstrous is associated with recognizable species, and with a sense of wonder and humility. For instance, the narrator observes a species of starfish called the “destroyer of worlds” – an experience she then likens to seeing the Crawler, i.e. an entity that cannot be scientifically categorized:

But the longer I stared at it, the less comprehensible the creature became. The more it became something alien to me, and the more I had a sense that I knew nothing at all—about nature, about ecosystems. There was something about my mood and its dark glow that eclipsed sense, that made me see this creature, which had indeed been assigned a place in the taxonomy—catalogued, studied, and described—irreducible down to any of that. And if I kept looking, I knew that ultimately I would have to admit I knew less than nothing about myself as well, whether that was a lie or the truth. (207)

In *Manières d’être vivants*, Baptiste Morizot conceptualizes a contemporary crisis of sensibility, i.e. our loss of perception and understanding⁸⁰ of the natural world; in the context of *Annihilation*, shame is therefore no longer the experience of inadequacy in a social world but in the natural world. The novel suggests an ontology and an aesthetics beyond human understanding and

⁸⁰ “Une réduction de la gamme d’affects, de percepts, de concepts et de pratiques nous reliant [au vivant].” (21)

perception, and recounts a synesthetic experience (in the following order: sight, sound, touch, smell, taste), even as she acknowledges that her five senses are not enough:

I realized that the words on the wall were being infused with sound as well, but that I had not had the capacity to hear it before. The vibration had a texture and a weight, and with it came a burning smell, as of late fall leaves or like some vast and distant engine close to overheating. The taste on my tongue was like brine set ablaze. (208)

Those impressions suggest an awareness of the inconceivable, an expansion of the possible (as the narrator experiences changes in her perception after being infected, as she progressively becomes a hybrid creature), but also the sense of a tired world, with the autumn leaves and the overheating engine of an exhausted machine. The text suggests that the Crawler shames her for her mediocre perception, or that she feels shame because of its incomprehensible presence:

As I adjusted to the light, the Crawler kept changing at a lightning pace, as if to mock my ability to comprehend it. It was a figure within a series of refracted panes of glass. It was a series of layers in the shape of an archway. It was a great sluglike monster ringed by satellites of even odder creatures. It was a glistening star. My eyes kept glancing off of it as if an optic nerve was not enough. (208-209)

She then finds herself drowning in light which has turned into water, and chooses to accept her fate, and “welcome” the unrelenting gaze of the Crawler:

I was a thing in a swimming pool being observed by a monstrous little girl. I was a mouse in an empty lot being tracked by a fox. [...] I wanted to live—I really did. But I couldn’t any longer. I couldn’t even breathe any longer. So I opened my mouth and welcomed the water, welcomed the torrent. Except it wasn’t really water. And the eyes upon me were not eyes, and I was pinned there now by the Crawler, had let it in, I realized, so that its full

regard was upon me and I could not move, could not think, was helpless and alone. (213-214)

The narrator also increasingly embraces irrationality, or rather a perspective beyond science, as she pities the narrow perspective of the psychologist:

I found the psychologist's faith in measurements and her rationalization for the tower's absence from maps oddly ... endearing? Perhaps she meant merely to reassure us, but I would like to believe she was trying to reassure herself. Her position, to lead and possibly to know more than us, must have been difficult and lonely. (24)

Jeff VanderMeer has pointed out his fascination for the intelligence of natural processes, which influenced the creation of Area X:

When you think about the complexity of our natural world — plants using quantum mechanics for photosynthesis, for example — a smartphone begins to look like a pretty dumb object. (*"Annihilation: "Weird" Nature"*)

VanderMeer's fascination for the natural world, rooted in scientific observation but also in rich sensory experiences, translates into the biologist's growing openness to life forms that we may not understand.⁸¹ His own discovery of rich, "transitional ecosystems" in Florida was an experience of uncanniness and hybridity:

The setting in *Annihilation* is, more or less, a transformed version of the fourteen-mile hike I have done for almost twenty years at the St. Marks Wildlife Refuge here in North Florida. It is a landscape and a series of transitional ecosystems that have enchanted me, fascinated

⁸¹ On a similar note, see Myra Hird's remarks on bacteria:

In important ways, bacteria push humanist suppositions further than studies of animals. Animals, as Lynn Margulis liked to remind us, are "big like us" and are more easily amenable to anthropogenic ways of apprehending and assimilating them into lifeworlds that we recognize. Bacteria trouble our familiar forms of communication, identity, sociality (community organization), reproduction, sexual reproduction, movement, metabolism, and just about everything else. (213)

me, and at times scared me. I've seen a Florida panther in that place, and turned a corner right into the gaze of a bobcat, been charged by a wild boar, seen dolphins swimming up the brackish marsh canals at high tide, and had to jump over an alligator on a raised path with water on either side. It's a place where you need to live in the moment, and yet can also, by doing so, be transported deep into memory and catharsis. (ibid.)

In his meditation on his experience in Florida, VanderMeer insists on the dislocation of time which is reminiscent of Romantic meditative lyric (Wordsworth in particular): the aesthetic contemplation of nature prompts a flashback, a return to one's individual consciousness yet a simultaneous erotic merging with the landscape, the assimilation of the other. The contemplative mood of *Annihilation*, which resists pessimism, thus owes to a literary tradition that emphasizes a distortion of time, but also accepts the different "modes of lastness" of an extinct – yet beautiful – world.⁸² We can see how VanderMeer's observations translate into the descriptions of Area X in *Annihilation*:

In the forest near base camp one might encounter black bears or coyotes. You might hear a sudden croak and watch a night heron startle from a tree branch and, distracted, step on a poisonous snake, of which there were at least six varieties. Bogs and streams hid huge aquatic reptiles, and so we were careful not to wade too deep to collect our water samples. [...] The effect of this cannot be understood without being there. The beauty of it cannot be understood, either, and when you see beauty in desolation it changes something inside you. Desolation tries to colonize you. (8-9)

If desolation is colonial, it is also beautiful: *Annihilation* accommodates those contradictions, and the aestheticization of the posthuman, which exceeds definitions and demarcations and creates an

⁸² See Jacques Khalip, *Last Things* (2018), which "explores lastness as the unthinkable but unavoidable limit of our lives and worlds" (6) and examines Wordsworth's "antisensational" (9) perspective.

uncertainty of genre and tone. *Acceptance* is thus the trajectory of the trilogy – the acceptance of the posthuman world that goes beyond our understanding, predates it and will outlive it, which we can contrast to Deckard’s uncertain observation about the paltry lives of electric things:

The terrible thing, the thought I cannot dislodge after all I have seen, is that I can no longer say with conviction that this is a bad thing. (227)

In that sense, the novel reflects the optimism of what Donna Haraway conceptualized as the Chthulucene:

The bodies of the plants and animals that inhabit this planet are hosts to literally trillions of other microbial beings in an infinitely complex network of connections. The horror of the Chthulucene is thus not, as in Lovecraft, the tentacular nature of life on the planet but the failure by the Anthropos to recognize and embrace the planet’s multispecies nature. (Edwards, Graulund, and Höglund 250)

The three novels under study resist and play with the mythic, the allegorical. The incursion of mythopoetic forces is figured by kipple in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (a new ontology), by effective dreaming in *The Lathe of Heaven* (a new cosmogony), and by Area X in *Annihilation* (both); fatigue, the residual affect that permeates the novels, functions as resistance to those forces. While the biologist seems to accept the unknowable dimension of Area X, which resembles Jack Halberstam’s conceptualization of “wildness” (outside of human temporality, order, and teleological orientation),⁸³ she nevertheless names “the Crawler,” which, in turn, endows it with a mythical aura. The tower, which seems to be key to Area X’s mystery, cannot be categorized – it is thus a disorienting mise en abyme of the uncertainty of genre/species, since we

⁸³ “Wildness is all at once what we were, what we have become, and what we will be or, even, what we will cease to be in the event of postnatural climate collapse. [...] Wildness is the absence of order, the entropic force of a chaos that constantly spins away from biopolitical attempts to manage life and bodies and desires. Wildness has no goal, no point of liberation that beckons off in the distance, no shape that must be assumed, no outcome that must be desired” (7).

don't know if it is organic or non-organic, human or alien, real or hallucinated, fantasy, or science fiction:

The tower breathed, and the walls when I went to touch them carried the echo of a heartbeat ... and they were not made of stone but of living tissue. Those walls were still blank, but a kind of silvery-white phosphorescence rose off of them. The world seemed to lurch [...]. I think I was shaking as I finally stood. I don't know if I can convey the enormity of that moment in words. The tower was a living creature of some sort. We were descending into an organism. (51)

The discovery of "living words" add a mystical, spiritual dimension to Area X:

An ... organism ... was writing living words along the interior walls of the tower, and may have been doing so for a very long time. Whole ecosystems had been born and now flourished among the words, dependent on them, before dying off "as the words faded." (107-108)

Those words transcend human time and recognizable ecosystems, but the words themselves also have religious connotations:

Where lies the strangling fruit that came from the hand of the sinner I shall bring forth the seeds of the dead to share with the worms that... (30)

The text plays on the hypnotic quality of those Biblical associations; moreover, the words themselves are a "miniature ecosystem" (32), which means that the words are performative – they are lifeforms, exceeding a clear scientific categorization. They are derived from a presumably human mind, i.e. forms as artifacts, but also evoke natural forms (moss, fungi, loam, honey, forest, sea grass):

I saw that the letters, connected by their cursive script, were made from what would have looked to the layperson like rich green fernlike moss but in fact was probably a type of fungi or other eukaryotic organism. The curling filaments were all packed very close together and rising out from the wall. A loamy smell came from the words along with an underlying hint of rotting honey. This miniature forest swayed, almost imperceptibly, like sea grass in a gentle ocean current. (31-32)

Conclusion

Fatigue as the affective mode of Dick's and VanderMeer's texts directly contends with the postmodern question of how we (can) live with the realization that there is no limit. It simultaneously draws from the postmodern intuition that there is no limit (an idea we may find from Kafka to Kim Stanley Robinson) and, most visibly in the case of VanderMeer, goes back to early traditions of science fiction: the weird, the monstrous, the grotesque, which were part of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century anxiety about the boundaries of the human.

What the novels' characters experience as fatigue is correlated to the intuition of non-human, even non-organic life, or of formless forms (i.e. indefinite structures). If we go back to Beckett's allusion to the paradox of the sorites in *Endgame*, we can observe a deflation at the core of this paradox about accumulation. Indeed, the grain is a seed, a self-contained form; but the heap itself is formless, a mere amalgamation of smaller parts. The heap acquires a name, but, as Dick shows with kipple, naming something isn't enough to give it a definite form: like kipple, the heap is never form(ed), because it is too indeterminate.

For the inevitably form-bound human, for the *Bildungsroman* protagonist, shame then remains, the shame of not being inserted into the process of form-resisting, posthuman evolution, the shame of the limitations of the human form. This is conveyed by the unstoppable expansion in the three novels, and the bricolage (human-machine, human-animal, human-alien) that creates a new cosmogony or eschatology – fatigue turns into creativity, into an endless profusion of possibilities that challenge or distort recognizable forms.

In terms of affect, we have seen that fatigue functions as an affective instantiation of shame in those novels, but that it is complemented by other affects relating to the loss of a recognizably human world – nostalgia, disquiet, horror, wonder, etc. An affect that may be more specific to this loss – and particularly relevant in the context of climate change – is “solastalgia,” a word coined by Glenn Albrecht, which suggests an immobile exile and a resulting sense of disorientation and helplessness, as our surroundings change beyond recognition and estrange us from the natural world:

Le terme rend compte de l’anxiété et de la peine de ces habitants privés du réconfort que procure le fait de se sentir chez soi ; pour rendre compte, aussi, de leur sentiment d’impuissance face à la dégradation de leur environnement. En 2019, le philosophe français Baptiste Morizot étend ce concept à notre condition face aux métamorphoses dues au changement climatique. (Poissonnier)

In his recent work, Baptiste Morizot thus uses “solastalgia” to reflect on a world in which (like the biologist in *Area X*, Orr in *The Lathe of Heaven*, or Deckard in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*) we are no longer at home, but where we are not *elsewhere* either: it rather relates to our dispossession of the world, “une désappropriation du monde tel que la modernité, la révolution industrielle et le naturalisme se l’étaient approprié” (“Ce mal du pays sans exil” 166).

Chapter Four

Shame and the Terrorist in Postcolonial Novels

Introduction

This chapter turns to contemporary novels about characters that are barred from incarnating the universal; they recognize, problematize and negotiate their experience of inadequacy. Those novels are about multicultural worlds, hybrid identities, postcolonial turmoil: the change in scale in those novels recasts the double movement of shame and the failures of empathy and epigenesis on both global and local levels. Since shame is about a fraught positionality, what is its relation to novels that are, essentially, about different modes of displacement and inadequacy? The way I conceptualize shame as interrelated with displacement and migration is made more literal in novels *about* migration and postcolonialism. Shame is an inevitable feature of those novels, insofar as they tackle the various affects that result from enduring structural injustices – humiliation, resentment, melancholia. Indeed, migration, acculturation, assimilation, and rejection are all bound up with being out-of-step, with the attempt to align and orient oneself differently. Postcolonial migrant literature fruitfully represents and problematizes feelings of misalignment, unease, and embarrassment, which, in turn, provoke different forms of literal or figurative displacement. As discussed in the introduction, shame and mobility are the two terms of a self-perpetuating cycle; thus, novels about (im)migration are therefore always confronted with shame as the experience of displacement and difference, and novels about specific instantiations of shame are always bound up with dislocation and movement.

Does the novel's shame of form prompt its own thematization, or do novels about migration and displacement adapt to a form structured and determined by the affect of shame? What is the relation between the migration on which the novel hinges (given its picaresque roots and *Bildungsroman* developments) and the particular forms of migration and displacement which Lahiri, Shamsie, and Hamid explore? This chapter turns to this double causality and examines the different ways in which shame appears as cause and symptom in postcolonial novels about terrorists and refugees: the novels under study dramatize the novelistic tension between character and figure, between feeling and unfeeling, between national belonging and postcolonial dissent.

Migration is not just physical – geographically static subjects can thus experience a form of mobility: this is why I interpret the figure of the terrorist as they are (tentatively) constructed by Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, and Jhumpa Lahiri as characterized by the extreme mobility of the self, its concomitant unveiling and scattering. If shame can disable interest in the world, the loss of shame can also lead to desubjectivation – that is, to the dissolution of the (narratively constructed) subject, or its descent into madness/psychosis. In that sense, those novels are taking up and renewing the problems of shame and sensibility which are key to character construction and to its failure, and were prominent diegetic and stylistic features of the early Anglophone novel.⁸⁴

Home Fire by Kamila Shamsie, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, and *The Lowland* by Jhumpa Lahiri all circumvent the representation of a terrorist character in action, with the problematic characters of Parvaiz, Changez, and Udayan respectively. The terrorist embodies movements of revolutionary action through the killing of others as well as self-destruction and is simultaneously criminalized and dehumanized: the character-as-terrorist becomes a shadow, a plot

⁸⁴ See Wendy Lee, for instance, who claims that “[i]nsensibility seems to express the philosophical problem of narrative” in *Failures of Feeling* (2018, 1).

device, rather than a full-fledged character. This has consequences on a formal level: in *The Lowland* and *Home Fire*, we find structures that function as a network of plot lines, that crisscross and deviate from each other, but that cohere around an empty center, a black hole that acts as a magnet and a repellent. The terrorists in the novels (Udayan, Parvaiz) are even spatially inaccessible and elusive. Their plotlines create new deviations, new pathways through the women in their lives (Gauri in California, Aneeka in Pakistan, Isma in Massachusetts).

If American counterterrorist discourses tend to explain the figure of the terrorist in relation to “forms of illegitimate queerness” (Puar xix), the novels refuse any clear characterization of the terrorist. Is his exclusion from traditional characterization a way of queering the terrorist, i.e. of reinforcing reactionary counterterrorist discourse; or is it a way of imagining another type of character, one that manages to inhabit a narrative space outside of sentimentalism?

Indeed, within a sentimentalist, nationalist framework, the terrorist is an unfeeling, destructive non-character; but novels may also make space for unfeeling as a legitimate affect, and for dissent as a refusal of normative sociality and boundaries. Within the field of affect theory, the construction of feeling as a socially necessary performance of sentiment (and, conversely, the revaluation of bad feeling, unfeeling, or feeling askew) has been analyzed through a postcolonial and decolonial lens, most notably in Sara Ahmed’s and Xine Yao’s work. In *Disaffected*, Yao states:

I am concerned less with the limits of white sentimentalism toward the ideal of a truer universal than I am with how white sentimentalism suppresses and renders illegible the emergence of alternative structures of feeling that would threaten its posturing as universal.

(32)

This chapter focuses on how the characterization of the figure of terrorist and the importance of spectacle problematize the novel form, and opens on the figure of the refugee with Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. If the novels under study participate in a "scandal of truth" (Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*) by portraying characters that resist or lose shame in different ways, then those characters expose or conceal themselves according to a logic that leads them to either attempt to discard shame altogether, or to find their way back to it. Despite their differences, the two liminal figures of the terrorist and the refugee are two phobic objects that call in question the possibility to construct them as novel characters, who are afforded autonomy, agency, and the ability to feel and communicate shame.

I. The Terrorist

1. Udayan, Parvaiz, and Character-Space

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013) is the story of two Bengali brothers, Subhash and Udayan. Subhash leaves India and moves to Rhode Island to pursue a PhD in marine chemistry while his brother joins the revolutionary Naxalite movement and dies in violent circumstances that remain mysterious until the end of the novel. His pregnant widow, Gauri, is taken back to the United States by Subhash, who marries her, but she soon abandons him and her daughter Bela.

The opening chapters of *The Lowland* show how Udayan and Subhash develop in relation to each other, to the land, and in the context of neocolonial oppression in a poor Calcutta neighborhood. After a description of the lowland and its biological characteristics, the second chapter turns to the Tolly Club and the twins' attempt to trespass into this other world of wealth, exclusivity and neocolonialism:

Suddenly they were no longer in Tollygunge. They could hear the traffic continuing down the street but could no longer see it. They were surrounded by massive cannonball trees and eucalyptus, bottle-brush and frangipani.

Subhash had never seen such grass, as uniform as a carpet, unfurled over sloping contours of earth. [...]

They kept far from the main entrance, not venturing toward the clubhouse, where foreign couples walked arm in arm, or sat on cane chairs under the trees. From time to time, Bismillah had said, there was a birthday party for the child of a British family still living in India, with ice cream and pony rides, a cake in which candles burned. Though Nehru was Prime Minister, it was the new Queen of England, Elizabeth II, whose portrait presided in the main drawing room. (7-8)

The text insists on the discrepancy between Tollygunge and the Tolly Club, which is still haunted by British colonial power and beholden to the neocolonial structure of the Commonwealth. Subhash's curiosity and sense of wonder towards his finds (a warbler's egg, feathers, wild almonds) is counterbalanced by Udayan's bravado. The event catalyzes Udayan's sense of rebellion and sacrifice after they are stopped by a policeman: when Subhash is unjustly beaten, Udayan calls out the perpetrators and shields him from their blows.

This opening, which sets up a stratified, economically divided world, foreshadows what will turn into lifelong passions for the two brothers: fighting against injustice as a Naxalite for Udayan and studying nature for Subhash. The first chapters' focus on the Tolly Club provides a key to understand Udayan's motivations: throughout the novel, the Tolly Club remains the symbol of social and economic injustice, and thus a target for the Naxalites. While shame appears to be constitutive of the construction of the postcolonial subject and takes root for the characters in both

class inequality and police repression, Udayan's refusal to feel shame fuels his political views and revolutionary ideals:

Now if they happened to pass the Tolly Club together on their way to or from the tram depot, Udayan called it an affront. People still filled slums all over the city, children were born and raised on the streets. Why were a hundred acres walled off for the enjoyment of a few? [...] He said the Tolly Club was proof that India was still a semicolonial country, behaving as if the British had never left. (29-30)

However, the novel doesn't insist on Udayan's psychological motivations. Instead, it puts forward the perspective and interests of Subhash, with the focus on the minute details of the land and on his sense of wonder. The novel then follows Subhash as he leaves for the United States for his studies and negotiates his feelings of shame and melancholia as an Indian international student. Udayan is therefore primarily defined and described through his surroundings, his upbringing in Calcutta, his relationships (with his brother, his parents, his wife Gauri): the novel only provides a glimpse of his perspective in the last chapters. The circumstances of Udayan's death and his motivations thus function as an empty center, which is highlighted by the geographical dissemination of memory and trauma through Subhash, Bela, and Gauri. Similarly, the revolution at the center (or in the margins) of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* is the 1967 Naxalite uprising, a failed revolution which took place in West Bengal and slowly disappeared from the collective consciousness – in other words, a silent revolution which becomes a void within the narrative.

Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*, a contemporary retelling of *Antigone* by Sophocles, follows the radicalization of Parvaiz, a young British-Pakistani, who joins ISIS in Syria, and the aftermath of this event on his twin sister, Aneeka, and his older sister Isma: Aneeka tries to help him get back to London, and initiates a relationship with Eamonn Lone, the son of the conservative British

Home Secretary Karamat Lone, who is also of Pakistani descent. After Parvaiz is killed, she attempts to return his body to the UK. Rather than putting forward one singular, transformative event, like *The Lowland*, Shamsie's novel hinges on Parvaiz's escape to ISIL, which is correlated to his disoriented second-generation immigrant experience, his relationship and potential identification with his father, a jihadist who died during his transfer to Guantánamo.

Parvaiz is primarily described through the perspective of his family members: he is introduced later, referred to as an invisible, unknowable center of the narrative for several chapters. Indeed, the novel starts with Isma rather than with the purposely detached, calculating Aneeka, who later becomes the focal point of the narrative. It thus delays the revelation of Parvaiz's betrayal and radicalization, and the meditation on his own experience of shame, insecurity, and search for a strong father figure. Through the alternating characters' perspectives, the novel thus presents the perspective of very different characters: Isma, as she starts her PhD in the US, Eamonn as he falls in love with Aneeka, Parvaiz, in a flashback of his radicalization, Aneeka as she reacts to Parvaiz's death, and finally Karamat Lone. By the time Parvaiz is given his own chapter, his story has already become distorted by Isma's Aneeka's and Eamonn's points of view: because the reader already knows he has joined ISIL, the chapter recounting his radicalization makes his individual story seem predetermined.

