

**DECONSTRUCTING TEXT AND SELF:
BOUNDARY VIOLATIONS IN THE POSTMODERN NOVEL**

DECONSTRUCTING TEXT AND SELF:
BOUNDARY VIOLATIONS IN THE POSTMODERN NOVEL

By

TIMOTHY L. WALTERS, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Timothy L. Walters, B.A. (McMaster University)

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Abstract

This thesis is an attempt to show a very particular type of intertextuality (defined in three ways) at play within three postmodern texts, to chart the ways in which it is deployed, and to examine the ways in which its influence is manifested. First, each novel contains an intertextual reference that is concealed, marginalized or elided to a degree that misrepresents the intertext's relevance to the text's project(s). Secondly, each submerged referent is the subject of a rigorous and sustained deconstructivist critique by the text that contains it. And finally, the intertextual reference in each work is involved in deconstructing the narrator's self, often displacing or replacing a seemingly unified and autonomous speaker with one that is fragmented and constituted by discourse.

Chapter One sets the parameters of my thesis and articulates the manner in which I will be using intertextuality as a means of "probing, fissuring, disorienting, and dangerously supplementing the text at hand so as to exhibit its implications and implicatedness." (Clayton 18) In Chapter Two, I offer an analysis of the role of Vladimir Nabokov's Lectures on Literature as an overlooked intertext in Julian Barnes' Flaubert's Parrot, a 'trans-generic prose text' dealing with the relationship between the fictive and the real. Chapter Three traces Paul Gauguin's strange intertextual presence in Jamaica Kincaid's Lucy, and Chapter Four is an examination of Bret Easton Ellis' American Psycho, which I defend as an apocalyptic deconstruction of 'the *GQ* man'.

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I need also to thank my remarkable family--Ann, Peter, and Nick 'Junior' Walters--whose selfless contributions to all aspects of my life, this project included, have enriched me in inestimable ways. Also, my heartfelt gratitude to all of the Sotak clan (Alyssa, Nina, and Andy), but particularly to Andrea--my partner in crime--who tolerated my deranged work habits and the generally erratic behaviour that went hand in hand with the development of this thesis. Not only did she show hitherto unimaginable patience during this shared ordeal, but her intellectual contributions to this paper can be found on every page; for a biochemist, she may well know far too much postmodern theory for her own good.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandmother, Enid Illingworth, who died this past summer while it was nearing completion. Her lifelong passion for reading (supplemented in her nineties by a budding career as a writer) marked me deeply, and I will always regret that we were never able to exchange our respective finished works. I would have loved to talk about them with her.

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Chapter 1

An Intertextual Introduction

A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game.

Jacques Derrida, "Dissemination"

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture.

Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author"

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full-stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network.

Michel Foucault, "Language, Counter-Memory, Practice"

As with most of the narrative techniques that are currently linked within the nebulous conglomeration of discourses that have become known as postmodernism, intertextuality both as a fictional and critical strategy predates the postmodern. It is, as many critics have suggested, "the oldest troping we know, the most ancient textual (con)figuration" (O' Donnell xiii). However, primarily as a result of the work of Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes in the 1970's, the concept of intertextuality has re-entered our critical vocabulary in a much changed and invigorated form; one that is intimately involved and implicated in the postmodernist project(s). It is this contemporary

reincarnation of intertextuality that will be the focus of my thesis; one far removed from the influence, allusion, and source studies that were once so fashionable in literary criticism.

While this is not the place for a comprehensive explanation of the development of intertextuality as a critical practice, it is important to acknowledge some of the formative influences (each an important intertext) which have helped to shape it into a distinct theoretical concept. All surveys of intertextual criticism observe that it developed from, and was a response to, the influence studies whose dominance reached its peak as a consequence of “the mid-eighteenth-century interest in originality and genius”(Clayton 4-5). Within an academic climate where originality was hailed as the definitive stamp of genius, critics sought for traces of influence in an attempt to show the weakness of a given work. Similarly, the work that exerted the greatest influence or was most frequently alluded to became elevated in literary stature. Firmly rooted in the belief that the proper (the only true) aim of art was to imitate nature and not merely other art, influence studies were generally, although not exclusively, intended as an evaluative tool.