In the two novels, the terrorist as an individual is left in the margins: his story is dwarfed by the lives of the other characters. If we consider the character-space⁸⁵ in each novel, the characters who are directly associated with terrorism tend to be the most invisible, distant, their

⁸⁵ "Each fictional individual emerges only within a larger narrative framework, shaped by the particular space he or she occupies within a complicated structure. This space is formed through the dynamic interaction, or jostling, among numerous characters who share a limited, and unevenly distributed, amount of narrative attention. The implied person is transformed in this process: whether pushed to the side or fondly rendered, a character's relative position within the totality flows into his or her specific representation as an individual." (Woloch 177)

existence being mediated by others. The two novels are therefore characterized by patterns of scattering and unrooting, death and absence, pathways of literal or figurative escape. In *The Lowland*, far from the tragedies of the Naxalite movement, Subhash and Bela choose to privilege organic life and nomadism over a sedentary lifestyle, and, in *Home Fire*, the daily routine of Isma in wintry Massachusetts stands in stark contrast to the passionate love story and spectacular deaths of Aneeka, Eamonn, and Parvaiz. This structural ambiguity in terms of plot and character-space is emphasized by a recurrent doubling or duality: Gauri in *The Lowland*, Aneeka in *Home Fire*, Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* are all inhabited, eaten away by ghost figures (Udayan, Parvaiz, Erica). Lahiri's and Shamsie's use of plain style and distant rendering of consciousness goes hand in hand with their multi-character narrative: the narrators temporarily attach themselves to characters, emphasize a connection beyond time and space, or a complete loss of connection.

The burden of shame is shown to fall onto the other characters, as a consequence of those narrative patterns. The terrorist is implicitly constructed as a distant figure bringing shame to his family, yet revealing the shame that is already experienced by displaced, postcolonial subjects. *Home Fire* thus opens on a scene where Isma has to endure a long and detailed interrogation before her flight to the US, which she misses:

Isma was going to miss her flight. The ticket wouldn't be refunded because the airline took no responsibility for passengers who arrived at the airport three hours ahead of the departure time and were escorted to an interrogation room. She had expected the interrogation, but not the hours of waiting that would precede it, nor that it would feel so humiliating to have the contents of her suitcase inspected. (3)

We later learn that the reason for such a lengthy process is that her father is a terrorist who died in American custody. Isma therefore has to prove her Britishness by answering a slew of ludicrous questions “on Shias, homosexuals, the Queen, democracy, the Great British Bake Off, the invasion of Iraq, Israel, suicide bombers, dating websites” – a selection that is supposed to yield a particular profile, while also suggesting an array of characteristics that amount to appropriate Britishness, with a hint of homonationalism, Islamophobia, nationalism and sexism.

Home Fire therefore opens on the first-generation experience of self-imposed exile, the shock of a new culture and a new environment; like *The Lowland* with the focus on Subhash’s and Gauri’s perspectives rather than Udayan’s, the novel obviates an immediate exploration of the relation between postcolonial shame and terrorism in Britain. It focuses on Isma’s academic escape from that world, her shame of being associated with terrorism and of having failed Parvaiz as his older sister. However, her serendipitous encounter with Eamonn Lone, the son of Karamat Lone, foreshadows a narrative that will recenter itself on Aneeka.

Starting the novel with Isma (Ismene), who is described as an outsider within her own family and in the process of moving to Massachusetts, rather than with Aneeka (Antigone), is a necessary narrative strategy: it prevents the novel from turning into an allegory that would be exclusively attached to a character who doesn’t doubt her path and place, a character who, unlike Isma, is loved back by Eamonn (Haemon). By contrast, Isma feels shame as the daughter and sister of a terrorist, and as an international student trying to find her place and her voice.

In Lahiri’s novel, the characters’ misaligned relation to their own narratives translates as silence and obsession migrating from character to narrator, an endless alternation between concealment and exposure. Subhash, Udayan, Gauri and Bela are all silent characters, haunted by the shadows of those they cannot be like and/or with; in that sense, their experience of

disorientation and inadequacy parallels their self-imposed mobility. Gauri, whose story is more developed than her husband Udayan's in *The Lowland*, is an "accomplice in a crime" (392) who carries guilt over her indirect involvement in Udayan's actions and who keeps looking over her shoulder decades later. Subhash also lives in the shadow of his brother, which is made very explicit from the beginning of the novel:

Subhash was thirteen, older by fifteen months. But he had no sense of himself without Udayan. From his earliest memories, at every point, his brother was there. (7)

Bela, the daughter of terrorists, is described as a torn character, wandering on a highway as a child, unsure of where she should stand – but as she grows up, she grounds herself more firmly on the earth by working on farms and is described as changed, as if she had been claimed by the soil:

When she came home on weekends he saw that the shape and texture of her hands were being altered by the demands of her labor. He noticed calluses on her palms, dirt beneath her nails. Her skin smelled of soil. The back of her neck and her shoulders, her face, turned a deeper brown. (270)

We thus see her as haunted by her absent mother and her more absent father, as she slowly becomes another Udayan, albeit a non-revolutionary, non-political one, choosing the country over the city, instability over family, poverty over comfort. By anchoring herself within a particular land, Bela thus offers a new model of simultaneous mobility (escaping her family and moving between states and farms) and immobility (being grounded, in harmony with the earth), which captures the ambivalent roots of second-generation immigrants.

The fictional representation of the terrorist can therefore offer a meditation on the exclusionary allocation of sentiment and unfeeling, and subvert the expectations of major versus minor character. For instance, in *A Burning* by Megha Majumdar (2020), the gradual

disappearance of protagonist Jivan from the novel highlights the extent to which she turns into whatever other characters project onto her: she reverses the sentimental paradigm by exposing society's refusal to feel for and with her. The novel follows a constellation of characters, who figure facets of national shame: the poor in relation to the middle class, the middle class in relation to higher and corrupt political circles, the Muslim, the hijra, and, last but not least, the terrorist, whose ghostly presence (or absence) signals the epitome of unpatriotic threat. Jivan, whose name ironically means "life," is the perfect scapegoat after a mysterious terrorist attack: the abject poor, the Muslim, the woman all constitute layered identities of shame which cohere as the necessary deject of the national body. She is shamed and condemned as a terrorist: the novel thus shows the instrumentalization of the terrorist as a figure that embodies the most extreme antisocial, treasonous tendencies. The real terrorist is never known, never present in the novel, while Jivan is progressively robbed of her agency, resilience, and, by the end, of her narrative voice. The character, who is first presented as a wronged protagonist owning her voice in the first chapter, gradually turns into an anomaly within the character-space, discursively constructed and maligned from the outside. The novel moves on from Jivan just like the characters do: it implicates the reader, insofar as reading the novel means moving on from her too.

2. A Literary Heritage

Foucault traces the literary heritage of revolutionary action as scandal of truth: while he emphasizes the break of Russian nihilism in the nineteenth century with Dostoyevsky, he points to the link to tragedy, to the theatrical dramatization of the courage of truth to the point of death.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ "On pourrait dire schématiquement qu'ils ont été tour à tour dominants: l'aspect de la socialité secrète a dominé clairement les mouvements révolutionnaires au début du XIX^e siècle; l'aspect de l'organisation est devenu essentiel dans le dernier tiers du XIX^e siècle avec l'institutionnalisation des partis politiques et des syndicats ; et l'aspect du témoignage par la vie, du scandale de la vie révolutionnaire comme scandale de la vérité a été dominant beaucoup

The novel form has a long tradition of exploring terrorism while exploring the limits of the form and character construction (Dostoyevsky in the nineteenth century, but also Joseph Conrad or Irène Némirovsky), but so do other genres, which point to the difficulty of adjudicating between figure and character. The figure of the terrorist poses fruitful formal and ethical dilemmas for the theater, both in the staging of philosophical dialogue about engagement and action (Albert Camus's adaptation of Dostoyevsky), but also insofar as the dramatization of truth to the point of death is, as we see with *Home Fire*, inherently spectacular. Indeed, if we consider Baudrillard's lens in "L'Esprit du terrorisme," terrorism has to be understood on the side of the spectacular, of the power of the symbolic over the real, and blurs the line between fiction and reality – a power which, in *Home Fire*, Aneeka reclaims in her non-violent (but visually powerful) vigil, which she stages in order to shame and stun the British government and the world.

The novels under study thus need to be read within the larger context of the representation of revolutionary action and the novelistic categorization of individuals who implicate themselves in those movements. This question becomes a growing concern for novelists with the rise of anarchism and terrorist action in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The focus on sensibility and affect is inseparable from those texts: indeed, the ability and willingness to relinquish one's humanity to transgress iniquitous laws either dissolves the body or turns it into a monstrous, non-human entity, and those portrayals of dysmorphia, emaciation or obesity can be rendered in a

plus dans les mouvements qui sont, en gros, ceux du milieu du XIXe siècle. Dostoïevski bien sûr serait à étudier, et, avec Dostoïevski, le nihilisme russe; et après le nihilisme russe, l'anarchisme européen et américain; et également le problème du terrorisme et la manière dont l'anarchisme et le terrorisme, comme pratique de la vie jusqu'à la mort pour la vérité (la bombe qui tue même celui qui la pose), apparaissent comme une sorte de passage à la limite, passage dramatique ou délirant, de ce courage pour la vérité qui avait été posé par les Grecs et la philosophie grecque comme un des principes fondamentaux de la vie de vérité. Aller à la vérité, manifester la vérité, faire éclater la vérité jusqu'à y perdre la vie ou faire couler le sang des autres, c'est bien quelque chose dont on retrouve la longue filiation à travers la pensée européenne." (Foucault, "Le courage de la vérité" 56)

satirical (Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 1907) or pathetic mode (Némirovsky, *L'affaire Courilof*, 1933).

The Secret Agent puts forward a dichotomy between characters who feel emotion in their flesh, and are overwhelmed by their own material presence, which is implicitly related to conventional morality, and characters who are emaciated, distant from both their feelings and their own physiological needs. The novel's characters experience extreme shame (disorientation, inadequacy, painful sympathy) and shamelessness (unfeeling to the point of cruelty). For instance, Stevie, a character who is mentally challenged and ultimately made to carry out a terroristic act by Verloc, is defined by his excess of empathy, by his constant state of disorientation. His sense of being overwhelmed by sympathy and shame of living in an unjust world results in his affective and literal dispersal:

The contemplation of the infirm and lonely steed overcame him. Jostled, but obstinate, he would remain there, trying to express the view newly opened to his sympathies of the human and equine misery in close association. But it was very difficult. "Poor brute, poor people!" was all he could repeat. It did not seem forcible enough, and he came to a stop with an angry splutter: "Shame!" Stevie was no master of his phrases, and perhaps for that very reason his thoughts lacked clearness and precision. But he felt with greater completeness and some profundity. That little word contained all his sense of indignation and horror at one sort of wretchedness having to feed upon the anguish of the other. [...]

Mrs. Verloc [...] was in the dark as to the inwardness of the word "Shame." (231)

By contrast, the anarchist Professor is not impressed or affected by others, cannot feel shame, and reduces individuals to their conventional morality and attachment to the social order when he, on the other hand, merely depends on death. The positioning of the characters on the shame-

shamelessness spectrum can be figured by their excess or deficiency of flesh and plasticity. The fleshy characters demonstrate a capacity to be affected and of valuing material life, whereas emaciated characters – like the Professor – are unaffected, emphasize their own hardness. Ossipon, an anarchist, is shamed by the Professor’s extreme ability to not feel, and the text highlights his body language and blush – “Ossipon’s face had turned dusky red” (155):

He spoke carelessly, without heat, almost without feeling, and Ossipon, secretly much affected, tried to copy this detachment. [...] After uttering these words the Professor walked away from the table. Ossipon, whom that piece of insight had taken unawares, gave one ineffectual start, and remained still, with a helpless gaze, as though nailed fast to the seat of his chair. (156-161)

In *The Secret Agent*, the premature explosion near the Greenwich Observatory, accidentally triggered by Stevie, distorts the timeline of the novel: the narrative, which never shows us the explosion, moves forward and backwards, as if giving form to the hole made by the explosion.

In *The Lowland*, the untold event that precipitates Udayan’s death is deferred, and similarly functions as a hole in the text. Here, the event that catalyzes the course of the novel is not an attack or an explosion: Udayan participated in the murder of a policeman, although he wasn’t the one who wielded the weapon. However, the explosion recurs as a motif, at first associated with a non-lethal accident which is explained in the first half of the book:

His right hand was bandaged, his arm in a sling. He and his squad members had been trying to assemble a pipe bomb, using a firecracker as an explosive. Udayan, with the slight tremor that had never fully left his fingers, should not have been the one to attempt it. The blast had occurred at a remote location, at a safe house. He’d managed to get away. (127)

This event foreshadows the destabilization of the characters’ lives, and of the text itself:

Since the explosion the exterior world was no longer stable. The soles of his feet no longer anchored him. The ground below now beckoned, now menaced, if he happened to look down. (406)

The text ends on another explosion, the sound of Udayan being shot, through his own perspective:

For a fraction of a second he heard the explosion tearing through his lungs. A sound like gushing water or a torrent of wind. A sound that belonged to the fixed forces of the world, that then took him out of the world. The silence was pure now. Nothing interfered. (414)

The motif of the explosion, tearing a hole in the linearity of time, parallels the problematic characterization of terrorists, who are associated with a distorted or lacking sensibility. While *The Secret Agent* never addresses Stevie's perspective in his last moments, the focus on Udayan at the end of *The Lowland* seems to restore a chronological and characterological stability, through the reference of the "fixed forces of the world," and through Udayan's unequivocal transformation from being to non-being. The representation of the narrative and literal hole that fissured the novel thus gives the reader the closure that Gauri was never afforded.

3. The Terrorist: A Theory of Character

Why is the portrayal of the terrorist as a *Bildungsheld* problematic? Is the terrorist, by definition, outside of sentimental characterization, and therefore outside of characterization, or could unfeeling itself be understood as a possible, dissident mode of characterization?

The novels under study are about the relation between shame and terrorism, i.e. (1) the terrorist's absence of shame, or warped relation to affect; and (2) terrorism as a broader, umbrella term for illegitimate political violence, which initiates, polarizes or exacerbates a war of affects. According to Gayatri Spivak, the terrorist spreads terror while/because they are inured to terror or

to affect at large. In turn, state terrorism resists the terrorist's terror and, through terrorizing measures, claims victory:

Where “terror” is an affect, the line between agent and object wavers. On the one hand, the terrorists terrorize a community, fill their everyday with terror. But there is also a sense in which the terrorist is taken to be numbed to terror, does not feel the terror of terror, and has become unlike the rest of us by virtue of this transformation. When the soldier is not afraid to die, s/he is brave. When the terrorist is not afraid to die, s/he is a coward. The soldier kills, or is supposed to kill, designated persons. The terrorist kills, or may kill, just persons. In the space between “terrorism” as a social movement and terror as affect, we can declare victory. Although civil liberties, including intellectual freedom, are curtailed, and military permissiveness exacerbated, although racial profiling deforms the polity and the entire culture redesigns itself for prevention, and although, starting on September 28, 2001, the UN Security Council adopts wide-ranging antiterrorism measures, we can still transfer the register to affect and say, “We are not terrorized, we have won.” (92)

This transfer of affect links shame/shaming and terror (as state terrorism relies on both). The novels under study dramatize the difficulty of entering the consciousness of terrorist characters: indeed, according to the ideology that neatly opposes the soldier and the terrorist, not feeling “the terror of terror” means being on the side of unfeeling, disaffection, and shamelessness. The resistance to affect, which is assigned to soldiers as a positive trait, becomes, in the case of terrorists, more specifically related to the refusal to feel shame. According to that logic, the terrorist lacks an essential human ability, that to feel shame; this lack itself is a “transformation” since the terrorist can then be defined by identifiable attributes (cowardice, cruelty). We find a similar paradoxical articulation of lack and attribute, non-affect and affect, in Bernard Stiegler's definition of

Missachtung (the absence of attention) or *aidos*, which turns into an affect (*mépris*, i.e. scorn, contempt, disregard).⁸⁷

As we have seen with Sterne in Chapter I, this problematization of unfeeling in relation to physiology is an important part of the history of the novel, since the eighteenth century. The shift to vitalism explains the interpretation of unfeeling as a fundamental moral and physiological inability to function in a social world, in *A Sentimental Journey* in particular: “the nervous system, in these moments of sympathetic connection, operates more like a tool connecting self with world than a secret space populated by reflections of the self” (Keiser 424). Unfeeling translates into a formal problem, i.e. their inability to develop into characters whose consciousness can be represented within a sentimental framework.

However, this problem is renewed here by particular tropes. Indeed, the contemporary figure of the terrorist, as it appears in the three novels, is rooted in racist and Islamophobic tropes. *Home Fire*’s plot is related to the paranoid panic that inhabits post-9/11 texts like *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (the (mis)identification of the terrorist). The terrorist as a racialized fanatic is a tributary of the Orientalist, essentialist, construction of the Muslim terrorist as incompatible with Western individual development and sentiment, on which the novel as form is built. In “Edward Said and Recent Orientalist Critiques,” Tahrir Khalil Hamdi opposes Bernard Lewis’ idea of an age-old, Muslim anger rooted in a rejection of modernity, to a realistic, historically informed appraisal of individual character. He observes that monolithic anger translating into indiscriminating terror is a particular mode of representation of the postcolonial subject:

⁸⁷ “Le mépris manifeste l’absence de vergogne. Vergogne se dit en grec *aidôs*. L’*aidôs*, dont le nom fait résonner celui d’Hadès, est un sentiment dont Protagoras fait avec la justice, *dikè*, la condition d’une existence mortelle digne d’être vécue. L’idée de la vergogne, dont le mot n’est plus usité en français, se dit de nos jours par une locution au fond assez étrange dans sa facture : avoir honte (comme on dit avoir froid ou faim – tandis que l’on est heureux, triste, intelligent, amoureux, méchant, riche, etc.). La vergogne est la capacité à avoir honte, à être affecté par ce sentiment que l’on a, et que l’on n’est pas, qui vous tombe dessus en quelque sorte, et qui est la honte : être sans vergogne, c’est être devenu incapable d’avoir honte.” (Stiegler 59)

This representation of the native's "irrational" anger is also portrayed in literature by the "postcolonial" subject who is more lauded in the West than in his own homeland, V. S. Naipaul, [...] Unlike Lewis' Muslim, Naipaul's native does not know the enemy, but he is a potential terrorist, a confused "seething mass of unfocused anger" (Walder, 2005: 63) who simply wants to kill. (133)

On the other side of indiscriminating anger, the novels under study ask whether or not (or to what extent) the characters have been brainwashed, taken over by a robotic, unhuman entity who has become desensitized, inured to shame. In his book *Brainwashing, Automaton, and American Unfreedom*, Scott Selisker argues that "the human automaton has been used to disavow or pathologize terrorists and fundamentalists" but that "more sympathetic representations of the terrorist, such as *Homeland*, have developed a complex relationship with that "brainwashing" and automaton imagery in popular culture and scientific discourse" (152). The automaton, an important object of anxieties since the eighteenth century (because it blurs the lines between human and machine), is projected onto the figure of the terrorist: the terrorist as automaton destabilizes the very distinction between man (as man of feeling, integrated into the sensorium of the world) and machine (an enclosed, unfeeling object).

The two tropes – the brainwashed fundamentalist, the angry native – are fundamentally at odds: one embodies unfeeling while the other is entirely moved by ancestral, powerful affect. The novels thus tackle contradictory representations of the characters' affect. An example of this dual characterization is Parvaiz in *Home Fire*.

Parvaiz's radicalization, condensed in one chapter, is a distorted *Bildungsroman* in which he finds a way to negotiate shame as an insecure, orphaned young man. It follows a logic which was already outlined and derided earlier in the novel; indeed, when Eamonn's friends tease him

for being smitten with Aneeka to the point of disappearing from their circle, they compare him to a radicalized young man. They paint a picture of a stereotypical brainwashed terrorist, and the novel therefore already provides the reader with a recognizable template to understand Parvaiz's trajectory:

Twenty-something unemployed male from Muslim background exhibits rapidly altered pattern of behaviour, cuts himself off from old friends, moves under the radar. Also, are we sure that's an evening shadow rather than an incipient beard? I think we may need to alert the authorities. (82)

Parvaiz's journey of formation is shaped by Farooq, an ISIS recruiter who sings the praise of his dead father, and emphasizes the extent of his sacrifice, in order to make Parvaiz yearn for a similar status as a jihadi. A turning point in his radicalization is when Farooq tests and conditions him by unexpectedly torturing and humiliating him as his father would have been tortured at the hands of American soldiers. Parvaiz experiences pain and humiliation, which builds and confirms his resolve: he even starts hurting himself on his own to continue strengthening himself, thus inuring himself to pain and terror through a pseudo-cathartic process of feeling deeply in order to not feel at all (and be capable of inflicting pain in turn). Parvaiz turns to what Foucault analyzes as a practice of *adoxia* (dishonor), an active search for situations of humiliation in order to regain control of himself within this accepted humiliation. The shamed persona of his absent father is to be honored precisely because he had been defiled through torture and imprisonment. But for Parvaiz, this practice of self-terror, both physically painful and shameful because it means occupying the abject position of the tortured prisoner, results in the discovery of another – more traditional and rigid – code of honor by which he can abide, a code that requires complete, blind trust and obedience. His gradual alienation from affect remains incomplete and is the result of

external psychological manipulation feeding on his shame as the drifting son of a jihadi. But the trope of brainwashing also recurs in a different way: rather than expressing himself, Parvaiz is used to recording sounds and voices, in particular Aneeka's, and is thus characterized as an echo chamber, sensitive and susceptible. The fact that Parvaiz develops as a conduit for other discourses likens him to a mindless, brainwashed fanatic, yet relies on his excessive sensibility.

In *Home Fire*, the terrorist is neither an unfeeling brainwashed terrorist nor a mass of uncontrollable affect. As a narrative figure, he can be understood as swiftly moving from shame (of injustice, of one's unbearable complicity) to a stance of shamelessness or resistance to shame (through scandalous, destructive, extreme behavior). Shame and shamelessness function as two poles of experimentation of the self, but such a spectrum of shame is rooted in sentimentalism, since terrorists may simply recognize another type of shame, linked to honor. Moreover, as we see with Gauri and Udayan, being marked as shameless – abandoning a child, becoming a terrorist and dishonoring the family name – only conceals a destructive sense of shame, which contaminates the other characters yet is only revealed in the final chapters:

He had hoped that she and his mother were still out shopping. But when he emerged from the water, he saw that they had returned in time for this. (409)

He knew that he was no hero to her. He had lied to her and used her. (413)

The Lowland forces the reader to stay with the frustration of having a limited access to the consciousness of a key character. If the plot twist is relatively anticlimactic, the last pages thus function as belated character construction, which questions the reader's projections of Udayan's consciousness. Indeed, the ending of the novel is an analepsis, where Udayan is fleshed out as a character in the moment of his death. In his last moments and in the last sentences, Udayan focuses on a specific memory of Gauri, a memory of love, silence, and harmony:

He adjusted his body in relation to hers. His head angled down, his hand forming a canopy between them to shield her face from the sun. It was a useless gesture. Only silence. The sunlight on her hair. (415)

Udayan dies as he reminisces about a harmonious reorientation of his body, protecting Gauri, a heteronormative vignette that restores the fiction of a happy ending and functions as a corrective to his shame.

II. Embracing Shamelessness

1. Willful Women and *Anaideia*

The shamed figure of the terrorist embodies a particular form of shamelessness and mobility; I am rooting this analysis in Foucault's exploration of shamelessness, exposure and the ethics of truth. In Foucault's last lectures at the Collège de France, he calls modern art in general "the vehicle of cynicism in the modern world" (Foucault, *The Courage of Truth* 188), and argues that it is bound to an ethics of truth that does not gesture towards a form of transcendence or a set of norms. Truth is the process of unveiling, which, in turn, constitutes an ethics as the relation of the self to the self – the Cynics transform this process into a shameless scandal. For Foucault, art is the site of irruption of what is underneath, of what has no possibility of expression. The unconcealed life for the Cynics is thus defined as "the life which does not make one blush because one has nothing to be ashamed of" (251): they dramatize the principle of non-concealment, turning it into shameless life, life in *anaideia* (the brazen life), an *other* life (*une vie autre*) (255). Foucault goes further by interpreting revolutionary movements as "bearing witness by one's life in the form of a style of existence" and defining "terrorism as practice of life taken to the point of dying for the truth" (184-5).

In *The Lowland* and *Home Fire*, given Udayan's and Parvaiz's relative exclusion from the narrative, the question of unfeeling as a willful stance rather seems to apply to characters who embody a different kind of resistance, and are associated with a different kind of domestic terrorism: Aneeka and Gauri. Both Gauri and Aneeka are adjacent to terrorism, defined in relation to it: they are collateral victims and indirect perpetrators of terror, and they stand in contrast to the absent figures of terrorists, Parvaiz and Udayan. Terrorism as an identity defined through racialization and sexualization is implicitly projected onto those two female characters:

[T]he terrorist figure is not merely racialized and sexualized; the body must appear improperly racialized (outside the norms of multiculturalism) and perversely sexualized in order to materialize as the terrorist in the first place. (Puar 38)

While Aneeka is hypersexualized, family-oriented in an excessive way (i.e. to the point of exceeding the law), Gauri is desexualized: they both act against the expected normative attachments to the state, and the family. Indeed, Gauri and Aneeka are portrayed as willful women who choose a non-conventional path: Gauri relinquishes family ties, devotes herself to her academic pursuits and flees West, while Aneeka chooses "radical kinship" (Butler) over the British state. They choose "an *other* life" rather than the one they would be expected to live, to the point of embodying, respectively, the bad mother, and the defiant, suicidal sister. Shamelessness thus functions as a (gendered) mode of character formation.

In *Disaffected*, beyond a critique of white sentimentalism, Xine Yao turns to the other side of the problem by asking how we can read those unreadable figures of disaffection, and make space for unfeeling, or for alternative structures of feeling outside of hegemonic sentimentalism: "marginalized unfeeling is the unrecognized underside of universalized feelings of the dominant" (11). She analyzes the character of Babo in Melville's "Benito Cereno":

Babo's refusal to comply with the terms of this social contract renders him in Delano's eyes its antisocial negation: the unfeeling specter of unsympathetic Blackness that seeks not inclusion into but liberation from the America's structures of feeling that are founded upon the violent subsuming of racialized affects. (33)

To some extent, Gauri and Aneeka also seek liberation from structures of feeling that shame them for their association with terrorism, but also set up gendered expectations for them: in other words, they do not react the way they would be expected to, as the widow of a Naxalite and the Muslim sister of an ISIL fanatic.⁸⁸

A. Gauri in *The Lowland*

In *The Lowland*, Udayan has to be read through his widow Gauri, the complicit partner and the one who remains behind. Gauri is no conventional diasporic widow and is by no means an innocent bystander: she played a part in her husband's terrorist plot, which caused a man's death. Her implication is key to the economy of the novel, since it is revealed at the end and somehow sheds light on the mysterious events that led to Udayan's demise – but, more importantly, because Gauri is constructed as the reluctant trace of her husband's actions, the silent accomplice. Gauri thus asks to be read as (and in relation to) the figure of the terrorist. She is a particularly ambiguous character because she is never allowed to completely embody the revolutionary activist: Udayan takes on that role fully. She also refuses to embody the grieving (or angry) widow, cultivating his memory through their daughter:

⁸⁸ As Lauren Berlant suggests: “[B]iopolitical systems of supremacy often call on the problem populations— such as women, people of color, queers, and youth, but this too will vary—to have emotions for the privileged, to be vulnerable, expressive, and satisfying in disturbance. If they withhold they're called inscrutable, which is a judgment against a form of composure that on other bodies would be honored as good manners, and is often deemed good manners in the servant class.” (197)

But her worst nemesis resided within her. She was not only ashamed of her feelings but also frightened that the final task Udayan had left her with, the long task of raising Bela, was not bringing meaning to her life.

In the beginning she'd told herself that it was like a thing misplaced: a favorite pen that would turn up a few weeks later, wedged between the sofa cushions, or discreetly sitting behind a sheaf of papers. Once found, it would never be lost sight of again. To look for such a misplaced item only made it worse. If she waited long enough, she told herself, there it would be.

But it was not turning up; after five years, in spite of all the time, all the hours she and Bela spent together, the love she'd once felt for Udayan refused to reconstitute itself. Instead there was a growing numbness that inhibited her, that impaired her. (196)

Her loss is described as impairment, as a form of disorientation that needs to be rectified. What Andrew H. Miller refers to as the optative may explain Gauri's warped understanding and experience of time here. Miller links the optative to realism – because of “their shared notion that our lives are at once singular and instances of a class or type or species” (“A Case of Metaphysics” 782) – and therefore to a realistic portrayal of character development and psychology:

At the heart of optative self-understanding is the experience of identity as doubled, at once singular and typical—as Paul Ricoeur puts it, both *ipse* and *idem*. I must experience my life as bounded: for me not to have another life, I must first have one life, only one. In this way, the optative expresses our separateness: in having one life (rather than another) I have one life (apart). And it expresses our singularity: in having one life (rather than another) I have one life only, unlike any other (this one). (778)

The optative occurs in *The Lowland* when, for instance, an older, settled Subhash reflects on his second marriage at the end of the novel:

The years the couple have together are a shared conclusion to lives separately built, separately lived. There is no use wondering what might have happened if the man had met her in his forties, or in his twenties. He would not have married her then. (403)

The optative mood turns his focus to this late “point of origin,” from a nostalgic yet pragmatic perspective that signals his relatively happy ending: in other words, Subhash has made peace with the particular sequence of events that led him there. As Miller argues, this linear, incremental understanding of time relies on the status given to life-changing events:

This optative disposition encourages the thought that experiences are themselves bounded or discrete, that time no less than persons comes in its units. It foregrounds, indeed makes melodramatic, the idea of the event. There was one moment, one fork in the road, one “kernel,” as narratologists would say, that made all the difference. (779)

For Udayan, becoming a Naxalite and taking part in a terrorist act is an event that changes the course of his life:

I can’t become a father, Gauri.

After a moment he added, Not after what I’ve done.

What have you done?

He wouldn’t say. Whatever happened, he told her, he regretted only one thing: that he had not met her sooner, that he had not known her every day of his life. (394)

Dramatizing the terrorist event makes Udayan imagine what another life could have been like by turning his focus to a non-event, and imaginary shift: having met Gauri earlier. However, this

passage doesn't function as a reminder of his life's singularity, but rather as a reminder that he has chosen to live two lives, to the point of being desensitized to violence, immune to feeling:

After the party was declared he began living two lives. Occupying two dimensions, obeying two sets of laws. In one world he was married to Gauri, living with his parents, coming and going so as not to arouse suspicion, teaching his students, guiding them through simple experiments at the school. [...] But in the world of the party it had also been expected for him to help kill a policeman. [...]

In the alley he'd felt calm and purposeful. He'd watched the constable's clothing darken, the look of astonishment, the bulge of the eyes, the grimace of pain that seized his face. And then the enemy was no longer a policeman. No longer a husband, or a father. (411-412)

If the optative mood is essential to realism, as a meditation on the linearity of time which reasserts the singularity of one's life, it must then be opposed to the experience of leading a double life: it is impossible to sustain, as it translates as being half-dead, and, on a formal level, it destabilizes the singularity of the fictional character. In the novel, Udayan has two lives, even if one is a form of death – perhaps because it is paradoxically an affirmation of life, of the possibility of radical change. He passes on this double life to Gauri, who experiences time as both linear and interrupted:

There was the anxiety that one day would not follow the next, combined with the certainty that it would. It was like holding her breath, as Udayan had tried to do in the lowland. And yet somehow she was breathing. Just as time stood still but was also passing, some other part of her body that she was unaware of was now drawing oxygen, forcing her to stay alive. (132-133)

Her child Bela, because she contains the ghost of her father, symbolizes this contradictory double life, or life-in-death:

She felt as if she contained a ghost, as Udayan was. The child was a version of him, in that it was both present and absent. Both within her and remote. (208)

Gauri thus sees herself as half-dead; more precisely, carrying a non-life, i.e. the life she is expected to lead as a housewife in Rhode Island, which is made real and unbearable to her by the life of her unwanted child, and she fantasizes about the life she might have led:

At four Bela was developing a memory. The word yesterday entered her vocabulary, though its meaning was elastic, synonymous with whatever was no longer the case. The past collapsed, in no particular order, contained by a single word. [...] At times Gauri derived comfort from Bela's version of history. According to Bela, Udayan might still have been living the day before, and Gauri might still be married to him, when really almost five years had passed since he was killed. Almost five years, she'd been married to Subhash. (178-182)

Gauri's refuses to become an Andromache-like figure and be trapped in either the past, with Udayan's memory, or the future, with her child Bela. She thus refuses both the logic of memory and grief, and what she calls the "logic of parenthood":

Again, as it was after Udayan's death, there was an acute awareness of time, of the future looming, accelerating. The baby's lifetime, so scant, already outdistancing and outpacing her own. This was the logic of parenthood. (173)

Her horror at the "logic of parenthood" is therefore not only the refusal of heteronormative time and of the traditional role of the mother, but also a refusal of a present without Udayan, i.e. of a timeline that doesn't include him. Udayan's premature death forms "a grave in her mind's eye"

whereas the present is “a hole in her vision” (132). In that sense, having the present take over the past means engaging with the hole, with the void that can never be filled with projections from the past or the future – the projections that constitute “her mind’s eye,” which precedes and obliterates the act of seeing by imposing pre-established significations on what is about to be seen:

Only the present moment, lacking any perspective, eluded her grasp. It was like a blind spot, just over her shoulder. A hole in her vision. But the future was visible, unspooling incrementally. She wanted to shut her eyes to it. She wished the days and months ahead of her would end. But the rest of her life continued to present itself, time ceaselessly proliferating” (132).

Gauri attempts to dissociate herself from the linearity of time, and from space as a sedimentation of history. This bears an interesting resemblance to the act of destructive terror as inaugurating a break in time, opening a void in the present to create another time, another future, since her inability to experience the present is directly linked to the looming presence of a heteronormative future she hasn’t chosen for herself. This point is made by Benjamin in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, especially in Thesis XV, where he recounts that, during the July Revolution, several clock-towers were shot at: “The consciousness of exploding the continuum of history is peculiar to the revolutionary classes in the moment of their action” (“Thesis XV”). Gauri’s obsession with taming time, destroying its teleological linearity, could thus be read as a revolutionary act taken beyond the moment of action, into a philosophy and a stylization of her own life.

Gauri, however, does not die: she pushes forward, leaving her second husband and newborn daughter, going further West in a form of what Edouard Glissant would call “nomadisme en flèche” (Glissant 30) – the type of nomadism linked to conquests and invasions. It is quite

significant that she chooses to flee to California, which she associates with barrenness, purity, silence. Her obsession with time and the future and her horror of reproduction reflect the annihilation of the terrorist act, as does her gradual self-refashioning into a monk-like figure, shedding her saris and chopping off her hair, figuratively shedding her skin, becoming more and more unreadable precisely as she exposes herself:

Her hair hung bluntly along her jawbone, dramatically altering her face. She was wearing slacks and a gray sweater. The clothes covered her skin, but they accentuated the contours of her breasts, the firm swell of her stomach. The shape of her thighs. (168-169)

This passage, before she leaves Subhash and Bela, emphasizes the disturbing aspect of her attire, drawing attention to the shape of her body – the projected neutrality of her clothes and severe haircut thus paradoxically eroticizes her by suggesting both nudity and mystery. The reader therefore has very little access to her thought process, but is turned into a witness of her exposed body. Moreover, Gauri's body itself is described as impermeable to outside influences, leaving no trace. Gauri's lack of affect and fleeting material presence simultaneously excites and bothers Subhash:

At first she expressed no obvious desire, only a willingness. And yet this combination of indifference and intent excited him. [...]

Her skin was uniform, the color even. No tan lines, not a blemish or a fleck of variation as there had been, everywhere, on Holly's body. No nicks on her calves from shaving, not the prickly texture he expected to find on her buttocks and thighs. It was almost disturbing in its softness, like an underbelly that ought not to be exposed.

And yet it did not bruise from his weight, did not redden or swell from the pressure of his teeth or hands. The briny odor between her legs, transferred temporarily to his fingers when he probed her, was absent the following morning when he sought it again. (176-177)

In *Disaffected*, Xine Yao revalues unfeeling as an alienation from affect that has the potential to be productive and creative:

Rather than absence or negation, unfeeling may enable dormant, incipient, and insurgent affects. Unfeeling used strategically can be put in the service of the eventual flourishing of feeling, as with Anzaldúa's figure of the *india*-Mestiza: "She hid her feelings; she hid her truths; she concealed her fire; but she kept stoking the inner flame." Their feelings qua feelings do not require expression or recognition for legitimacy, and unfeeling in another sense names the outsiders' frustration with these dissenting modes of emotional life that may seem ineffable to them. (16-17)

Indeed, Gauri is a striking figure of unfeeling. More specifically, she refuses to express appropriate feeling; she recoils from social recognition or identification beyond her academic, professional role. Gauri in *The Lowland* and Isma in *Home Fire*, are outsiders within the academic world, which nevertheless gives them the opportunity sublimate their intimate, unspoken experience. They both experience an epiphany about their ability to have a voice outside of the domestic world in which they have been raised. For instance, Gauri goes to lectures "surreptitiously," without being enrolled, and finds herself raising her hand to ask a question about Aristotle:

He'd replied as if Gauri were any legitimate member of the class. And spontaneously he altered the course of the lecture, building on her question, accommodating the point she'd made. (159)

The emphasis on the fact that she reorients the professor's lecture suggests that Gauri realizes she can find her own path in academia and express her emotional grappling with time through her exploration of philosophy. Similarly, Isma surprises herself by speaking up in class, to point out how British citizens of foreign descent are "rhetorically being made unBritish" (38):

Isma had gone home that evening and stood in front of the mirror, pressing down on her larynx, and felt the slight tremor of something on the cusp of waking. And wake it had – her suppressed anger distilled and abstracted into essays about the sociological impact of the War on Terror. (39)

They are "dissident" because, as Sara Ahmed points out, the dissident is "the one who sits apart" ("Feminist Killjoys"). As a queer character and an academic, Gauri fashions and orients herself by creating distance, refusing to root herself in and fully inhabit the world, thus expressing a "dissenting mode of emotional life" as a strategy of survival. Her affair with Lorna, for instance, takes place in her office on campus, an in-between space, a makeshift home for an ephemeral relationship: "piles of paper were pushed aside to make room on the daybed behind the desk" (290).

Gauri's choices categorize her as a bad mother, as a queer, unfeeling academic, who refuses to experience time as heteronormative, linear, incremental, and singular; who refuses to root herself in the world and leave a trace. She thus appears as the polar opposite of Subhash, who is fascinated by the tangible traces left by organisms in their wake, and who chooses to build a home and a family on the East Coast. Subhash's optative mood at the end of the novel is thus completely different from Gauri's perspective, who finds herself, at the end of the novel, dead to her family and to the world:

No one connected her to it. Still no one knew what she'd done. She was the sole accuser, the sole guardian of her guilt. Protected by Udayan, overlooked by the investigator, taken away by Subhash. Sentenced in the very act of being forgotten, punished by means of her release. Again she remembered what Bela had said to her. That her reappearance meant nothing. That she was as dead as Udayan. Standing there, unable to find him, she felt a new solidarity with him. The bond of not existing. (393)

B. Aneeka in *Home Fire*

Like Gauri, Aneeka in *Home Fire* has to be read in relation to the figure of the terrorist. In her case, her absolute love for her twin brother turns her into the main agent of opposition to the State, when Parvaiz appears to be a less cunning, unwitting victim of a skillful manipulation. She is the one who effectively terrorizes the government as a dissident who refuses to stand still, to stay in her place, and to privately grieve for her brother in London. She is a willful woman who wants too much, and thus stands out as a figure of excess. Aneeka thus challenges, both politically and formally, the individualist ideology of character, as she precipitates a confrontation of narratives. While she is initially associated with terror and excess, the text reclaims her through sentimental tropes to put forward other modes of kinship, and therefore, of character construction.

After Parvaiz is killed by his former comrades as he attempts to flee ISIS, Aneeka wants to return his body to the UK. However, Karamat Lone rescinds Parvaiz's citizenship and rejects her plea.⁸⁹ Since Parvaiz was also a Pakistani citizen, his body is sent to Karachi, and Aneeka manages to smuggle out the ice-encased body of her brother and sets up camp in a public park

⁸⁹ Even though *Home Fire* was published in 2017, this ethical confrontation could be compared to the case of Shamima Begum, a jihadi bride and member of the ISIL morality police who was found in a camp in Syria in 2019. Conservative Home Secretary Sajid Javid, the son of Pakistani immigrants, revoked her British citizenship, and she lost her appeal to regain it in February 2024.

without moving, as the ice slowly melts in the heat – a morbid spectacle that becomes ubiquitous on the news channels. The novel, in the spirit of the confrontation of Antigone and Creon, thus stages a confrontation between two codes of honor.

In the novel, Karamat Lone as MP embodies the very Empire that plundered Pakistan; this may seem like a paradox – and Lone may seem like an outlier – but the novel emphasizes that his stance is the inevitable result of assimilationist ideals, which structure *Bildung*: Lone's formation as a national subject needs him to embrace individualism (he is nicknamed "Lone Wolf") and Britain's structural racism.

When Isma recognizes Eamonn because of his resemblance to his father, she recalls seeing Karamat Lone in a photograph at a family friend's house:

[T]here was a photograph from the '70s of a neighbourhood cricket team posing with a trophy; it was a photograph Isma had sometimes stopped to look at as a child, wondering at the contrast between the glorious, swaggering boys and the unprepossessing middle-aged men they'd grown into. It was really only the ones she knew as middle-aged men to whom she paid attention, and so she's never given particular thought to the unsmiling one in the badly fitting clothes until the day her grandmother stood in front of the picture and said the word 'Shameless!', poking her finger at the young man. (14)

The specific reason for this reaction – "a cruelty he'd recently shown to their family" is deferred in the text, which rather emphasizes the opportunistic nature of young Karamat, who held the trophy in the picture despite being an outsider replacing a player and doing "nothing all match except drop a catch" (150). Later, Isma reveals to Eamonn the "cruelty" done to her family: Lone refused to help them find out anything about the death of her father. Lone's lack of shame is associated with his caricatural rejection and dehumanization of his community, according to a

binary logic opposing the bad, unruly, Muslim immigrant, and the good, integrated, patriotic one – Isma thus refers to him as “Mr British Values. Mr Strong on Security. Mr Striding Away from Muslimness” (52).

In a 2018 article published in *The Guardian*, Kamila Shamsie states that she initially dismissed the idea of a Tory Prime Minister of Pakistani-Muslim origin, but was inspired by rising politicians:

But it was the summer of 2015 and the political landscape of Britain included three children of Pakistani-British bus drivers: Sajid Javid, Sadiq Khan and Sayeeda Warsi, all in their mid-40s, young enough and prominent enough to make you wonder how far any one of them might progress in a few years. [...] I had finished the first draft of the novel when Sadiq Khan won the London mayoral election. By the time the novel was published he had been in the job a year, so it wasn't entirely surprising that people asked me if I'd based my Muslim politician on him. (“True story: Kamila Shamsie on predicting the rise of Sajid Javid”)

In her talk at the Palestinian Festival of Literature in December 2023, her discussion of the Indian and Pakistani political elite in the context of the Palestinian genocide implies that a character like Karamat Lone in *Home Fire* should not be considered an ironic anomaly:

The question for us is this: what does it mean to live in a nation that remains attached to a myth with racism at its heart? It is not actually a historic irony that British politicians of Indian descent, Rishi Sunak and Suella Braverman, should be among the most enthusiastic supporters of Israel's genocide. It is just another example of how the lessons of empire continue to inform England. Over the years, the British Empire became increasingly adept at making it clear to the Indian elite that there was much advantage to be gained from

setting aside race solidarity in order to ally itself with power. We are merely seeing a twenty-first-century iteration of that. (“*Empire: A Ghost Story*” 6:31-7:36)

The opposition of power and racial solidarity identified by Shamsie parallels the opposition of two sentimental regimes: one bound to the exclusionary logic of national formation in a colonial and neocolonial Empire, and one indebted to a transnational diasporic community of feeling.