The gradual decline of this procedure was accelerated in the first half of the twentieth century, with the important work of such scholars as T.S. Eliot and Northrop Frye. However, the academic whose work exhibited the greatest impact on studies of influence and intertextuality was Harold Bloom, who violently broke with the prevailing New Critical notion that a literary work is an autonomous artifact and, therefore, its relationship to other texts is wholly irrelevant. The principles that Bloom articulates in The Anxiety of Influence were groundbreaking and, although his conception of influence

is different in many striking ways from our understanding of intertextuality today, comments such as “The meaning of a poem can only be another poem” (Bloom 94) and “Influence, as I conceive it, means that there are *no* texts, but only relationships *between* texts”(96) show the extent to which his theorizing prefigures a postmodern intertextuality. However, Bloom’s explicitly (and infamously) Oedipal theory of influence nonetheless retains many of the traditional characteristics of the term, one that is “committed to an author-centered criticism, concerned with issues of originality and genius, an evaluative rhetoric, and an emphasis on literary history”(Clayton 10). More troublingly, his insistence on a patrilinear formulation of literary influence in which ‘major’ authors (sons) feel more compulsion to do battle with their canonized predecessors (fathers) than do minor writers leads him to articulate an exceedingly restrictive view of literary history. His self-proclaimed elitism is most painfully expressed in his recent work The Western Canon, in which he freely displays his alarming contempt for ‘multiculturalists’, ‘feminist cheerleaders’, and ‘quilt makers’, all of whom are, by virtue of their (apparently unreasonable) attempts to open up the canon, denounced wholesale as a “rabblement of lemmings”(Bloom 4).

With Bloom’s (presumably rather reluctant) assistance, the dominance of influence studies comes to an end when many critics begin to seriously question its dependence on the centrality of the author as agent, reigning absolutely over the texts *he* creates. Jay Clayton suggests four specific ways in which this new area of concern caused the practice of influence studies to wane, and ultimately fall completely out of intellectual fashion, noting:

(1) behind an idea of influence lie dubious normative judgements about originality; (2) the biographical issues crucial to influence are at best merely ancillary to texts; (3) a stress on the author's being influenced or influencing tends to make that author authoritative, thus to brush aside the activity of readers, let alone their freedom of interpretation and response; and (4) a concern about influence promotes an outworn humanism. (12)

Generally, then, the shift from influence to intertextuality was one marked by a shift in focus from that of agency to that of the multidirectional and impersonal intersection of intertwined and overlapping texts. The terminological leap from influence to intertextuality ostensibly occurred when Julia Kristeva (much influenced by Lacan) inaugurated the term when she observed what she felt was:

an insight first introduced into literary theory by Bakhtin: any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*. (Kristeva 66)

Kristeva's theorizing of the text as a matrix of other texts which are negotiating between one another infinitely has remained the most influential work on the topic, although many other scholars have put forth their own models of intertextuality, often under the influence of semiotics, post-structuralism, or the new-historicism. Most notable is Roland Barthes, who closely follows Kristeva's lead but who shifts the emphasis more firmly away from the author or literary work and onto the reader who becomes the organizing locus of interpretation. Calling attention to this revision, he argues that "The reader is the space on which all of the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination." (Barthes 148) Furthermore, he helps to clarify that which is more implicit in

Kristeva's formulation; that is, that influence typically alludes to the inclusion of 'classical' literary intertexts (those, for instance, in Bloom's rigid canon), whereas intertextuality refers more "toward a notion of the subject as constituted by the texts of its culture, the subject *as the already read*" (Clayton 21) and allows a space for the inclusion of *all* manner of texts.