In the novel, Karamat Lone is thus seen by his detractors as having no shame, first because he has betrayed his community of origin (which sees him as an opportunist and a hypocrite), and, especially during the final confrontation, because he has no regard for human vulnerability, redemption, and systemic inequality. His own wife shames him for his lack of empathy:

I’m talking about a nineteen-year-old, rotting in the sun while his sister watches, out of her mind with grief. He’s dead already; can’t you leave him alone? [...] Look at her Karamat: look at this sad child you’ve raised to your enemy, and see how far you’ve lowered yourself in doing that. (252-253)

By contrast, Aneeka is considered to be shameless by Karamat Lone as the daughter and sister of terrorists – “the nexus of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State” (109) – who manipulates and seduces her son. Right after meeting Eamonn, she goes home with him and initiates sex, then insists on maintaining their relationship secret, which becomes for Eamonn “a tiresome game in which she [holds] all the power” (77).

As the Pakistani twin sister of a terrorist, she refuses to support national outrage at terrorists, to align herself with either Lone’s politics or Isma’s choices (which articulate academic resistance to Lone’s rhetoric and cautious cooperation with the government to ensure her family’s protection). Aneeka is a willful subject making demands, taking space; she is often portrayed as

undecipherable through Eamonn's eyes, who witnesses her mood shifts, her "clinging" (85) presence, as if demanding to be deciphered:

She'd turn cold, or sad, or sometimes angry, and any attempts to talk to her about it were futile. One particularly strange night he woke up in the early hours of the morning to see her standing at the foot of the bed, staring at him with one of her unreadable expressions. (84)

Aneeka's emotional unavailability and instability is unnerving; her outbursts or blank stares don't give any clear indication that she feels either guilt, disgust, fear, or what exactly provokes her sadness and anger. The second to last chapter, which follows her perspective, opens on Aneeka learning of Parvaiz's death, and describes how she cannot understand grief, nor recognize it as a particular feeling without the presence of her brother:

It was not a possibility her mind knew how to contain. Everyone else in the world, yes. [...] Everyone died, everyone but the twins who looked at each other to understand their own grief.

Grief manifested itself in ways that felt like anything but grief; grief obliterated all feelings but grief [...]. Grief was a shapeshifter, and invisible too; grief could be captured as a reflection in a twin's eye. (184)

Her inability to register grief then turns into a silent rage that distorts her, seeps into her flesh – a grotesque disfigurement that may parallel the trope of the brainwashed, radicalized youth:

What was this? Not grief. Grief she knew. Grief was the step-sibling they'd grown up with, unwanted and inevitable. Grief the amniotic fluid of their lives. Grief she could look into the eye while her twin looked over its shoulder and told her of the world that lay beyond. [...]

But this was not grief. It did not cleave to her, it flayed her. It did not envelop her, it leaked into her pores and bloated her beyond recognition. [...]

This was not grief. It was rage. (193)

In the novel, Aneeka is therefore described as a character whose expressions of feeling or unfeeling are difficult to decipher, but also as a shameless manipulator of feeling, who identifies with sentimental representations (the martyr, the passionate lover). But for Karamat Lone, her sin is above all that she privileges community and family over nation. Their final confrontation seems therefore to be between two different forms of kinship.

Antigone has been read, from Hegel to Irigaray, as the dramatization of dichotomies (kinship/universal, woman/man, home/polis), in which Antigone stands out as a fundamental transgressor. However, in *Antigone's Claim*, Butler criticizes this opposition: Antigone “exposes the socially contingent character of kinship, only to become the repeated occasion in the critical literature for a rewriting of that contingency as immutable necessity” (6). Butler analyzes Hegel’s reductive reading of Antigone as siding with the law of the gods and kinship rather than that of the state. She argues that Antigone “upsets the vocabulary of kinship,” that she claims political speech and representation while destabilizing the logic of power that excludes her:

She acts, she speaks, she becomes one for whom the speech act is a fatal crime, but this fatality exceeds her life and enters the discourse of intelligibility as its own promising fatality, the social form of its aberrant, unprecedented future. (82)

Following this logic of in-betweenness, which complicates Antigone’s motivations, I argue that Aneeka exposes the contradictions of the British state, as she stands for both universal human dignity, and loyalty to one’s kin. The spectacular staging of this revolt against institutions, against the law, resembles what Foucault describes as the cynical lifestyle – a form of activism addressed

to all, that uses spectacle rather than education, that is “in the world and against the world” (*The Courage of Truth* 262). Rather than standing for socially contingent kinship, Antigone stands for kinship that privileges universal values. Aneeka opposes the logic of the War on Terror⁹⁰ – “Take out the trash. Keep Britain clean” (219). But more generally, she also opposes laws rooted in ideologies that privilege punishment over justice:

In the stories of wicked tyrants men and women are punished with exile, bodies are kept from their families – their heads impaled on spikes, their corpses thrown into unmarked graves. All these things happen according to the law, but not according to justice. I am here to ask for justice. I appeal to the Prime Minister: let me take my brother home. (225)

In this statement, Aneeka links the law to various ancient practices but those also allude to the brutal methods of ISIL – she thus draws an implicit parallel between ISIL and the UK. In the spectacle she stages in Karachi, she overturns the destructive postcolonial shame and resentment of her brother by invoking the pathetic figure of the Pietà, by appealing to a post-Enlightenment belief, to an entrenched Christian sentimental tradition, but also – from a Pakistani perspective – by becoming “Laila and Majnu combined in the nation’s consciousness” (228).

In the text, Aneeka is described by Karamat Lone as a political inconvenience, although Karamat’s wife tries to reason with him and remind him of her age and background. She nevertheless remains a remote figure, and is progressively desubjectivized as she makes her stand in Karachi:

⁹⁰ In his article on terror and terrorism in Merleau-Ponty, Thamy Ayouch points to the connection between state terrorism, as outlined by Merleau-Ponty – erroneous generalizations and patterns, which can be seen in the dangerous abstractions conveyed by official discourse in the media to interpret cultural differences, like Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” – and terrorist acts that reclaim this ineluctable, theatrical confrontation of Islam and the West. This contemporary form of terrorism thus borrows from both terrorism as spectacle, violence, and from state terrorism as a power rooted in ideological abstractions (the Jihad on the one hand, the crusade against evil on the other).

For a few moments there was only a howling noise, the wind raging through the park, and then a hand plucked away the white cloth and the howl was the girl, a dust mask on her face, her dark hair a cascade of mud, her fingers interlaced over the face of her brother. A howl deeper than a girl, a howl that came out of the earth and through her and into the office of the Home Secretary, who took a step back. As if that were the only thing the entire spectacle had been designed to achieve, the wind dropped... and the girl stopped her noise, unlaced her fingers. The cameras panned, then zoomed. In the whole apocalyptic mess of the park the only thing that remained unburied was the face of the dead boy. (Shamsie 224)

The delayed identification of the howl, but also of bodies and features emphasizes the disappearance of Aneeka as a character and her merging with the earth, in the eyes of the TV viewers, Lone in particular; we don't see flesh and blood, but dust, mud, a being who is both alive and dead. Claire Chambers unearths the layers of intertextual references or echoes of that primal cry:

This moment, mediated as it is by the optics of a Pakistani news channel's cameras and coldly interpreted by Karamat as an "impressive" visual spectacle, is nonetheless highly auricular. Not only does it bring to mind Allen Ginsberg's beat poem "Howl" (1956) and the horrible scene of the magistrate's torture in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for Barbarians* but also, from Urdu poetry, Kishwar Naheed's collection *The Scream of an Illegitimate Voice*. In Shamsie's arrangement, Aneeka becomes her anguished utterance: a howl that seems to emanate from the earth, aeolian remnants of which soil her face. In pathetic fallacy, the wind howls with her, only abating when her voice drops. Karamat is literally taken aback by Aneeka's deepthroated, almost animal wail, and it takes him a moment to recover his suave cynicism. (Chambers 209)

The spectacle turns Aneeka into a voice carrying histories of human pain rather than an individual being; this passage functions both as synecdoche (Aneeka's voice stands for her entire self) and an allegory (of pain that reaches beyond her own singular grief). This representation, however, is countered by the fact that Aneeka is turned into an object of terror: while Aneeka is still in Karachi with the decaying body of her brother, Karamat Lone is told about a potential attack, which is mistakenly believed to target him, rather than his son. As Eamonn reaches Karachi to be with Aneeka, Karamat learns that his son is actually the target of the attack: upon his arrival, Eamonn is strapped with explosives, and Aneeka willingly runs towards him and embraces him as the bomb explodes.

The passage combines a radical critique of institutional power, a revolt unto death, but also invokes traditional, recognizable tropes that associate this narrative with the tragic form of the doomed love plot, still framed and mediated by the TV screen and camerawork:

Every television channel replayed it, endlessly: A man in a navy-blue shirt walks into the park [...] One cameraman, a veteran of carnage, stops at the edge of the park, beyond the blast radius as best as he can judge, turns his lens onto the new emptiness of the field. [...] For a moment they are two lovers in a park, under an ancient tree, sun-dappled, beautiful and at peace. (259).

The eroticized display of death hearkens to the stories of star-crossed lovers who meet a tragic ending, and this particular televised sequence most explicitly calls to mind the ending of Mani Ratnam's 1998 film *Dil Se*, where the power of heterosexual love over political revolution – in the form of the final, explosive embrace of Amar (Shahrukh Khan) and bomb-strapped Meghna (Manisha Koirala) – functions as the redemption from Meghna's terrorist allegiance through a double sacrifice.

The spectacle Aneeka initiates doesn't remain a distant political confrontation with Karamat Lone that turns her into a dehumanized, desubjectivized symbol of primal resistance, but rather ends in an intimate and universal tragedy: the trope of martyred star-crossed lovers reinstates Aneeka within a recognizably sentimentalist narrative, even as it shows the power of radical, willful, non-normative kinship over patriotic, assimilationist ideals. The scene functions as a shocking representation of death as "preservation of symbolic self" – of resistance to the state, of radical kinship superseding repressive laws.⁹¹ As she willingly runs her to her death and seems to convince Eamonn to accept their fate, the text subverts the image of the suicide bomber, for whom "[s]uicidal resistance [...] is both execution and mourning, for both self and other, where you die with me for the same cause, no matter which side you are on, with the implication that there is no dishonor in such shared death" (Spivak 96):

Get away from me, run! And run she does, crashing right into him, a judder of the camera as the man holding it on his shoulder flinches in expectation of a blast. At first the man in the navy shirt struggles, but her arms are around him, she whispers something, and he stops.
(260)

While Aneeka's suicidal project initially stages her resistance to the law in a spectacle of defiance and melancholic attachment (even if it means her death alongside Parvaiz's decaying body), the killers turn it into a spectacle of death. Unlike Gauri, whose perspective we follow at the end of the novel, Aneeka only appears through the filter of the TV screen: the last paragraphs turn the characters into unnamed figures moving on a screen and don't allow the reader or spectator to

⁹¹ Jasbir Puar, quoting Ghassan Hage, points out that self-annihilation preserves the symbolic self: "Self-annihilation is the ultimate form of resistance, and ironically, it acts as self-preservation, the preservation of symbolic self enabled through the 'highest cultural capital' of martyrdom, a giving of life to the future of political struggles—not at all a sign of 'disinterest in living a meaningful life.' [...] This body forces a reconciliation of opposites through their inevitable collapse— a perverse habitation of contradiction." (216)

grasp the exchange between Eamonn and Aneeka, which reinforces the inaccessibility of Aneeka's feelings and motivations. The text circles back to a form of emotional unavailability, which now includes Eamonn as well, yet dramatizes the tragedy of their deaths: the limiting mediation of the TV screen highlights "the power of a dramatized withholding as an esthetic machinery of normative social reproduction" (Berlant 197).

2. Mohsin Hamid: Sentimental Encounters

A. Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) is a first-person narrative from the perspective of a protagonist who may or may not be a terrorist. Changez, the narrator, comes back to Pakistan after studying at Princeton, working in the US and enduring the changes that 9/11 and its aftermath ignited in American society. If the terrorist's marginalized experiences of feeling are typically linked to either a lack or an excess of affect, the narrator challenges those interpretations through a series of reversals of conventional structures of feeling. He thus alternatively presents himself as participating or being excluded from traditional *Bildung* and American sentimental structures, exposes the illusion of a coherent, readable protagonist, and shames the narratee's own assumptions.⁹²

The novel starts as a traditional *Bildungsroman*, with the narrator's account of his education at Princeton as he is "invited into the ranks of the meritocracy" (4). Changez is a symbol of academic excellence: he follows a path of formation that leads him to a lucrative job at a valuation firm. He feels proud of his accomplishments, but experiences shame as he tries to fit into

⁹² The narratee is Changez's interlocutor in the diegesis (an American man) but through the narrative structure of the long monologue, the novel implies and questions the reader's identification with or distance from the American.

American culture – for instance, when he first meets Erica, who is sunbathing with her breasts bare.

According to Monica Chiu, “[t]he novel thus nurtures the narratee’s compassion for a man who has pulled himself up by his metaphorical bootstraps” (114-115). Changez also claims to abide by the norms and values of the progressive West, disavowing any link to terrorist action. Indeed, after acknowledging his links to students who planned an assassination, he adds:

What precisely is it that you are trying to imply? I can assure you that I am a believer in nonviolence; the spilling of blood is abhorrent to me, save in self-defense. And how broadly do I define self-defense, you ask? Not broadly at all! I am no ally of killers; I am simply a university lecturer, nothing more or less.

I see from your expression that you do not believe me. (206)

Beyond his story of integration into prestigious American institutions, the novel follows another, broader trajectory of shame: Changez attempts to fit into society until he becomes ashamed of his own implication in unjust structures: his *Bildung* ends with his return to Lahore as a university lecturer and “anti-American” activist (203).

Changez doesn’t appear to be an unfeeling, desubjectivized, brainwashed terrorist: he is introspective, he is able to feel love, loss, to initiate a dialogue with an American stranger and – if we are to trust his digressions about his interlocutor’s reactions, able to defuse tension. For instance, as he orders tea with the American at the beginning of the novel, he comments:

You seem worried. Do not be; this burly fellow is merely our waiter, and there is no need to reach under your jacket, I assume to grasp your wallet, as we will pay him later, when we are done. [...] I must admit he is a rather intimidating chap. But irreproachably polite:

you would have been surprised by the sweetness of his speech, if only you understood Urdu. (6)

In this attempt to preempt his interlocutor's doubts by challenging his assumptions about the "burly waiter," Changez refers to Pakistani hospitality as a precise set of norms of which the American is ignorant. He also implies that his own presentation as a well-spoken, Princeton-educated man should not be opposed to the stereotype of the uncivilized barbarism.

In that moment, Changez reveals that the dialogue isn't as innocent as it seemed (i.e. a hospitable Pakistani man offering companionship to an American tourist): the American seems on edge, as if expecting imminent danger, and Changez implies that his interlocutor may be carrying a gun. Whether Changez is playing dumb about the American's hostile gesture, or is paranoid about the American being a special agent or an assassin remains uncertain. As a dialogue between two potential enemies that may end violently, the novel sustains a balance between two strategies, whereby Changez shames the American for his assumptions, potential hostility, and ignorance, but also reassures him through appeals to sentiment, good manners, and shared values.

The novel's particular framing, i.e. the narrator addressing an unnamed American interlocutor he just met in Lahore, and the confessional mode (a form of *askesis* and exposure of the self), hints at a greater likelihood of obfuscation: Changez is an unreliable narrator who directly and earnestly addresses an unnamed interlocutor. This framing makes his potential disingenuousness all the more difficult to ascertain. Indeed, self-exposure may function as a form of manipulative disaffection, the appearance of engagement with sentiment (sometimes excessive, maybe sarcastic) to conceal unfeeling.

As a character, Changez is fundamentally unreadable, ambiguous. Changez is a text that resists interpretation and reading; the narrative thus refuses to delve into his psychology.

According to Madeline Clements, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s narrator is a "monster, martyr, mimic or middleman apparently embodied by Hamid's 'Changez', but given flesh by the apostrophised Western interlocutor and reader" (78). She develops Changez's ambiguity, both as a novelistic character and as a terrorist – and we might infer that those two uncertainties feed off each other:

The 'fundamentalist' in the novel's title remains unrepresented; like an empty signifier, Changez floats free. His are *potential* rather than *actual* affiliations; it is not possible to determine whether Changez is responsible for an act of Islamic terror, or to what extent he subscribes to a radical Islamist's agenda" (78).

Clements thus notes that reading Changez's psychology is potentially misleading and dangerous, since it fails to consider Hamid's ambiguous fictionalization (82), i.e. the possibility that the text yields no coherent psychological profile.⁹³

Changez himself explains his own cordial, polite manners as colonial mimicry, artificial training, and claims to take advantage of America's repressed colonized mentality and lack of manners to be respected in turn – thus undermining implicit power dynamics:

I have subsequently wondered why my mannerisms so appealed to my senior colleagues. Perhaps it was my speech: like Pakistan, America is, after all, a former English colony, and it stands to reason, therefore, that an Anglicized accent may in your country continue to be associated with wealth and power, just as it is in mine. Or perhaps it was my ability to function both respectfully and with self-respect in a hierarchical environment, something American youngsters – unlike their Pakistani counterparts – rarely seem trained to do.

⁹³ See also John Mullan's review of the novel, which points out Changez's ability to change "fundamentally" when seen from different perspectives.

Whatever the reason was, I was aware of an advantage conferred to me by my foreignness, and I tried to utilize it as much as I could. (Hamid 47)

Changez becomes a shameless figure as he shames the narratee, taunts him, makes him uncomfortable and plays with his cultural assumptions: the locus of shame is purposely displaced by the narrator. A similar point is made by Monica Chiu, who calls “this narrative turn a reverse specularly in which the assumed object of the gaze (Changez, the Other, the post-9/11 Middle Eastern-looking bearded man) strategically demands that the reader scrutinize herself” (113).

Indeed, Changez reverses the logic of the brainwashing argument: he implies that he – and therefore his interlocutor, perhaps even the reader– had been brainwashed by American unethical values. After he is chosen by his boss to value a book publisher in Valparaiso, Chile, he meets with the chief of the publishing company, Juan-Batista, who invites him for lunch. Juan-Batista senses Changez’s growing doubts and discontent, and asks: “Does it trouble you [...] to make a living by disrupting the lives of others?” (171). Following his noncommittal answer, he tells him about janissaries, prompting a “deep bout of introspection”:

There really could be no doubt: I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war. Of course I was struggling! Of course I was torn! I had thrown in my lot with the men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the empire, when all along I was predisposed to feel compassion for those, like Juan-Batista, whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for his own gain. (173)

This passage emphasizes the identification of Underwood Samson and the United States (with their mutual initials), and Changez’s rejection of his deep affiliation to the “American empire,” his

shame at having misaligned himself and carried out acts of imperialist greed. More specifically, Changez points at an ideological manipulation that redirected his empathy, distorted his sentimental and ethical compass. After he takes a sudden decision to leave his job unfinished and sabotage his own career, he points out: “All I knew was that my day of focusing on fundamentals were done” (175). This offers another possible interpretation of the title’s “reluctant fundamentalist”: Changez discards his job (fundamentals, i.e., fundamental analysis data).

Pride becomes a necessary ideological stance – a consequence of moving past his shame of having been manipulated, but also a willful resistance to the allure of the American success that he chased and to which he may still be susceptible:

[M]y pride compelled me to attempt to appear unaffected by the unexpected sadness within me. I did not permit my gaze to linger on the imposing reception area – which struck me now as reminiscent of the gleaming façade of some exalted and exclusive temple [...].
(180)

At the end of the novel, Changez ironically reclaims the figure of Kurtz: “Since then, I have felt rather like a Kurtz waiting for his Marlow” (208). The reference to *The Heart of Darkness* implies that, like Kurtz, he was radicalized, destroyed by colonial ideology, hollowed out. However, it is unclear what he is waiting for – does this announce his doomed future as an anti-imperialist activist in Lahore and his belief that the American is here to kill him, or has he been waiting for a Marlow to tell his story?

The ending seems to open on a violent conclusion to the monologue. The American appears to be on the side of shamelessness: since we don’t hear his voice, or understand his reactions fleetingly described by Changez, he merely seems immune to Changez’s appeals – neither

responding to heartbreak or ethical disillusion. His last gesture points to a final refusal, or breach of trust:

I know you have found some of my views offensive; I hope you will not resist my attempt to shake you by the hand. But why are you reaching into your jacket, sir? I detect a glint of metal. Given that you and I are now bound by a certain shared intimacy, I trust it is from the holder of your business cards. (209)

In that final scene, the implication that the American is, in fact, reaching for a gun means that he is portrayed by the narrator as refusing to abide by rules of hospitality, choosing retributive violence over dialogue, but also as repeating his gesture from earlier: Changez never stopped being categorized as a target.

By contrast, the story of Erica, Changez's American girlfriend, seems to follow a pattern of disillusion that translates, in her case, into melancholia and suicide. Indeed, if what Changez describes as his new-found lucidity brings him back to Lahore, Erica rather symbolizes and carries the shame of her country, the shame of complicity:

Erica makes literal the silencing of privilege by willingly embodying—and thus modeling—a shame that was missing from American consciousness during the reactive post-9/11 years and by responding to that shame with politically purposeful self-abnegation. (Gardner 109)

Renee Lee Gardner opens her chapter “Suicide as an Invocation of Shame in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*” on a quote from *Diary of a Bad Year* by Coetzee: “If today I heard that some American had committed suicide rather than live in disgrace, I would fully understand” (Coetzee 43). Because this remark hearkens back to an ancient understanding of shame as a dishonor that warrants (public) death, it shows the radicality of suicide as a political “invocation”

of shame. Indeed, if we follow Timothy Bewes' analysis of shame in Coetzee, shame is fundamentally "sensuous, corporeal. Coetzee, then, has been conducting his struggle *on behalf of shame* in opposition to the propensity of writing towards conceptualization, naming, and disembodiment" (Bewes 153).

Erica's response to shame is not to name it or conceptualize it, but to "dislocate"⁹⁴ her body from "First World privilege," first through anorexia and depression, then through her suicide. In her pain, she becomes, in turn, a reluctant fundamentalist, since her suicide functions as "a radical and symbolic way out of the mandates of nationalistic aggression":

[I]f it is politically motivated, female suicide is so flagrantly rebellious as to constitute a "real and credible threat" (to borrow the language of the post-9/11 U.S. government) to national sovereignty. Such behavior effectively amounts to rejection of the cultural construction of bio-power. (Gardner 111)

Erica, then, also operates a reversal of sentimental structures, insofar as she mobilizes tropes of vulnerable femininity in order to enact, "a manner of vulnerability that America at large fervently resists" (115).

B. The Refugee in *Exit West*

According to Edward Said in *Reflections on Exile*, the notion of "exile" was crucial in the development of modern Western culture. However, "against this large, impersonal setting" of the "age of the refugee," "exile cannot be made to serve notions of humanism. One must set aside Joyce and Nabokov and think instead of the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been

⁹⁴ Gardner refers to Judith Butler's idea of dislocation from "First World privilege" as an escape from the mandates of sovereignty, in order to "imagine a world in which [our] interdependency becomes acknowledged as the basis for global political community" (111).

created” (Said 39). Thinking about global migration and opposing it to a romanticized, cosmopolitan Western account of exile is a change in scale which implies a completely different, “impersonal” conceptualization of migration – the opposition between famous writers in “exile” and the migrating “masses” is particularly telling.

However, Mohsin Hamid’s novel, *Exit West* (2017) posits that the figure of the refugee (insofar as we can find it (re)constituted in novelistic fiction) introduces a difference in degree, not in kind. The novel is about two refugees, Saeed and Nadia, who find themselves fleeing to the West through magical doors that open on Greece and the US. It puts forward the figure of the refugee as both abject and universal. More specifically, it emphasizes different processes of abjection, as well as the universal dimension of migration – in that sense, being a refugee would appear to be an extreme variation of a universal condition.

The narrator in Hamid’s *Exit West* seems to go even further in the theorization of migration as a universal, structural phenomenon, encompassing all sorts of physical and literal, spatial and temporal migrations, by observing: “We are all migrants through time” (Hamid 209). This calls to mind Rushdie’s remark in *Imaginary Homelands*: “It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity” (12).

In a similar vein, while *La fin de l’hospitalité* attends to the particular figure of the refugee in the context of the Syrian war, the Deleuzian reclaiming of the word refugee by Le Blanc and Brugère suggests a shared vulnerability, which looms over all of us, and with which they urge us to reckon. The figure of the refugee is thus posited as being beyond humanity, outside of the nation, not recognized as a subject, but also functions as the universal representation of human vulnerability to hardships and change.

While “refugee” and “migrant” can be used interchangeably, I am using “refugee” as referring to a particular figure of migration and exile, a migrant of war and crisis. Refugees are the “new subalterns” (Farrier 5); they signal the end of hospitality as a norm in Europe, according to Le Blanc and Brugère’s analysis of the 2015-2016 refugee crisis in Europe in *La fin de l’hospitalité*: “The migrant’s body becomes the expelled threshold of the nation” (142, my translation). Adorno links the experience of exile to humiliation and resentment. Indeed, the loss of self one experiences in exile, a loss akin to a mutilation, is an experience of shame which can lead to resentment and destruction. As Cynthia Fleury points out in her chapter about exile, fascism and resentment in Adorno’s work:

Tous ceux qui ont l’expérience de la traversée d’une rive l’ont appris à leurs dépens. Du moment qu’on traverse, on n’est plus rien, car l’on n’a plus rien avec soi. (144)

The novel’s opening paragraphs introduce Nadia and Saeed, but also the fragility of a narrative purporting to tell the story of two individuals in a particularly unstable world:

In a city swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war, a young man met a young woman in a classroom and did not speak to her. [...] It might seem odd that in cities teetering at the edge of the abyss young people still go to class – in this case an evening class on corporate identity and product branding – but that is the way of things, with cities as with life, for one moment we are pottering about our errands as usual and the next we are dying, and our eternally impending ending does not put a stop to our transient beginnings and middles until the instant when it does. (1-2)

As with the concept of migration as both situated and fundamentally universal, the narrator bridges the gap between the exceptional circumstances of this story and the banal universality of life’s contingency. And yet, the syntax creates a tension between the protagonists – the “young man”

and “young woman” who, we can surmise, will fall in love – and the refugees, an indeterminate, desubjectivized crowd that has “swollen” the city. Those associations are both derogatory and refute the possibility of individual journeys. Indeed, the verb “swollen” evokes the metaphor of the wave, the flood, but also that of the inflammatory disease provoking a reaction.

Like *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, but also Hamid’s 2013 mock-self-help book *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, *Exit West* explores the failures of the *Bildungsroman*, i.e. how the form can never carry out its purported goals of complete character formation. As Vanessa Guignery suggests:

[T]his narrative precariousness is always countered by a simultaneous drive towards some form of stability and unity within the novelistic genre. In *Exit West*, [...] the narrative itself is both fracturing into disparate fragments and trying to resist the fracture by maintaining the main narrative line of Saeed and Nadia, even if the young people are irremediably drifting apart. (21)

The text itself reflects how Nadia and Saeed are moved by shame and fear of remaining inchoate, unfinished, undefined, of never becoming subjects, and by their attempt to find stability and coherence amid chaos. The difference between nondescript refugees on the street and the main characters who leave their country and become, de facto, refugees, is precisely what the novel emphasizes and questions. The refugee is the Other, who fascinates, repels, yet foreshadows the fate of the protagonists.

As they start dating, Saeed and Nadia observe the presence of refugees across the city, in liminal spaces – a presence that arrests the gaze and become an obstacle to movement:

Refugees had occupied many of the open spaces in the city, pitching tents in the green belts between roads, erecting lean-tos next to the boundary walls of houses, sleeping rough on

pavements and in the margins of streets. Some seemed to be trying to recreate the rhythms of a normal life [...]. Others stared out at the city with what looked like anger, or surprise, or supplication, or envy. Others didn't move at all: stunned, maybe, or resting. Possibly dying. Saeed and Nadia had to be careful when making turns not to run over an outstretched arm or leg. (23)

Refugees are simultaneously shamed as unwanted others, but also deprived of their right to feel shame, to be afforded privacy and dignity – the refugee, like the terrorist, is discursively pushed outside of the realm of shame altogether. What the figure of the refugee puts forward is the obscene, the overexposure that Agamben famously analyzed as “bare life” in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*: the refugee is reduced to pure vulnerability.

In “Necropolitics”, Achille Mbembe analyzes the political need for this obscene exposure, this display of injury. Mbembe derives his concept of necropolitics from Foucault's conceptualization of biopolitics, within the context of colonial plunder: necropolitics designates “contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death” (39) which create *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead* (40).

The scandalous, brazen life analyzed by Foucault and the bare life endured by the refugees thus find a point of similarity in the facets of shamelessness they present, which have different valences (one of resistance or voluntary discipline, and one of unbearable privation and exclusion). As we see in *Exit West*, just like the shameless man for the eighteenth-century man of feeling, the refugee as a figure represents the outsider, not just for the sedentary bourgeois citizen but more importantly for the migrant-turned-refugee characters themselves – the refugee is the migrant who is devoid (deprived) of shame, exposed, spectacular, scandalous.

However, the novel also subverts expectations in its depiction of refugees. For instance, early in the novel, after introducing Saeed and Nadia and their incipient love story, the text suddenly shifts to a completely different place, Australia, where a mysterious man, revealed to be a refugee, comes out of a woman's closet in the middle of the night:

The door to her closet was open. Her room was bathed in the glow of her computer charger and wireless router, but the closet doorway was dark, darker than night, a rectangle of complete darkness—the heart of darkness. And out of this darkness, a man was emerging.

He too was dark, with dark skin and dark, woolly hair. He wriggled with great effort, his hands gripping either side of the doorway as though pulling himself up against gravity, or against the rush of a monstrous tide. [...] He rallied himself again, fighting mightily to come in, but in desperate silence, the silence of a man struggling in an alley, on the ground, late at night, to free himself of hands clenched around his throat. But there were no hands around this man's throat. He wished only not to be heard. (6)

The reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* could suggest the influence of colonialism and neocolonialism in shaping the inequalities between North and South and the text's own implication in the colonial enterprise, but also ironically points to the racist assumptions such a story might occasion: an innocent white woman asleep in her bedroom invaded by a black man. However, the passage overturns this narrative and emphasizes how fragile this man is:

With a final push he was through, trembling and sliding to the floor like a newborn foal. He lay still, spent. Tried not to pant. He rose.

His eyes rolled terribly. Yes: terribly. Or perhaps not so terribly. Perhaps they merely glanced about him, at the woman, at the bed, at the room. Growing up in the not

infrequently perilous circumstances in which he had grown up, he was aware of the fragility of his body. He knew how little it took to make a man into meat: the wrong blow, the wrong gunshot, the wrong flick of a blade, turn of a car, presence of a microorganism in a handshake, a cough. He was aware that alone a person is almost nothing. The woman who slept, slept alone. He who stood above her, stood alone. The bedroom door was shut. The window was open. He chose the window. He was through it in an instant, dropping silkily to the street below. (7)

The narrator thus rewrites a colonial, racist trope by displacing white sentimentality, reading affect on the side of the invading stranger rather than the woman, and poking fun at the stereotypical representations of black men (“His eyes rolled terribly”), which are swiftly contradicted, as the narrator challenges and shames the reader’s expectations: the man is not a threat, but rather feels threatened, an experience to which demonized minorities can attest.

The text thus attends to the humanity and the vulnerability, discomfort, and fear of the unnamed refugee, who foreshadows the fate of the protagonists. Exile is likened to a difficult, second birth, which creates disorientation and uncertainty. Shame as form thus clearly appears in relation to complicity in perpetuating dangerous narratives, and calls attention to the narrative structures that organize feeling. Indeed, as Yao makes clear, what she calls disaffection or unfeeling is, since Adam Smith, attributed to the uncivilized, who are deemed incapable of complex emotions and reactions:

The figure of “the savage” is the ultimate figure of unfeeling. [...] The criminal is racialized, while all the racialized are criminal: the former has the privilege of agentic individuation, and the latter is the indistinguishable stand-in for the entire race. (Yao 14)

In moving from the woman to the man, the text poses the following questions: how is empathy distributed? When is it denied? By shifting the focus and establishing an implicit comparison between the plight of the solitary woman and the exiled man, the text posits an uneasy equivalence. The man's choice of the open window (rather than the bedroom door), and the fluidity of his movements contrast with the static pose of the sleeping woman in her bedroom and set him up as a potential character, ready to evolve and experience *Bildung* – in opposition to the woman, whose life is seemingly laid out like an open book in a short description of her belongings and crushed aspirations. Ironically, as the text critiques the racialized narrative structures that frame men of color as threats to white women, it engages in a gendered opposition between the static, undeveloped, flattened female character and the evolving, active male character.

Before Saeed and Nadia become refugees, the novel has thus opposed them to refugees in their own country, and, conversely, presented the reader with a scene that focuses on the fundamental humanity and vulnerability of the refugee. The novel thus challenges the distribution of attention that would create a hierarchy between identifiable characters and the mass of refugees. The distribution of attention is what Alex Woloch focuses on in his analysis of character-space:

I want to demonstrate the importance of distributed attention not just to the realist novel but to the vexed problem of characterization itself: a problem that lies at the heart of contemporary literary theory.” (14)

If, as Woloch observes, “the minor characters are the proletariat of the novel” (27), *Exit West* troubles the class distinction between major and minor characters by redirecting the reader's identificatory sympathy, and by having Saeed and Nadia progressively destabilize that hierarchy as they become refugees yet still distance themselves from other refugees.

Exit West and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* both expose the logic of white sentimentalism through the figures of the refugee and the terrorist, and thus displace the shame associated with those figures by shaming the reader's identification. If Hamid's novels seem to actively channel shame and weaponize it against culturally produced processes of identification and exclusion, the next chapter will turn to other modes of weaponization. To what extent do novels shame the reader as a complicit voyeur or, conversely, reclaim shame as the affect of confession and self-examination to elicit empathy?

Chapter Five

Shame and the Confession of a Liar

Introduction

I shall strip away layer after layer of grime -- the toffee-colored varnish and caked soot left by a lifetime of dissembling -- until I come to the very thing itself and know it for what it is. My soul. My self. (John Banville, *The Untouchable*)

The autobiography draws on the tradition of the confession, which emphasizes self-examination, truthfulness – even through painful, awkward encounters with shame. Michel Foucault traces an evolution towards the confession, which influenced not only the form of the memoir, but also literature and philosophy:

L'homme, en Occident, est devenu une bête d'aveu. De là sans doute *une métamorphose dans la littérature : d'un plaisir de raconter, qui était centré sur le récit héroïque ou merveilleux des « épreuves » de bravoure ou de sainteté, on est passé à une littérature ordonnée à la tâche infinie de faire lever du fond de soi-même, entre les mots, une vérité que la forme même de l'aveu fait miroiter comme l'inaccessible*. De là aussi, cette autre manière de philosopher : chercher le rapport fondamental au vrai, non pas simplement en soi-même – dans quelque savoir oublié, ou dans une certaine trace originaire – mais dans l'examen de soi-même qui délivre, à travers tant d'impressions fugitives, les certitudes fondamentales de la conscience. (Foucault, *La volonté de savoir* 80, my emphasis)

The *telos* of the confession as a literary form (truth) thus attributes an epistemological and moral dimension to one's self-examination. This is the fiction of transparency with which autobiographical texts play, as they tend to question the assumption that there is a truth to be reached, a coherent self to be known, a subject to be formed through the process of self-examination. As we will see with Althusser's *L'avenir dure longtemps*, the autobiography can present itself as an untrustworthy fiction of transparency, while still holding self-awareness and search for truth as a moral, epistemological, and aesthetic ideal.

According to Philippe Lejeune, the autobiographical pact implies the identity of the author, narrator, and protagonist (14), which can only be guessed through resemblance (25). The autobiography thus purports to reach the truth through a resemblance to the truth, which is why the autobiographical pact and the referential pact⁹⁵ are generally coextensive (36). Lejeune criticizes the misconception that the novel is better suited to reach the individual, intimate truth of the author than the autobiography, and exposes the implicit logic of such a comparison between novel and autobiography: novels are read in relation to the fantasies they reveal about their author, and therefore in relation to the autobiographical project (42). Rather than opposing and comparing the novel to the autobiography, Lejeune thus posits an "autobiographical space," which includes the novel and determines the truth value of the novel and the autobiography in relation to each other.

As we have seen in the introduction, both the *Bildungsroman* and the picaresque play with and subvert the expectations of the confession. If the picaresque specifically is "the confession of a liar" (Guillen 92), the novel form as a whole relies on this fundamental paradox, on problematizing the confession's desire for truth and transparency, precisely as it puts forward self-

⁹⁵ The "referential pact," which autobiography and the biography have in common, implies that the text provides information about a reality that is external to the text and implies that the text bears a resemblance to the truth.

examination (the novel which, as we have seen in the introduction, was defined by Kundera with the example of Richardson as the form that enacted a shift from external action to internal life), and thus relies on shame as a tool of recalibration, reassessment of the self. This results in the misalignment of form and content, of the ideal of *Bildung* and its structural failures. It may also be linked to a stylistic feature specific to the novel form, insofar as it has, since its beginnings, negotiated the relationships between author, narrator, and character: free indirect discourse. Free indirect discourse proposes the fiction of direct, fluid representation of characters' thoughts and feelings,⁹⁶ precisely as it may reveal implicit authorial attachments,⁹⁷ and creates in turn, as "unspeakable sentences" (Ann Banfield), a disjunction between narration and consciousness.

The first-person novels I analyzed by Sterne, McBride, Ishiguro, VanderMeer, and Hamid all rely on both the structure of the *Bildungsroman* and on the form of the autobiographical account, precisely as they expose their limitations: the limitations of the ideal of formation, and of the ideal of sincere, reliable self-exposure. We can therefore see that the interplay of truth and fiction is fundamental to both the novel and the autobiography. Early novels often relied on the premise of non-fiction,⁹⁸ and contemporary first-person novels often incorporate autobiographical characteristics within the form of the novel. Such novels have been influenced by Augustine and

⁹⁶ "The theater consists of nothing but direct quotation so as to insist on speakability; the epistolary novel regularly confines itself to indirect quotation in the most expansive self-representation imaginable and makes one's individual moral position look like a debating point; but the novel of free indirect style has characters and society speaking the same language. Free indirect style carries with it the implicit claim that characters have what Dorrit Cohn has called "transparent minds," highly legible to their narrator even when they are not directly speaking or acting." (Ferguson 169-170)

⁹⁷ D.A. Miller expands on the relation between free indirect discourse and different modes of identification – from cathexis to detachment – in *Emma* and *Persuasion* by Jane Austen, and argues that "shame has been style's encrypted alter ego—its alternate form as ego—and style, the unremitting labor of managing and masking this encryption." (48)

⁹⁸ The early novel was discredited because of its fictional status; more generally, the novel as form is, since its inception, critical and ashamed of its own structure of illusion – according to Marthe Robert, this self-criticism is still present in the mind of Diderot, "lui aussi romancier honteux, comme il paraît dans *Jacques le Fataliste*, où il démonte les procédés habituels de la narration Romanesque de manière à faire apparaître leur énorme part d'arbitraire et de convention." (13)

Rousseau in implementing shame as the primary moment of self-consciousness and motive for self-improvement, and memoirs, in turn, tend to portray the narrator as the hero of their own novel.

The novel, through its paradigmatic structure of the *Bildungsroman* and its structural reliance on encounters with shame, and the autobiography or memoir thus have a relation of mutual influence. Autofiction is an intermediate category that blurs the lines between fiction and nonfiction, more specifically the autobiography and the first-person novel, since it is a fictionalized account that still relies on the identity of author, narrator and character. *A l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie* by Hervé Guibert is an example of autofiction that claims to be a novel while relying strongly on autobiographical elements, and could also be categorized as a *roman à clef* (Michel Foucault is recognizable under the name of "Muzil"). The text itself is a meditation on truth and fiction, betrayal and manipulation. In his 1990 interview with Antoine de Gaudemar, Guibert talks about his ideal of truth and transparency, which paradoxically requires the "graft" of "fiction particles":

Je tiens à la vérité dans la mesure où elle permet de greffer des particules de fiction comme des collages de pellicule, avec l'idée que ce soit le plus transparent possible. Mais il y a aussi des grands ressorts de mensonge dans ce livre. (Guibert)

Since for Guibert, the truth can only exist through manipulation, collage (just like his photographs), and therefore lies, he is interested in a problematic relation to truth, itself deformed by the writing process:

Le sida m'a permis de radicaliser un peu plus encore certains systèmes de narration, de rapport à la vérité, de mise en jeu de moi-même au-delà même de ce que je pensais possible. Je parle de la vérité dans ce qu'elle peut avoir de déformé par le travail de l'écriture. C'est pour cela que je tiens au mot roman. (Guibert)

Truth here is not the result of the sincere transparency promised by the autobiographical pact, but rather the result of a literary creation that accommodates lies and betrayals (and is directly linked to the narrator's feeling of having been duped by his friend), hence Guibert's insistence on the word "novel" (*roman*). One could interpret the central role of "AIDS" (*sida*) in Guibert's autofictional project as the result of "AIDS" being a destructive experience that challenges the narrator's relation to himself and others, but also as the result of "AIDS" itself being a slippery signifier that relies on and promotes its ideological association with gay men.⁹⁹ But while Guibert's novel – as a novel – challenges the desire for truth as sincere, unadulterated transparency, it also mobilizes extreme self-exposure and shame: it purposely turns the reader into a voyeur, and the narrator's body into a locus of fascination and disgust, in order to question the shame associated with the narrator's stigmatized condition. The text, as a first-hand account by a HIV seropositive author, exposes the experience of a shamed assignation.

Playing with the boundaries of the autobiography of academic theory, Maggie Nelson also repurposes the traditional genre of the autobiography into auto-theory (*The Argonauts*); Paul B. Preciado similarly plays with genre in *Testo Junkie*, a formal experimentation between autobiography, fiction, and a conceptualization of the body as (political) text, thus complicating the truth towards which the autobiography tends – from an emotional, subjective truth, to a philosophical exploration of concepts intertwined with the author's bodily experience.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Lee Edelman has analyzed how "AIDS" functions as "an inscription of difference" that exceeds definitions, starting with medical discourse and the conflation of "AIDS" with HIV seropositivity:

"AIDS," then, resists our attempts to inscribe it as a manageable subject of writing—exceeding and eluding the medical, sociological, political, or literary discourses that variously attempt to confront or engage it—to the extent that as an historical phenomenon in the so-called Western democracies it has itself taken shape—has been given shape—as that which writes or articulates another subject altogether: a subject whose content is suggested but not exhausted by reference to "male homosexuality." (93-94)

¹⁰⁰ "This book is not a memoir. This book is a testosterone-based, voluntary intoxication protocol, which concerns the body and affects of BP. A body-essay. Fiction, actually. If things must be pushed to the extreme, this is a somatopolitical fiction, a theory of the self, or self-theory." (Preciado 11)

Through self-exposure or spectacle – and more specifically in contemporary autobiographical texts, through a self-conscious meditation on their relation to factual truth – both fiction and nonfiction texts may attempt to overturn shame by shaming oppressors or oppressive structures. Indeed, while shame is central to the novel form and to the autobiography as a tool of recalibration of the self, its explicit expression and its reversal as pride can also function as a political tool. We may posit that shame may, in some instances, be repurposed, overturned, and function as a powerful political tool, especially in realist social novels and first-person accounts by discriminated groups: as a political endeavor, autobiographical shame acts as a collective catharsis through individual narration. In *Depression: A Public Feeling*, Ann Cvetkovich thus combines collective academic work about depression as a result of structural injustice, with her own detailed account of depression in “The Depression Journals: A Memoir.”

However, reactionary thought thrives on resentment and the allure of transgression, and can therefore weaponize the shame-pride paradigm. Indeed, as Becca Rothfeld observes, “[s]hame [...] is an effective weapon only when it is brandished against those who already inhabit a shared ethical universe” (“The Shaming Industrial Complex”). In other words, despite its purported transgressive and liberating power, shame can be just as powerful a tool across the political spectrum, and endlessly repurposed within different “ethical universes.” If the reversal of shame into pride is mobilized as the affect that signals transgression and liberation, and if transgression is explicitly defined *against* antiracist, feminist, LGBTQ+ affirming sentiment, novelists can invest the sphere of transgression through shame-as-spectacle to elicit sympathy for characters at odds with the world around them, with what they paint as dangerously puritanical, self-righteous, tyrannical norms. Those texts may then use the logic of self-exposure and character construction through encounters with shame for individual self-aggrandizement, or to overturn the logic of

structural oppression. But several authors also attempt to explore the shame of male, working-class characters without necessarily weaponizing the shame-pride paradigm against minorities, and by addressing how these characters may or may not be drawn to conspiracy theories and racist scapegoating (for instance, Ben Lerner, Nicolas Mathieu, Edouard Louis). In a different way, socially privileged but unreliable narrators foreclose or trouble the reader's empathy (for instance, the narrators of Coetzee's novels, in which shame is a pervasive affect and theme).

This dissertation has argued that shame is integral to the novel as form; this chapter means to take shame seriously as an ambivalent political force, through patterns popularized by the novel. How does the performance of shame and self-exposure, originating in the tradition of the confession but crucial to the development of the novel, from the eighteenth century onward, serve the construction of a reactionary protagonist, across narrative fiction and non-fiction? While the previous chapters showed different ways in which the novel form, in its paradigmatic *Bildungsroman* structure, relies on encounters with shame, this chapter rather investigates what shame, as it is expressed and reclaimed in both queer and reactionary texts, owes to the novel form. To what extent do fiction and non-fiction texts rely on shame and pride as politically transformative affects, and to what extent do they critique the sentimental frameworks that may sustain and subvert such affects?

I. Shame and Social Justice

Shame has been reclaimed, performed and/or turned into pride as a response to discrimination in social liberation movements, and primarily analyzed in queer theory, gender studies, postcolonial studies and black studies. The shame-pride paradigm, i.e. the reclamation and reversal of shame

as a political tool, has produced texts that analyze shame in systems of oppression, and the transgressive potential of shame and abjection.¹⁰¹

This reversal of shame is particularly important in the feminist and queer traditions, from the 1960s onwards. *La bâtarde* (1964) by Violette Leduc explores the multifaceted shame of the female, queer narrator, and is celebrated for its sincerity. Since the 1970s, Annie Ernaux resorts to deceptively simple, clinical writing, in order to deconstruct the shame of abortion, of poverty and social status, thus turning her gaze back at those who would endorse classist and sexist shaming discourse. In American literature, a later example is Audre Lorde's "biomythography" *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982), an autobiography which includes myth and history, and functions like a *Künstlerroman*, as a portrait of the Black, lesbian author. Such texts subvert the expectations of fiction and nonfiction, and show the impossibility of expressing a coherent, consistent, transparent self, by portraying shame as a destructive, shattering force on the body through formal experimentations.

In recent years, the rebirth of the social novel in France (Edouard Louis, Nicolas Mathieu, Alice Zeniter, Sandra Lucbert, etc.) and its international resonance (Ernaux received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2022) exemplify the aesthetic and political power of shame repurposed and rebranded. Shame, in these (sometimes autofictional) novels, often puts forward the difficult experience of *Bildungsroman*-like class mobility, with the portrayal and conceptualization of the

¹⁰¹ See for instance *Une morale du minoritaire: Variations sur un thème de Jean Genet* (2001) by Didier Eribon for an analysis of the shaming process of minorities, of the inscription of shame in their bodily experiences, and of the ways shame can be reclaimed; see *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* by Sally R. Munt (2007) for an analysis of shame as a productive force, generating attachments and joy; see *Gay Shame*, edited by David M. Halperin and Valerie Straub (2009) for an analysis of the negotiation of the shame/pride paradigm since the beginning of "gay pride"; see *La honte est un sentiment révolutionnaire* (2021) by Frédéric Gros for an analysis of shame as a transformative political affect – a perspective that was articulated by Marx, but also Sartre in his reading of Fanon.

transfuge de classe, or *transclasse*¹⁰² in dialogue with sociology.¹⁰³ More generally, literature can be the space where lives that are traditionally ignored, dismissed, or rejected, can be given dignity and purpose (Pierre Michon makes this project explicit in his novel *Vies minuscules*).

As I mention in Chapter One, different modes of resistance and transformation of shame can be found in novels by female authors featuring female protagonists, and often challenge traditional narratives around sexual violence and the patriarchal erasure of female desire and autonomy (Eimear McBride, but also Sayaka Murata, Han Kang, Melissa Broder, Mona Awad, Ottessa Moshfegh, etc.). This also applies to short stories (Mariana Enriquez, Carmen Maria Machado, etc.) and autofiction (Chris Kraus, Marie Calloway, Chloé Delaume, etc.).

In the post #MeToo era specifically, several memoirs have redefined their authors' relation to shame by reclaiming their voices and their stories. One example is the memoir *Know My Name* (2019), by Chanel Miller, who was made paradoxically famous as “Emily Doe” in 2016, because of her powerful victim statement during the trial against her rapist Brock Turner: reclaiming her story also meant revealing her identity, reclaiming her name. Other recent examples are two French memoirs that ignited a national debate on child grooming and molestation, and the public disgrace of the perpetrators: *Le consentement* (2020) by Vanessa Springora, which exposed writer Gabriel Matzneff's abusive behavior, on which he had built his literary career, and *La familia grande* by Camille Kouchner (2021), about the incestuous abuse that the author's brother suffered at the hands of their father-in-law, Olivier Duhamel, a powerful academic and politician. The literary dimension of those texts extends beyond their value as testimony, as they may experiment with form and offer a meditation on the role of literature: *Le consentement* by Vanessa Springora is as

¹⁰² This term was coined by Chantal Jacquet in *Les transclases ou la non-reproduction* (2014), which builds on Bourdieu and Passeron to explore the failures of social reproduction.

¹⁰³ The relation of shame and transidentity was similarly linked to an uncertain, difficult mobility by sociologist Emmanuel Beaubatie in *Transfuges de sexe. Passer les frontières du genre*. (2021).

much about abuse as it is about literature as alibi or liberation, and *Triste Neige* by Neige Sinno (2023) was celebrated for its experimental form and narrative voice in its treatment of incest.

Memoirs like *Le consentement* by Vanessa Springora and *Triste tigre* by Neige Sinno expose the rhetorical and literary manipulation of abusers. Both Springora and Sinno explicitly organize their autobiographical account in relation to a critical analysis of their abusers' discourse: their performances of shame, their delusion, victim-blaming, narcissistic victimization, and gaslighting. Both also refer specifically to *Lolita* as a too often misread literary exception, a novel that relies on identificatory processes while preventing or troubling the reader's empathy for the narrator – *Lolita* thus exposes Humbert Humbert's occasional performance of shame and self-deprecation for what it is. In *Le consentement*, Springora opposes this to Matzneff's self-complacent books, which function as literary plunder and literary rape. While misogynistic texts have long been excoriated or reinterpreted by feminist responses,¹⁰⁴ both in fiction and non-fiction, these recent memoirs have in common their precise analysis of the weaponization of shame as a literary tool of victimization and exculpation.

If we consider *Le consentement* as participating in a feminist reclamation of shame to the point of becoming a tool of public shaming – Matzneff was disgraced in the wake of the book's publication – then it is also important to consider how shaming as a feminist tool can fall into discriminatory patterns. When the narrator refers to the unnamed Matzneff as an ogre in disguise, she invokes literary tropes against him (which is precisely what he did to justify his crimes), but also distances herself from her own demonstration: that her abuser was a man, supported and celebrated by other men, who all minimized and justified those practices. This is where we can see

¹⁰⁴ For instance, the long tradition of feminist retellings of fairy tales, ironically going back to the roots of the fairy tale, which often critiqued patriarchal society (from Angela Carter to Carmen Maria Machado, or Emma Donoghue); but also the increasingly popular feminist retellings of myths: Christa Wolf, Margaret Atwood, Ali Smith, Madeleine Miller with Greek myths, or Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni with the *Mahabharata*.

limitations to (public) shaming; even if its valence and political import changes, whether it is wielded by oppressors or by oppressed minorities, it tends to turn the shamed into desubjectivized, essentialized entities – in this case, monsters, who would not be expected to feel shame, and who may even be reduced to and shamed for their physical appearance,¹⁰⁵ or hypothesized mental illness.

II. The Reactionary Turn and the Allure of Transgression

1. Shame and Degenerative Realism

In the face of the reclamation of shame by oppressed minorities across – and in-between – fiction and non-fiction, reactionary authors have renewed a tradition of disillusionment and decadence while appropriating the queer reclamation of shame.

In *Degenerative Realism: Novel and Nation in Twenty-First-Century France*, Christy Wampole, traces the evolution from postmodern irony to the return of realism,¹⁰⁶ and examines the particular features of what she calls “degenerative realism,” i.e. a form of realism rooted in disillusionment, frustration, and *ressentiment*, affects which come to sustain a reactionary worldview:

To put it plainly, the reactionary spirit governs these worlds, where pluralism is an abomination, identity politics abhorrent, and political correctness a blow to freedom. These

¹⁰⁵ One may think of the many instances when abusers like Harvey Weinstein, Donald Trump, or Gérard Depardieu were body-shamed (fat-shamed in particular): shaming often fails to remain about the acts of abuse but turns to familiar discriminatory tropes and thus to essentialism (if it looks like a monster, it is a monster).

¹⁰⁶ “Before the turn of the millennium, novelists whose work came to be called postmodern were equally disillusioned, but they responded with irony and selfreflexivity, iconoclastically dismantling literary conventions and toying with established forms. Now, with postmodernism’s amusements having lost their luster, realism has reasserted itself as the default literary mode.” (5)

are not feel-good books. France cannot be made great again, they seem to conclude. In fact, they oblige us to suffer along with those who perceive themselves as losers in the twenty-first century. The authors' request that empathy be granted to their ignoble characters feels something like a dare. (6)

Is it a dare or a particularly effective strategy? Shame is weaponized as a tool of identification with a flawed protagonist, but also translates as (often misogynistic and racist) *ressentiment*, hidden by a semblance of unsentimental self-deprecation and sarcasm. This particular, cynical performance of unfeeling thus makes this request for empathy less of a sentimentalist dare, as the narrators seem to preempt the readers' repulsion. An important representative of degenerative realism is Michel Houellebecq. For instance, the emphasis of *Soumission*'s narrator on "l'affaissement des chairs," – the decaying body of the average Westerner – contributes to a performance of shame and indiscriminating disgust (of the self, of others, of politics, civilization, or humanity as a whole):

Mon corps en général était le siège de différentes affections douloureuses – migraines, maladies de peau, maux de dents, hémorroïdes – qui se succédaient sans interruption, ne me laissant pratiquement jamais en paix – et je n'avais que quarante-quatre ans ! Que serait-ce quand j'en aurais cinquante, soixante, davantage !... Je ne serais plus alors qu'une juxtaposition d'organes en décomposition lente, et ma vie deviendrait une torture incessante, morne et sans joie, mesquine. Ma bite était au fond le seul de mes organes qui ne se soit jamais manifesté à ma conscience par le biais de la douleur, mais par celui de la jouissance. (105-106)

Shame in Houellebecq's work is related to the decay of the body, the nation, and of Western civilization. While Houellebecq refuses to be labelled a reactionary,¹⁰⁷ he conveniently avoids the

¹⁰⁷ "Houellebecq has pushed back against the label, arguing: A reactionary is someone who favors some previously existing social configuration— something it is possible to return to— and someone who militates in favor of such a

fact that the obsession with decay and degeneration is rooted in a reactionary worldview; it is thus telling that Wampole devotes a chapter to the authors' "anxieties about sex through a critique of radical Islam, the virile immigrant, and the overfeminized Western man who has forfeited his masculinity" (28), all tropes which are foundational to reactionary, white supremacist views in France and in the West.

Some novelists posit that, in an increasingly individualized, capitalist world, the relation to the social world that once characterized the protagonist has all but disappeared. This is a major component in Houellebecq's novels. As Michel Biron points out,

La société a perdu son pouvoir d'intimidation : l'individu ne cherche pas à s'adapter à elle au nom de règles extérieures, mais tente au contraire d'adapter l'univers social — son univers social — à ses besoins personnels. (28)

Biron links this to fatigue and depression, which replaces the ambition of Balzac or Flaubert's protagonists with the indifference, detachment, the non-affect of a *Bartleby*. We find again the shame of a tired world, which we have encountered as a structural component of mid-twentieth century American science fiction with Philip K. Dick and Ursula Le Guin, and which Houellebecq translates into a cynical, necessarily selfish understanding of the social world.

Houellebecq infers formal consequences for the novel itself, which becomes inadequate to its narrative goals since it does not invite flatness and indifference:

Cet effacement progressif des relations humaines n'est pas sans poser certains problèmes au roman. Comment en effet entreprendrait-on la narration de ces passions fougueuses, s'étalant sur plusieurs années, faisant parfois sentir leurs effets sur plusieurs générations ?

return. Whereas, if there is an idea, a single idea that runs through all of my novels, which goes so far as to haunt them, it is the absolute irreversibility of all processes of decay once they have begun... It is more than organic, it is like a universal law that applies also to inert objects; it is literally entropic." (Wampole 14)

Nous sommes loin des *Hauts de Hurlevent*, c'est le moins qu'on puisse dire. La forme romanesque n'est pas conçue pour peindre l'indifférence, ni le néant ; il faudrait inventer une articulation plus plate, plus concise et plus morne. (Houellebecq 42)

What Wampole refers to as “degenerative realism” includes other writers, such as Frédéric Beigbeder and his tellingly entitled *Confessions d'un hétérosexuel légèrement dépassé* (2023) – which alludes to the confessional tradition, as well as the autobiographical *Bildungsroman*, especially its Romantic instantiations (Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle*).¹⁰⁸ He acknowledges his inadequacy in a sarcastic performance of shame, appropriating the logic of the reclamation of shame by discriminated minorities – and thus the status of a discriminated minority, as a straight, aging man.¹⁰⁹

Feeling and unfeeling as particular moral stances can be weaponized by the oppressor and the oppressed alike; while unfeeling may function as resistance to the racialized and gendered sentimentalist regime, as Xine Yao proposes in *Disaffected*, unfeeling is often touted as a masculine, strong position, on the side of cold reason and logic (sometimes to a caricatural extent, as we can see with the widespread use of sarcasm by the alt-right and the phrase “facts don't care about your feelings”). Degenerative realism exemplifies a reactionary structure of performative white unfeeling that relies on sentimentalism to evaluate which feelings matter, and which doesn't

¹⁰⁸ Beigbeder's work tends to explicitly subvert the expectations of the novel and the autobiographical account, as we can observe in his (also tellingly) entitled *Mémoires d'un jeune homme dérangé* (1990), a pun on *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* by Simone de Beauvoir, and *Un roman français* (2009).

¹⁰⁹ In a different context, far-right polemist Eric Zemmour has reclaimed and openly identified with the Balzacian figures of Rastignac and Rubempré, a reclamation that relies on a simplistic reading which opposes shame-filled, naive provincial protagonists seeking to elevate themselves, to a corrupt, shameless, snobbish Parisian society. However, Rubempré and Rastignac negotiate their social shame as outsiders very differently: Rastignac makes opportunistic compromises to rise into a society that would despise him, while Rubempré exposes the failures of the meritocratic assimilation Zemmour relentlessly extols. *Lost Illusions* is, at its core, the chronicle of a failure foretold that shines a light on the cruelty and corruption of the politico-journalistic milieu, the very milieu that Zemmour – as a true Rastignac – has shamelessly shaped to his ideological and financial advantage in the last fifteen years.

struggled with his mental health for many years, and was sent to Hospital Sainte-Anne; the case was dismissed because Althusser was deemed legally insane.¹¹¹

Five years later, the narrative strategy which the media and the academic discourse put into place immediately after the event was denounced by Nathalie Sarraute, who criticized our collective misogynistic need to glorify, flesh out, elevate criminals, and erase their victims.¹¹² She described the crime of cannibal Issei Sagawa and his resulting fame – including the publication of an autobiographical account, and a film deal – and, with a passing mention of Althusser, commented on those patterns of erasure of the victim for the benefit of the criminal as a protagonist. (This implicit comparison is what convinced Althusser to write his memoir, according to his biographer.) She also commented on the shameful complicity of the media in making those narratives possible and appealing, sarcastically observing that she was proud of “stories that end well”:

Je suis ravie. J'adore les histoires qui finissent bien. Je suis assez fière aussi. Parce qu'enfin tout ça, c'est grâce à qui ? À moi. Nous, dans les médias, dès qu'on voit un nom prestigieux mêlé à un procès juteux, Althusser, Thibault d'Orléans, on en fait tout un plat. La victime ? Elle ne mérite pas trois lignes. La vedette, c'est le coupable. (Sarraute “Petite faim”)

But what does Althusser’s memoir *L’avenir dure longtemps* published posthumously in 1992, owe to the legacies of both the confession and the novel (specifically first-person *Bildungsromane*)? We witness the narrator’s *Bildung* through encounters with shame in his detailed *roman familial*, but also his confessions: sincere, transparent, shameless.¹¹³

¹¹¹ This analysis is not concerned with Althusser’s mental health, the judiciary system, or with Althusser’s relationship with his victim, but rather with the narrative patterns that have emerged in the media coverage of the story, in Althusser’s own memoir, and in the afterlives of those texts.

¹¹² This is not specific to the 1980s: more recently, the voyeuristic romanticization of murderers and scammers in TV shows has been criticized, for instance *Dahmer - Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* (2022).

¹¹³ Rita Felski thus summarizes the trend of talking about oneself in academic circles:

Althusser's text, through the exposure of the narrator's flaws and insecurities, is faced with a fundamental paradox: presenting an individual deemed legally irresponsible and mad, and a subject who is self-aware and self-possessed enough to recount and analyze his own life. Althusser thus performs both shame and shamelessness, insofar as his memoir functions as an exercise in shame (his lifelong feeling of inadequacy) and shamelessness (his indecent, excessive self-exposure). The text opens on an unbearably detailed, lurid account of the murder:

Tel que j'en ai conservé le souvenir intact et précis jusque dans les moindres détails, gravé en moi au travers de toutes mes épreuves [...] voici la scène du meurtre telle que je l'ai vécue. Soudain, je suis debout, en robe de chambre, au pied de mon lit dans mon appartement de l'École normale. [...] Devant moi : Hélène, couchée sur le dos, elle aussi en robe de chambre. [...] Agenouillé tout près d'elle, penché sur son corps, je suis en train de lui masser le cou. [...] Je ressens une grande fatigue musculaire dans mes avant-bras : je sais, masser me fait toujours mal aux avant-bras. Le visage d'Hélène est immobile et serein, ses yeux ouverts fixent le plafond. Et soudain, je suis frappé de terreur : [...] je sais que c'est une étranglée. Mais comment ? Je me redresse et hurle : j'ai étranglé Hélène !

(11)

Vania Widmer notes the absence of Althusser in his account of the murder: "Althusser est absent du meurtre. Le meurtre se déroule sans lui" (Widmer 13). The memoir recounts other instances where Althusser refuses responsibility for acts of violence he perpetrated on others, and therefore

The culture of confession, once limited to self-help manuals, therapy groups, and talk shows, has gradually penetrated the walls of the academy. For critics who are disenchanted with the spread of theory or who simply want to explore different kinds of scholarly writing, autobiography can be an appealing alternative. Writing about oneself is presented, with varying degrees of intellectual sophistication, as an act of catharsis or a means to self-knowledge. It is also clearly indebted to the "politics of recognition" informing new social movements grounded in group identities. Feminists, in particular, have often been at the vanguard of personal criticism, arguing that traditional forms of academic language need to be replaced by a more personal voice. (*Doing Time* 33- 34)

as a victim of this dissociative violence done by/through his own body. Shame is thus presented in the memoir as the repeated experience of a body that evades the mind, the experience of external, familial forces exerting their power onto a helpless subject, and the experience of a fundamental (relational, intellectual) inadequacy. This is where we can see a fundamental difference between guilt and shame: the narrator rejects guilt yet puts his shame on display, since shame is the experience of this disjunction that led to desubjectivized acts of violence, whereas guilt implies the subject's responsibility for this violence. Shame, in the text, goes hand in hand with irresponsibility.

In his review, Gibert Adair comments on the paradoxical articulation of shame and shamelessness in the text – shame as a ubiquitous *topos*, paralleled by shamelessness as a confessional strategy pushed to its extreme, which includes his – perhaps disingenuous claim of intellectual fraudulence:

Althusser appears to have lived out his whole adult life in the terror that his inadequacy as a thinker, his fraudulence (the word he himself uses), would sooner or later be exposed to his colleagues, his disciples and his enemies. It has happened later rather than sooner and only because, for whatever reason, he chose to bring it on himself. [...] Yet the fascination of the book does not reside solely in the obscene spectacle of its author's nakedness. (The author and journalist Cyril Connolly once said that no one writing completely honestly about himself could fail to produce a masterpiece.) Even in a book as revelatory as this, representing the first time a thinker of such stature has been able, by a terrifying privilege, to write about madness and murder in the first person, there are levels of candour of which, as in any other text, the author himself is not entirely in control. (Adair)

Self-exposure thus becomes a sign of literary value, which elicits uneasy appreciation, disgust, voyeuristic fascination. As we have seen with Foucault, self-examination takes the place the traditional trials of the hero to prove one's bravery or sanctity, and this shift suggests that self-examination itself turns into an act of heroism to be admired.¹¹⁴ According to Irène Fenoglio, the fact that Althusser, through his actions, endured a tragedy, turns him into the universal figure of a man courageously facing and retracing his destiny – i.e. leaving traces, signs of his corporeal presence, that need to be deciphered, analyzed, and archived:

Je suis convaincue qu'Althusser, en écrivant *L'avenir dure longtemps*, a autographié sa condition humaine tragique. Non seulement il y expose le projet d'assumer son destin, ainsi que le projet de l'exprimer en l'écrivant, non seulement il signe sa condition humaine [...] mais en outre il l'a *graphée*, laissant des traces gestuelles, corporelles sur le manuscrit [...].
(18)

The memoir was read as an act of literary and philosophical value. In his review of the memoir, Marc Chabot suggests that the autobiographical mode – as the shameless exposure of the self – is a worthy philosophical undertaking against which structuralists such as Althusser have struggled in vain:

Il y a de l'intolérable dans ces confessions, quelque chose d'absolument impudique. Les philosophes tentent avec si peu de réussite de faire taire *le sujet* qu'ils sont. Ils voudraient tellement échapper à la tentation autobiographique. Ils voudraient bien qu'après leur passage sur terre, il ne nous reste d'eux que des idées. Abstraire le « je » de l'oeuvre paraît une victoire. Mais laquelle ?

¹¹⁴ Althusser's memoir was adapted for the stage in 2017 by Michel Bernard. In this one-man show, Althusser (Angelo Bison) reflects on his madness: the stage, even more than the memoir, is thus a site of extreme, brave self-exposure and self-examination, of paradoxical intimacy with an audience.

Les philosophes devraient pourtant bien comprendre que ce *moi dans* l'oeuvre est l'une des plus grandes découvertes de la pensée occidentale, que ce *moi est* à la base même de notre conception de la liberté. Le « Connais-toi toi même » de Socrate nous hante. L'essentiel d'un philosophe s'y trouve, même pour un structuraliste. (Chabot 143)

By going back to the Socratic precept *Gnothi seauton* and failing to define what Althusser's self-exposure reveals politically (beyond the fact that he was sensitive, imperfect, and experienced a tragic love story), Chabot praises this autobiographical unveiling as a fundamental victory of Western philosophy.

More specifically, Althusser's autobiographical texts were received as the revelation of the truth of the murder, and his version of events in the opening paragraphs of *L'avenir dure longtemps* was generally unquestioned. In her review of *Des rêves d'angoisse sans fin*, a compilation of notes about his dreams published in 2015, Elisabeth Roudinesco thus argues: "C'est bien l'auteur de ce meurtre insensé qui en a le mieux dévoilé la vérité" ("Althusser, la raison en sommeil").

While some critics applauded the text's sincerity, which is presented as the necessary condition for its literary and philosophical value, others have pointed out Althusser's claim of unworthiness and deception. Indeed, shame in Althusser's autobiography appears in relation to feelings of "imposture" and "non-existence" (Lecercle 97). Jean-Jacques Lecercle identifies Althusser's well-known story of cheating on an essay and deceiving his professor Guitton as the "starting point" of Althusser's insistence on his intellectual inadequacy and fraudulence. For Lecercle, Althusser's seemingly exaggerated claims of being an intellectual impostor can only mean that the text is meant to be read as an "instance of irony" with "an unreliable narrator as an author" (96-97). This, however, implies that the literary value of the text doesn't derive from self-exposure and self-examination, but rather from the narrator's ability to trick the reader: should we

then trust his resemblance to the author? If he claims to be deceitful with others, is he also deceiving the reader, and to what extent?

Althusser explains that he is only able to exist through deception and artifice, and Lecercle points to a “structure of interpellation” in this relationship with his mentor. Lecercle then analyzes the “relationship between master and pupil” as evolving into “a master-and-slave dialectic,” in which Althusser’s imposture turns him “into even more of a slave.” Indeed, after having cheated by appropriating the master’s discourse, he is “dead as a pupil” and has charitably “rescue[d] Guitton from inexistence” by providing him with the voice of a (fraudulent) alter ego:

Far from being haunted by Guitton, Althusser becomes a ghost, the ghost of a failed master or author, who is excluded from the structure. For that structure is the narcissistic structure of self-appointment, in which Guitton addresses himself as if in a mirror. The former master is mad, because of his alienation; but the former pupil, in spite of appearances, is dead. (105)

Althusser essentially describes Guitton as a bad teacher providing the artifice of a good education through repetition and mimicry, since Guitton seems unable to appreciate and dialogue with a voice which isn’t his own. However, the narrative outlined here, which exculpates Althusser through a paradoxical avowal of shame and puts forward his figurative death and transformation into a ghost, will recur in the context of Legotien’s murder.

Lecercle interprets Althusser’s emphasis on imposture as a form of “humility” (96) and mobilizes it against critics who take the text at face value and believe that he was an impostor. However, Althusser’s performance of shame may warrant another reading. Indeed, Francis Dupuis-Déri emphasizes the contrived, pretentious logic of extensive, exhaustive (and

obfuscating) self-exposure by which the murderer argues his irresponsibility and victimhood.¹¹⁵ As I quoted in Chapter One, “shame and pride, shame and self-display, shame and exhibitionism are different interlinings of the same glove. Shame, it might finally be said, transformational shame, is performance” (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* 38). While this reversibility of shame was crucial in examining shame-as-spectacle as a defensive strategy for the oppressed narrator of *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*, it is also important to bear in mind when considering the confessional writings of a murderer: the very tension of shame as a contradictory back-and-forth between exhibition and concealment makes it an effective performative tool.

The memoir reads as an exculpation in which Althusser creates a multifaceted character – a protagonist, an antihero, a victim, a madman. Dupuis-Déri insists on two important aspects of the text, which remained the main source for media coverage and analysis of the event: the twin processes of psychologization and victimization. Those led to what I call a double displacement of responsibility: the antithetic positions of *murderer* and *victim* are modified into *the murderer is also a victim*, and ultimately reversed: *the murderer is actually the victim, and the victim is actually the murderer*.

In public discourse, the characterization of the mad philosopher displaced shame onto the impersonal tragedy of madness and excessive passion (the event was *a shame*, i.e. for him, for her, for the intellectual world). A first reversal of responsibility established Legotien as accessory to her own murder in the memoir – she provoked him, or begged him, and Althusser only wanted to

¹¹⁵ “Pour autant, il est aussi possible d’y voir un texte plutôt quelconque en termes littéraires, révoltant d’un point de vue politique et même écœurant d’un point de vue psychologique, puisque le meurtrier s’y présente comme une victime. Ce dernier s’y révèle également prétentieux et vaniteux, se comparant à Descartes, Rousseau, Kant, Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein. Il raconte l’entièreté de sa vie en commençant par le commencement – « Je suis né le 16 octobre 1918, à quatre heures et demie du matin » – et ne nous épargne ni ses petites lubies ni nombre d’anecdotes insignifiantes, jusqu’à boucler la boucle en terminant par une explication du meurtre présenté comme la conséquence d’une vie marquée par des traumatismes d’enfance. Au-delà des détails et de multiples digressions, cette autobiographie est un document de 323 feuilles de format A4 dont l’unique objectif est de présenter le meurtrier comme irresponsable de son crime.” (Dupuis-Déri 23)

help – hence his argument of the “altruistic suicide.” Corollary to this reversal of responsibility is a reversal of death, i.e. the murder was actually a suicide, this time Althusser’s: “Il étrangla comme on se suicide” (Enthoven 127). The event turned Althusser himself into a ghost – by contrast, Legotien was lucky to experience the peace and release of death. Althusser uses the word “tombstone” to refer to his metaphorical, social death, which took away his right to speak at a trial, as a subject. In fine, Legotien herself was the murderer of Althusser.¹¹⁶

As Althusser points out in his memoir, the murder was used to delegitimize his politics. However, little was said at the time about the other political dimension of the event: the profound banality of the murder of a woman who intended to leave her husband. Indeed, to what Olivier Corpet, the editor of *Lettres à Hélène*, refers to as the fascinating “enigma of the philosopher-murderer” (57), which the publication of the memoir encouraged by providing even more psychoanalytic, literary, and philosophical exculpatory hypotheses, one can oppose an all-too-familiar narrative: the femicide, often dismissed as too simple an interpretation for a man of Althusser’s stature. Dupuis-Déri points out that a man kills his partner or ex-partner every two days in France, and that a third of those murders occurs when the woman leaves or announces she will leave, because the man cannot accept the separation – the idea of a separation from Legotien, which she was planning, was described by Althusser as unbearable in his memoir, akin to a death threat.

The femicide is not new to the worlds of literature and academia and, more specifically, to the intersection of the two. The exculpatory rhetoric that followed the murders of Hélène Legotien and Marie Trintignant merely repeated other cases, if one recalls the incursion of literary criticism

¹¹⁶ Dupuis-Déri points to similar narrative patterns in the coverage of Marie Trintignant’s murder by Bertrand Cantat: the victim becomes responsible for her own murder, and the murderer is the real, haunted, haunting victim of the act – a martyr.

in the wake of the Chambige trial in 1888 (recently analyzed by Jacqueline Carroy et Marc Renneville in *Mourir d'amour*), which also projected the responsibility of the murder onto the victim. The murder was read *through* literature, the novel in particular, from Balzac to Flaubert; Anatole France and Maurice Barrès commented on the murderer as a literary figure, and – just as Sarraute did a century later – criminologist Gabriel Tarde criticized in turn literature's tendency to promote “le goût de l'anomalie” (a taste for the anomalous).

More generally, the femicide and literature have a relationship of mutual influence. Indeed, the crime of passion (*crime passionnel*) has a long history, in which penal discourse, literary tropes, and literary criticism are closely interwoven: “une dénomination héritée de la tradition journalistique, de la chronique judiciaire et de la fiction romanesque” (Sapio 7). The crime of passion, as a literary and para-literary trope which relies on a double displacement of responsibility, functions as an ethical microcosm that cements the privileged position of the male protagonist and male subject in relation to his female lover-turned-victim. In this context, the femicide is interpreted as a tragic, inevitable, sublime culmination of passion, an excess of love – an all-too common trope to this day. In 1900, René Doumic already criticized the Romantic logic by which true love can only be expressed through murder, and the complicity of literature in perpetuating this cycle: “La Littérature copie le crime passionnel, comme le crime passionnel copie la littérature” (925).

The reversal of responsibility we have observed with Althusser means that the narrator is characterized as passive – which is the very implication of the crime of passion. We have seen that Althusser paradoxically presents himself as an autonomous, self-aware protagonist, while also emphasizing that he is the real victim of his own mind, of his own crimes. The autobiographical paradox in Althusser's memoir (the problematic self-examination of a madman) therefore

rearticulates the paradox at the heart of the crime of passion as a literary trope: the protagonist is the passive puppet of his passions, but is simultaneously portrayed as autonomous and free.¹¹⁷ Althusser's memoir relies on the principle that literature can function as an alibi, in the etymological sense: just as Althusser was absent from the murder he committed, literature is an *elsewhere* that turns the narrator into a literary figure, first and foremost, whose shame functions as a literary trope – who is disembodied to the point of turning into a ghost, or transubstantiated from flesh to ink.

From *Carmen* to *Madame de Rênal*, novels are littered with examples of femicides or attempted femicides that displace the responsibility of the crime from the murderer to the victim. Even though the misogyny underlying this trope has been denounced, those are entrenched representations. This is particularly visible in the preface written by Bernard-Henri Lévy for *Lettres à Hélène*, a collection of letters by Althusser to Legotien, published in 2011. Lévy describes the letters as a “prodigious novel” of which Althusser is the hero (53), in this long preface entitled “Le fantôme de la rue d’Ulm.” (Unsurprisingly perhaps, the “ghost” announced in the title is not that of Hélène Legotien.)¹¹⁸ While Althusser wrote his memoir of his own volition, his letters were published two decades after his death and are described by Lévy on the back cover as a rich but shameless voyage (“impudique”). This is the fundamentally voyeuristic ideal of the psychological

¹¹⁷ This paradox isn't specific to the crime of passion as novels often problematize the protagonist's freedom to act, but is ubiquitous and extreme in the portrayals of the perpetrators of crimes of passion: in those cases, passion is enough to explain and justify a complete – yet temporary – loss of free will.

¹¹⁸ This title is perhaps an allusion to Oscar Wilde's “The Canterville Ghost,” another literary example of femicide in which the murderer (the sympathetic eponymous character) is presented as the victim of his own crime. While this satirical short story may be implicitly critical of the reversal of responsibility in narratives of femicide, it stages an opposition between the murderer-turned-ghost, and the victim resting in peace. In those famous lines, the Ghost thus poetically invokes the true death for which he yearns, and which he so violently inflicted on his nagging wife:

Death must be so beautiful. To lie in the soft brown earth, with the grasses waving above one's head, and listen to silence. To have no yesterday, and no to-morrow. To forget time, to forget life, to be at peace. You can help me. You can open for me the portals of death's house, for love is always with you, and love is stronger than death is. (86)

novel: to get to the core of an individual's psyche. The detailed analysis of a person's deepest motives turns that person into a fascinating, enigmatic character to be probed and explicated, and, in this case, erases Althusser's interlocutor and victim by privileging his voice.

The tone of this preface is compassionate towards Althusser. Lévy insists on the pain Althusser must have felt in his forearms while strangling his wife, and on the following ordeal of a man protected by his friends, but whose protection, insofar as they turned him into a "subject without a trial," ultimately forbade him to put words on his murderous act: his voice had been stolen, entombed.¹¹⁹

What the literature about Althusser relies on is the insistent construction of a complex *Bildungsheld*:¹²⁰ his experience of discrepancy with himself and the world, his rise and fall, his characterization as his wife's savior, which turns him into a tragic hero. Lévy's preface is thus ripe with literary tropes that associate him with the novel form specifically, from its early incarnations as the medieval romance to the nineteenth-century novel. The "romanesque" itself, as a loose

¹¹⁹ Those ideas are all paraphrased from Althusser's own account of the event, in the first pages of his memoir.

¹²⁰ Althusser's own insistence in being read as a *Bildungsheld*, overcoming modest origins to rise up in society may deserve further analysis, as he briefly identifies with his grandfather, a ranger, in his other memoir *Les faits*: "Je m'appelle Pierre Berger. Ce n'est pas vrai. C'est le nom de mon grand-père maternel [...]" (283). This voluntary rejection of one's bourgeois upbringing to the point of identifying with previous generations can be found earlier in Sartre's *Les mots* (1963), but has also been criticized recently with figures reclaiming – implicitly or not – the status of *transfuge de classe*, even as they were born in the bourgeoisie: for instance, singer Christine and the Queens recently discussing her muscle memory of the working class. While there may be some truth to transgenerational trauma, we may wonder to what extent this identificatory logic was influenced by the *Bildungsroman*, the myth of meritocracy, and the residual bad conscience of the bourgeoisie. By contrast to the real *transfuge de classe*, who is denied any bourgeois privilege, Sartre or Althusser can only imagine such a journey of assimilation and feel shame at having already "arrived." In the previously quoted *Doing Time*, Rita Felski thus associates her reluctance to write about herself as an academic with her "lower-middle-classness" – a derided, shameful non-identity (34).

This also means the transgressive dimension of social autofiction is to be nuanced, insofar as those texts, even when they expose the failures of the meritocracy, tend to affirm and take pride in the upwards journey of a *Bildungsheld*. Nicolas Framont, in his book *Parasites* (2023), thus criticizes Edouard Louis' simultaneous left-wing activism against the exploitation of the working class by the bourgeoisie, and his shame-fueled idealization of the same bourgeoisie, which drives his own successful *Bildungsroman*. The shame-pride paradigm is thus easily reversible and distorted because it follows the hierarchical, bourgeois logic of *Bildung*; in the same vein, heteronormativity informs contemporary gay rights movements, which problematizes the shame-pride paradigm (is pride inherently wedded to assimilationist, homonationalist ideals, or can it be sustained as the affect of transgression through a reclamation of shame?).

aesthetic category, is invoked to explain, justify, and minimize his actions.¹²¹ Indeed, according to Lévy, Althusser turns into a ghost in his apartment of rue Lucien Leuwen, and Lévy adds:

ah Lucien Leuwen! une dose de romanesque supplémentaire... y a-t-il une autre rue, à Paris, que celle où mon Maître trouva ce dernier refuge pour porter le nom d'un personnage de roman? (8)

Lévy, focused on the memoir's theory that Althusser spent his life trying to save and rehabilitate Hélène, paints him as a knight primarily devoted to his Lady, following the trope of courtly love: "un Althusser protecteur, champion de son aimée, défenseur de sa Dame aux prises avec l'injustice."

One may then conceptualize shamelessness as form: *L'avenir dure longtemps* (a memoir which was avowedly written by Althusser for himself and a small circle of friends, yet became a bestseller) is a defensive act in which Althusser chooses to renounce some aspects of his academic reputation in a performance of shame, but where he also uses the patterns of the confession, the *Bildungsroman*, and the crime of passion, to put forward his fundamental irresponsibility. This memoir remains bound up with its own discursive, narrative affiliations; according to John Sturrock, it is "the manipulative product of a theoretical intelligence turned lovingly in on itself, and a pre-emptive exercise in the discourse more *on* than of madness."

The abundant literature on Althusser, the philosopher gone mad, has all but erased Hélène Legotien. However, a group of students at the École normale supérieure recently renamed a room

¹²¹ The *romanesque* is a generic category that exceeds and sometimes contradicts the novel as form. Broadly speaking, the French *romanesque* presents important similarities to the post-Richardson, early English novelistic tradition, which focuses on sentiment and the unfolding of the psyche, but there are a few notable additions to that definition: the potentially endless accumulation of peripeteia, and the representation of moral and physical extremes. While the novel has been defined (by opposition to the romance and its reliance on allegory) in relation to forms of realism, the *romanesque* paradoxically emphasizes hyperbolic adventures and extreme passions, and can be closer to the romance. Implicit in Lévy's comment, the *romanesque* therefore has to do both with extremes (success, fame, love, madness, murder, despair) and with the depths of complex passions and feelings, which the reader is able to access. See Anne Souriau (1245) and Jean-Marie Schaeffer (291-302).

traditionally used as a free common space for students: formerly “Salle Raymond Aron,” it is now “Salle Hélène Legotien-Rytman. Résistante et sociologue. Victime de féminicide en 1980 à l’ENS.”

III. Shame: A Self-Serving Myth?

1. Axel Vander: All Frontage

Shroud, a novel by contemporary Irish novelist John Banville, exposes the fiction of individual coherence and transparency. It offers the possibility of a reading that runs counter to the processes of justification and minimization exemplified earlier, as a meditation on the tenuous relationship between fact and fiction,¹²² and the unreliability of the first-person narrative. Indeed, Axel Vander is a self-described liar, a “virtuoso of the lie,” “all frontage”:

There is not a sincere bone in the entire body of my text. I have manufactured a voice, as I once manufactured a reputation, from material filched from others. (329)

Like Althusser in his posthumous memoir, narrator Alex Vander paints himself as a fraud, a thief, and relies, as a narrator and scam artist, on the allure of transgression. In that sense, the novel is in the direct tradition of the picaresque, but is also reminiscent of Saint Augustine and Rousseau, who confess their sins at length in order to move towards redemption, and Banville ties back to those traditions in *Shroud*, but also in *The Untouchable*.

Banville uses the figure of the controversial academic in order to link Vander to suspicions of antisemitism (he actually stole the identity of an anti-Semitic acquaintance) and femicide (the

¹²² *Shroud* is a historiographic metafiction: a “hybrid genre which situates itself in the borderland between fact and fiction, thematizing the fictionalization of history and the historicification of fiction” (Pedersen 137).

text suggests he may have killed his wife Magda), but also links the unreliability of the narrative to Althusser's and de Man's philosophical systems:

Both [of them] questioned the existence of a fixed kernel of identity within us: Althusser claiming a history without subjects and individuals as historical constructs, and de Man questioning – among other things – an unproblematic relationship between identity, history, and language. (Pedersen 138)

Indeed, according to Lene Yding Pedersen, Banville refers implicitly to the ideas of disfiguration and defacement, through his reference to Paul de Man's reading of Shelley:

Banville quite explicitly refers to this essay in the novel, as Vander has written an essay called 'Shelley Defaced' (290), which is actually a combination of the titles of two of de Man's essays from *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 'Shelley Disfigured' and 'Autobiography as De-Facement.' In 'Shelley Disfigured' de Man reads Shelley's poem 'The Triumph of Life,' where the lyric 'I' of the poem in a dream-like state encounters a procession of figures from intellectual and literary history. (140)

This reference introduces a critique of the autobiographical project, which is bound to "be disrupted by the arbitrary effects of language."

In *Mémoires d'aveugles*, Derrida points to the literal meaning of the Italian word for self-portrait, *autoritratto*, i.e. self-withdrawal. In *Shroud*, as soon as the narrator attempts a self-portrait, he also withdraws. The expression Derrida uses is *visage dévisagé* ("stared at face" – *dévisager* means to stare at, but the word also draws attention to the unmaking of the face that happens in that process of staring). The face is a point of tension throughout the novel, whether it is figured as shrouded or unveiled, unmade as it is adumbrated. We could compare this process to Bacon's figuration of meat, of the head rather than the face, as Deleuze analyzes it in *Logic of*

sensation. One adjective for shameless, in Latin, is *effrons*, the one who transgresses the limit of the front, the forehead (which often metonymically stands for the face) and Vander, by going beyond shame, beyond an organized face and body, implicitly goes back to the true meaning of *exoticos*, leaving the boundaries of the organized body, of the face, of flesh and incarnation, to reach a true outside. The confessional mode thus poses the question of Vander's self-indulgence or of his honesty to the point of the unbearable/unreadable. The very metaphor of the shroud of Turin reminds us that shame seeks to both conceal and expose. Indeed, in *Shroud*, shame expresses the tension between a contained, coherent self – a readable, recognizable face – and a lying, elusive, decaying persona.

More specifically, Vander is simultaneously trying to preserve his persona while being fascinated by the idea of being exposed, in every sense of the word – found out as a fraud, and disincarnated – precisely because he is no longer able to inhabit his own (stolen) skin, i.e. the identity of a Nazi sympathizer and murderer. Shame hinges on the scission of the self; if the illusion of the real self is impossible to sustain and leads to visions of dissolution, evisceration and decomposition, those may also be read as narrative strategies to beat shame at its own game, to reach forms of non-shame – aesthetically figured in the novel as heads without faces, bodies without flesh, but also schizophrenic, addicted bodies.

Shroud exposes the aging, unreliable, male narrator's fascination for disembodiment and performance of shame, while emphasizing, in a phenomenological perspective, affects that escape the bounds of his body. In *Logic of sensation*, Deleuze describes two coexisting movements in Bacon's work: from the field (*aplát*) to the Figure, and from the Figure to the field – it is the latter that interests me in *Shroud*, the movement whereby the body attempts to escape itself. For instance,

the following paragraph shows Vander “fleeing” the materiality of the flesh, to the point of becoming a wooden, inorganic marionette:

I paid my bill and rose abruptly and made for the door, again as if I were fleeing someone, and had the sensation, as so often at such precipitate moments, of having left something of myself behind, and thought that if I were to look back now I would see a crude parody of myself sprawled on the chair where I had been sitting, a limp, life-sized marionette, hands hanging and jointed limbs all awry, grinning woodenly at the ceiling. (30)

In the novel, escape thus functions as the opposite of *Bildung* – Vander is fascinated by disappearance, dissolution into “non-space.” Indeed, later in the novel, Vander discloses that he despises novelists whom he calls “northern worshippers of the sun-drenched south” (32-33). After making fun of clichés about Mediterranean landscapes, he adds:

As if place meant something: as if being somewhere vivid and exotic ensured an automatic intensification of living. No: give me an anonymous patch of ground, with asphalt, and an oily bonfire smouldering, and vague factories in the distance, some rank, exhausted non-place where I can feel safe, where I can feel at home, if I am ever to feel at home. (33)

In that passage, Vander takes a stance against exoticism as the meaningless attraction for foreign landscapes and cultures, and against a superficial “intensification” of life; the last sentence about an “exhausted non-place” implies that there are more interesting possibilities of exoticism as the movement from the Figure to the field. He later describes America as “emptiness” (183) – and we could interpret America as the perfect field for the Figure to dissolve into in this novel.

Just as in Bacon’s paintings, “where sensation is developed through the fall,” the movement of the fall is crucial in the evolution of Vander. When he utters his new, stolen name for the first time, he experiences a sense of weightlessness which he likens to “what Goethe somewhere calls

der Fall nach oben” (the fall upwards) and he later calls it a “catabasis.” But beyond the general movement of the fall, the motif of the falling flesh is omnipresent. More specifically, it is something Vander is always acutely aware of, either in himself or others:

I look at my hand, catch sight of my old, my so old hand, and am halted. The falling flesh.
(221)

I was struck by the amazing fact that this woman who was here now would in a little while be here no more, would be indeed, nowhere, that her flesh that I had intimately known would soon be falling off the bones. (227)

This obsessive image of the falling flesh is the ultimate stage of Vander’s subversion of exposure, gesturing towards shamelessness through his fascination for disembodiment, for revulsion – revulsion as disgust and one being skinned (revulsion comes from the Latin word, *revellere*, that means to skin): he imagines a complete falling out of the flesh, a process of un-fleshing that leads to a moment of pure exhibition and pure disappearance.

Vander’s inability to inhabit his own body is shown through his attempts to escape through literary tropes and alter egos, but also through his fantasy of inhabiting other bodies, specifically a female one. Indeed, the novel shows that the bodily and textual expression of Vander’s shame relies on woman figures functioning as inanimate props, on reaching inside them for some undefined truth or essence – a brutal, epistemological, and aesthetic project. In a misogynistic rage, Vander fantasizes about climbing inside Cass:

Even her nakedness would not be enough, I would open up her flesh like a coat, unzip her from instep to sternum and climb bodily into her, feel her shocked heart gulp and skip, her lungs shuddering, clasp her blood-wet bones in my hands. (107)

One of Cassandra's hallucinations is the complete gutting that Vander envisions, leaving only her empty flesh and bones:

[I]t was as if a huge hand had thrust itself into her irresistibly, and scooped out her insides, leaving her an empty cage of bone and flaccid skin. (86)

Cass enigmatically observes that "A name is hard to speak. To name another is somehow to unname oneself" (141). The fact that the exposure of the other and the exposure of the self are intertwined is exemplified by the very structure of the novel, which revolves around the relationship of Axel Vander and Cassandra Cleave. What is at stake is not the revelation of who Vander really is and who he pretends to be, but who he can become, especially at the contact of Cassandra – his object of desire, of aesthetic and literary projection, but also the shroud with which he wants to drape himself. Because of their peculiar, interdependent yet exploitative relationship, the exposure of Cassandra Cleave is a major thread in this narrative about exposing the extreme materiality of the body – Vander shames her, exposes her instead of truly exposing himself.

By contrast, Vander doesn't consider female shame and bodily experience of disgust or desire to have anything in common with his own. Vander later criticizes the impudence of his Kristina, his former lover, when she touches him and assumes familiarity with him. Vander as a character/narrator therefore describes himself as a body seeking motion, purposely escaping itself, escaping its own flesh, whereas Kristina is paralyzed by a sense of shame that fixes her to her own flesh and pushes her to make physical contact with the flesh of another.

To what extent does shame as a pervading affect function as a performance to elicit empathy? Much like Nabokov's *Lolita*, *Shroud* unravels (literary) seduction and the weaponization of shame, and relies on a plethora of literary tropes and intertextual references (including *Lolita*, with the power imbalance and age difference between Vander and Cass Cleave) – shame is thus

put in relation to narcissism and an obsession with aesthetic perfection. The novel references Beckett, Kafka, Bosch, or Eliot, but also the trope of an idealized feminine figure: “She would be my Beatrice, my Laura, my Trilby” (210). Trilby, by definition, implies a plotting, malevolent, exploitative Svengali. We therefore see that Cass is reduced to a shadow, conjuring famous disembodied muses, but that the novel also relies on an accumulation of clichés or contrived plot points, which seems to expose its own obfuscating strategy: Vander is a suspected anti-Semite who is, in fact, secretly Jewish, but also an older academic seducing a young woman who interprets Nazis as aesthetes rather than murderous anti-Semitic ideologues. Vander exposes himself, but that exposure or exhibition seems excessive, extreme, essentially performative – as if to taunt his potential accusers.

2. David Lurie: The Smell of Shame

When Christy Wampole interprets “degenerative realism” authors’ request for empathy as a dare, one may think of other – perhaps more convincing – manifestations of such a dare in novels with unreliable narrators, like Axel Vander. Indeed, it is a dare – a difficult, uncomfortable one – to request empathy for characters such as Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*, David Lurie in *Disgrace*, or even Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*. As we have seen in Chapter Two, Stevens’ role in enforcing discriminatory practices puts him in an uneasy position, as he considers himself structurally irresponsible, but he also purposely distorts the truth and is proven, again and again, to be an unreliable narrator, either disingenuous or deluded.

The easy, perhaps inevitable reversibility of shame when it organizes white male narratives is a problem Timothy Bewes acknowledges in his chapter on J.M. Coetzee, which focuses on the difference between the “event” of shame and “instantiated” shame, and the struggle to write *with*

and *from* shame rather than reduce it to a concept. According to Bewes, in situations of oppression, shame tends to displace itself onto the oppressed and exculpate the oppressors (this is also the logic explored by Salman Rushdie in *Shame*):

Has this distinguished literary career, which has included two Booker Prize – winning novels and in 2003 the Nobel Prize, been anything other than a thirty-five-year indulgence of marketable spleen? In giving such views to Anya, *Diary of a Bad Year* addresses the possibility that shame is a self-serving myth, an alibi that white males erect in order to leave intact the inequality of their relations with others. One of the effects of such a myth would be the relegation of women and other identity formations to the status of things *about which one is ashamed*, and whose subordinate status is perpetuated by the earnest avowal of shame. (148)

Disgrace follows professor David Lurie, accused of sexual misconduct by his student and subsequently disgraced, and the second part of the novel focuses on the aftermath of his daughter Lucy's rape by three Black men. The novel first focuses on the protagonist's inappropriate sexual relationship with a reluctant younger student; then, after Lurie leaves Cape Town to stay with his daughter on her farm, the novel focuses on Lucy's rape, in the context of difficult race relations in post-apartheid South Africa – the protagonist is thus both a bystander (of his daughter's rape) and a disgraced anti-hero.

The way the novel shifts from the first to the second plot highlights the progression from one type of self-indulgent, performative shame, to another which is never explicitly articulated as such – the novel itself shames Lurie for his self-pity and his manipulation of affect:

As an ethics, shame is not instantiable; or rather, once it is instantiated it loses its integrity.

Lucy in *Disgrace* understands this better than her father. When David proposes that her

reluctance to report the rape to the police is a way of “expiating” the colonial crimes of the past, Lucy firmly corrects him: “Guilt and salvation are abstractions,” she says. “I don’t act in terms of abstractions” (112). What does she act in terms of? She never specifies; but that fact alone suggests that the principle of her action may be shame; for shame is by definition unnameable, uninstantiable. To invoke it as a principle of one’s action, as informing an ethics, would be to turn it too into an abstraction, to remove its corporeal quality, to make it fungible. For the same reason, David throughout *Disgrace* refuses to apologize or express any remorse over his affair with the student; but this intransigence, this shamelessness, speaks not of his lack of shame, but of its fullness, its opacity. (Bewes 163)

Lurie’s initial shamelessness functions as a cultivated facade of abstractions (desire, love) and of self-proclaimed shame, which opposes Lucy’s shame as an experience, beyond expression or representation.

In her article about the politics of shame in *Disgrace*, Sue Kossew emphasizes Lurie’s double nature, who is presented as both a sinner and a self-aware, apologetic protagonist:

As in all of Coetzee’s texts, there are complex levels of intertextuality. David is both an outcast – a Byronic figure (Lucy calls him “mad, bad dangerous to know”), a Lucifer, a Cain but also a smooth of the Stavrogin and Humbert Humbert school, those who, in the very act confession, are seen to be justifying themselves. Like Byron and his Therese (about whose love affair David is attempting to write a chamber opera), David sees himself as an older man unable to deny his desire for a younger woman. Like Dostoevsky’s Stavrogin and Nabokov’s Humbert Humbert, though, he is all too aware of his own guilt

and in this confessional there is some sense of repentance that could disarm the reader's moral outrage. Yet the "double thought" is always transparent. (158)

Lurie is ashamed of his old age, of his loss of authority and charisma, and expresses his "self-disgust, uselessness" (Kosew 157) in a manner reminiscent of Houellebecq's narrators. But he simultaneously claims authority over others, to the point of ventriloquizing Melanie, whom he imagines shaming him:

She stares back at him in puzzlement, even shock. *You have cut me off from everyone*, she seems to want to say. *You have made me bear your secret. I am no longer just a student. How can you speak to me like this?*

Her voice, when it comes, is so subdued that he can barely hear: 'I can't take the test, I haven't done the reading.' (34)

Even as he experiences an intermittent irruption of shame when he pursues Melanie, he rather affirms the force of his desire: "A child, he thinks. No more child! What am I doing? Yet his heart lurches with desire" (20). Then, when the university investigates and interrogates him about his actions, he refuses shame, refuses to be coaxed into confessing any wrongdoing, and rather makes a proud confession of desire:

'I was not myself. I was no longer a fifty-year-old divorcé at a loose end. I became a servant of Eros.'

'Is this a defense?'

'You want a confession, I give you a confession. As for the impulse, it was far from ungovernable. I have denied similar impulses many times in the past, I am ashamed to say.'

(52)

He then denounces the totalitarian Puritanism which, in his view, undergirds the university's investigation, collapsing individual responsibility, legal procedure, and public confession:

‘It reminds me too much of Mao’s China. Recantation, self-criticism, public apology. I’m old-fashioned, I would prefer simply to be put against a wall and shot. Have done with it.’
(66)

But as Kossew points out, “the text itself can be seen as a kind of confession” (159). Moreover, Lurie’s self-pitying refusal to cooperate with the university and defend oneself through institutional procedures is ironically paralleled by Lucy’s later choice to not denounce her rape, her refusal to explain her motivations, and to play the part of the shamed woman asking for help. Lurie becomes the embodiment of procedural justice, the voice of the law and reason, and by his own admission, “a nag, a bore” (Coetzee 155), confronted by his daughter who refuses to let him dictate her decisions:

You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn’t make an appearance until halfway through. Well, contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor. I am not minor. I have a life of my own, just as important to me as yours is to you, and in my life I am the one who makes the decisions. (198)

Through Lucy’s words, the novel self-referentially questions its protagonist’s own status as protagonist, and the inequitable distribution of space and voice, since Lucy doesn’t, in fact “make an appearance until halfway through.” This class distinction between major and minor characters also exposes the extent to which Lurie asserts his expectations of how Lucy (a humiliated, raped woman who only exists in relation to him) should behave.

Lurie progressively understands that his daughter is acting strategically to survive, not only as woman, but as a white woman in South Africa. He also acknowledges his own pervasive sense of shame, which seems to be related to his unavoidable implication in unjust structures. For instance, he works at a shelter where he has to dispose of euthanized animals, and struggles with negotiating compassion and the necessary distance to achieve his task:

If, more often than not, the dog fails to be charmed, it is because of his presence: he gives off the wrong smell (They can smell your thoughts), the smell of shame. (142)

He does not understand what is happening to him. Until now he has been more or less indifferent to animals. Although in an abstract way he disapproves of cruelty, he cannot tell whether by nature he is cruel or kind. He is simply nothing. [...] He is not, he hopes, a sentimentalist. (143)

In this passage, the olfactive identification of shame suggests that it is an affect associated with his presence and perceived by others, rather than something he is able to feel and express. The text rather focuses on Lurie's attempts not to "sentimentalize" animals or persons, and to accept the fundamentally paradoxical nature of his work as "a dog-man: a dog-undertaker; a dog-psychopomp; a *harijan*" – something both noble and ignoble which "no one else is stupid enough to do" (146). But by the end of the novel, Lurie is ashamed of his conduct with regards to Lucy. He is no longer trying to embrace indifference, glibness, or repentance: the novel opens on shame as the affect of unresolvability rather than as the condition of individual or collective redemption.

We can thus oppose his initial performance of shame as a self-pitying, complacent reaction against public shaming – a reaction which is supposed to elicit empathy, anger against those who shame, against the disruptors of the peace – to another shame, the Deleuzian "shame of being a man," which, according to Bewes, isn't erased when it is instantiated:

Dominic Smith comments on Deleuze's shame as follows: "To feel shame at being a man is to feel the limitations of identity and judgement—to feel oneself identified in terms of man as a 'majoritarian fact' and judged complicit in the shameful things that men do." [...] Deleuze's shame is the shame of actualization: the shame of what is producible or instantiable by writing, the order of referentiality to which writing condemns us, but from which it can also extract us. (172-173)

Conclusion

With a focus on problematic characters and disjointed narratives that are sustained and interrupted by the contrapuntal movement of shame, this dissertation has produced several connections between shame and the novel as interrelated forms. Shame functions as cause and effect of *Bildung* as the paradigmatic structure of the novel, whether it is related to sentimental journeys, to the negotiation of nation formation, to the confrontation to non-human possibilities, to violent dissent and rejection of a neocolonial order, or to the novel's paradoxical construction as "the confession of a liar."

In this analysis, I position the novel as neither the mere product of imperialist ideologies, nor a space of resistance and possibility because of its malleability: the novel is a form that is always inadequate to its mimetic, ideological or transformative aims. Unlike forms that are supposed to create coherence and organize experience around identifiable patterns, the novel form points to its failure or its limitations on several levels, more or less explicitly. This dissertation also works against the idea that Modernism constitutes a fundamental break in the novel form, that introduces incoherence and instability (Bewes).

As we saw in the introduction, early theorists of the novel and of the *Bildungsroman* have identified a problem inherent to the novel form: representing and negotiating the incommensurability and inadequacy of scales. This is still a problem relevant to scholars in the field, especially renewed in novels that stage a tension between the human subject and nonhuman life, or *longue durée* systems (capitalism, for instance), from historical novels to science fiction novels. Shame as the affective form of this confrontation between the scale of the human (enclosed, totalizing) and of the infinite, can be analyzed in different contexts. While this dissertation has

highlighted fatigue as the instantiation of shame in novels about the posthuman that exacerbate this confrontation, this dimension of shame takes on different forms in the chapters – for instance, Chapter Two focuses on novels in which the coherence of the individual and of the nation is not a given, and which do not neatly oppose the “good” coherence of the individual and of the nation to the “bad infinities” (Esty 44) of what transcends the human scale.

The novel form functions as an “hontologie” because is linked to shame through *Bildung*, inadequate to its purported goals, and shaped in large part by sentimentalism. As such, the novel relies on exclusionary patterns. Timothy Bewes analyzes the shame of implication in *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* by focusing on the implication of different authors and texts in structural injustices and reading shame as an “event of writing”; his work is thus concerned with the incommensurability of ethics and aesthetics. By contrast, this dissertation emphasizes the appropriation and subversion of *Bildungsroman* tropes (development, self-knowledge, confrontation to one’s ideal self), and the weaponization of shame to elicit empathy.

Conceptualizing the centrality of shame in the novel may have consequences for both the theory of the novel and affect theory, and I would like to suggest a few directions here.

Many theorists of the novel have argued that the novel form is hybrid, capacious, ever-evolving, and contemporary research in the field often focuses on the ways in which novels deviate from their expected patterns, including *Bildung*.¹²³ Identifying shame as the affect most associated with the novel form may shed light on the interplay between affective patterns and social emotions in specific genres and cultural contexts, especially in novels concerned with different forms of displacement.

¹²³ For instance, in *Estranging the Novel* (2021), Katarzyna Bartoszyńska examines the formal strangeness of Irish and Polish novels and proposes a “weak theory” of the novel, which focuses on strange, overlooked novelistic forms that open new possibilities.

While the last chapter alludes to a particular tension in the history of the novel, namely the suspicion of the illusion that fiction is supposed to maintain, which may be perceived as either disingenuous or as unnecessary, the question of realism mostly fell outside of this dissertation's purview. Shame as the affect of inadequacy and of (temporal) tension could nevertheless be analyzed in relation to the development of realism and across its evolving historical definitions, insofar as the formation of affect as a concept distinct from emotion is historically situated.¹²⁴

If shame is produced and normalized by the *Bildungsroman* as a necessary novelistic affect, this dissertation opens on the formal and political ties between affect and social practices, socially situated emotions, socially produced affects. Indeed, the last chapter opens on shame as a tool, and therefore as a form that may have different purposes or "affordances" (Levine) and different moral valences. More specifically, in the first and last chapters, shame appears as a non-instantiable affect that reflects on itself, by contrast to shame as a social object rooted in particular social practices, from eighteenth-century variations of sentimentalism ideology in relation to the formation of the subject, to the reclamation and expression of shame in the twentieth century. This parallel conceptualization could be analyzed in relation to the study of structural affects and their political import at large,¹²⁵ and put in relation to the evaluation of shame in different modes of subjectivation.

One could also investigate the extent to which the structure of shame at work in the project of *Bildung* operates beyond the novel form, insofar as individuation relies on processes of orientation and re-orientation. As Sally Munt suggests in *Queer Attachments*:

¹²⁴ In *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013), Fredric Jameson thus examines the birth of affect as a representational break within realist fiction, and analyzes its gradual "autonomization" (48) from emotion and from linear, teleological temporality.

¹²⁵ See Frédéric Lordon, *La société des affects* (2013), which analyzes the affects at work within capitalist structures.

The modern bounded self has to manage intelligibility of itself through time, and it achieves this through narrative, through becoming the ‘hero’ of its own story. This self is very durable: techniques of the self such as writing (confession, diary, autobiography) render the self visible and plausible to itself, to others. The folding of the outside into the inside creates intelligible interiority; over time, this gathering accrues the force of a plot, it is retrospectively submitted to a sense of ordering, it is made to mean, it contains narrative devices such as cause and effect, heroes and villains, major themes, disruptions, and the emplotment of random events. These elements cohere into the thing we call ‘a life.’ (183)

Chapter Five identifies connections and distinctions between the novel and the memoir, but one may also think of the contemporary expansion of autofiction, in which the narrator-protagonist is the hero of a narrative that relies on fiction tropes.¹²⁶ Similarly, a structure of shame may be explored in self-help literature, given its roots in individualistic self-improvement and its complex relation of mutual influence with the novel.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ In *Immediacy, or The Style of Late Capitalism* (2024) Anna Kornbluh links this expansion to “immediacy” as a style that relinquishes conventional forms of temporal progression and mediation (such as fiction or character). However, autofiction still primarily relies on the fantasy that an accretion of events will cohere into the life of a singular individual.

¹²⁷ See Beth Blum, *The Self-Help Compulsion: Searching for Advice in Modern Literature* (2020).

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Index

A

Ahmed, Sara, 12, 30, 74, 224, 252, 327
 Althusser, Louis, 37, 280, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297,
 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306,
 307, 323, 334, 335

B

Banville, John, 37, 279, 306, 307, 323, 333
 Barthes, Roland, 165, 166, 173, 184, 187, 198,
 335, 337
 Bewes, Timothy, 10, 11, 12, 31, 64, 65, 66, 69,
 156, 160, 167, 174, 195, 270, 312, 314, 317,
 319, 320, 327
 Brinkema, Eugénie, 9, 12, 32, 168, 327
 Butler, Judith, 6, 35, 101, 142, 243, 258, 270, 330,
 336

C

Castle, Gregory, 12, 26, 27, 167, 189, 325
 Coetzee, J.M., 37, 260, 269, 285, 312, 314, 316,
 323, 333

D

Deleuze, Gilles, 91, 307, 308, 318, 336
 Dick, Philip K., 36, 167, 170, 180, 181, 184, 189,
 200, 210, 220, 291, 323, 324, 332

E

Eliot, George, 6, 36, 101, 103, 106, 110, 111, 112,
 115, 116, 121, 122, 130, 132, 143, 162, 163,
 312, 323, 324, 328, 330, 331, 332
 Esty, Jed, 12, 21, 156, 167, 320, 325

F

Felski, Rita, 31, 89, 93, 294, 304, 325, 336
 Foucault, Michel, 225, 232, 233, 240, 242, 258,
 274, 279, 282, 297, 337

H

Hamid, Mohsin, 37, 223, 225, 263, 266, 267, 269,
 271, 273, 278, 281, 323, 332, 333

I

Ishiguro, Kazuo, 6, 28, 36, 104, 105, 135, 146,
 149, 152, 160, 163, 175, 281, 323, 330, 331

K

Kundera, Milan, 14, 15, 281, 325, 337

L

Lahiri, Jhumpa, 5, 37, 223, 225, 227, 229, 230,
 323, 332
 Le Guin, Ursula K., 36, 167, 185, 190, 192, 197,
 200, 291, 323, 332
 Lee, Wendy, 12, 28, 29, 52, 59, 118, 143, 223, 328
 Lejeune, Philippe, 27, 280, 325
 Levine, Caroline, 32, 321, 325, 328, 332
 Lukács, Georg, 11, 13, 17, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 34,
 64, 326

M

McBride, Eimear, 6, 35, 41, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 79,
 92, 94, 95, 98, 281, 287, 323, 329, 330
 Miller, Andrew H., 24, 116, 245, 246, 281, 326,
 331

S

Sedgwick, Eve, 16, 30, 38, 39, 40, 42, 47, 56, 67,
 91, 300, 329, 330
 Shamsie, Kamila, 37, 223, 227, 229, 255, 256,
 260, 323, 332, 333
 Sterne, Laurence, 6, 28, 30, 34, 35, 41, 42, 46, 56,
 58, 63, 64, 66, 69, 77, 94, 238, 281, 323, 324,
 329, 330, 337

V

VanderMeer, Jeff, 36, 167, 200, 210, 213, 216,
 217, 220, 281, 323, 332

W

Woloch, Alex, 25, 101, 110, 228, 277, 327, 332

Y

Yao, Xine, 224, 243, 251, 276, 292, 329