Although Barthe's expansion of Kristeva's seminal work has exerted enormous influence, critics such as Michael Riffaterre argue that his work is too anarchic as it fails to provide a practical interpretive model with which to confront a literary text. He argues that if a text can potentially be constructed out of any one of an infinite number of other texts, as Barthes asserts, then it is impossible to reasonably determine which intertextual references are useful or relevant. To combat the infinitude of Barthe's radical theory to facilitate analysis of individual works, Riffaterre posits a diametrically opposed theory in which intertextuality functions as a "constraint upon reading (as a set of restrictions upon the reader's freedom, as a guide for him in his interpreting)" (Riffaterre 628). The chosen intertext then becomes a clue which will, in the hands of a careful reader, unfailingly lead to the only proper interpretation of a text, an idea that is clearly anathema to Kristeva and Barthes' contributions to the field.

Too many other important theories of intertextuality have been advanced (by Culler, Foucault, Iser) to examine here, so I have tried to summarize only those which have been most influential in the concept's development. Moreover, the notion of intertextuality has largely exceeded the constraints of those who helped to define it. Like the term postmodern, with which it has developed, intertextuality has become firmly

rooted in our critical vocabulary as a phenomena that is *in itself* a conglomeration of various discourses, theories, and interpretations, all of which are, of course, compelling intertexts. And it is this contemporary incarnation of intertextuality that will be both the object and the method of my study.

Although all attempts to stabilize the meaning of the term intertextuality are suitably fraught with theoretical difficulties, I will borrow one of the simplest and most concise definitions in order to clarify precisely what I mean when I refer to intertextuality in this thesis. In Palimpsestes, Gerard Genette asserts that intertextuality is “a relation of copresence between two or more texts, that is ... the demonstrable presence of one text within another” (Genette 8). The apt metaphor which he uses to clarify his understanding of intertextual relations is one of a “palimpsest, in which one sees, on the same parchment, the superimposition of one text into another which the parchment does not completely hide, but permits us to glimpse through its transparency”(451). Each of the novels that will be examined in this work is a palimpsest, a text within which one or more other texts is at play. However, unlike influence studies which tend to emphasize a frequently reverent, stable, and unidirectional relationship between text and intertext, I hope to show how intertextuality (both as a critical tool and as a narrative technique) in its redefined configuration is a much more radical and unstable formulation. Rather than merely explicating what (other) texts are concealed within or constitutive of the postmodern novels which will be investigated here, I should rather use these intertextualities as part of a strategy of “probing, fissuring, disorienting, and dangerously supplementing the text at hand so as to exhibit its implications and

implicatedness.”(Clayton 19)

Furthermore, I hope to show something of a common thread which ties these seemingly disparate works together; a commonality that is expressed precisely through their engagement of postmodern intertextualities. Firstly, all of the intertexts that I will examine are submerged, concealed, or partially erased to an extent that seemingly contradicts their profound importance to the texts that (partially) contain them. Included in each work are often oblique and fleeting references to mastertexts whose belittled importance to the meaning of the novels are frequently vast and largely unexamined. Although postmodern works must seemingly by definition contain within them attempts to evade or subvert the very possibility of a stable or definitive meaning (which runs counter to Riffaterre’s notion of intertextuality), I hope to show that the recognition and exploration of these intertexts allows for richer interpretational possibilities. Also, since I will focus primarily on one intertextual reference per novel, I hope never to give the (incorrect, impossible) impression that the chain of signification ends, or that the riddle of the text is solved, by implying that the ‘truth’ of a text is unambiguously found in its relationship with a specific intertext (in the manner that Riffaterre proposes). Although I clearly consider the invocation of these intertexts critically rewarding, it must be emphasized that various others could have been the focus of my analysis, facilitating very different readings of each novel. Essentially, I do not wish to infer that I have achieved closure with regard to any of these works, but, rather, at all times highlight the ways in which intertextuality must always enable what James Scott calls an ‘infinite deferral of meaning’, which is the primary source of pleasure that they make available to us.

Secondly, if, as many have suggested, source studies are redolent of a patrilineal system of canonical (by which I mean self-evidently earned) literary greatness (in which one's reference to a previous text is a literary note of congratulations for a job well done), then this study will show how certain postmodern writers articulate a far more complicated, ambiguous, and multidirectional relationship with the texts that they invoke. Indeed, far from being a tribute to earlier works, these texts are invariably suspicious, critical, and frequently contemptuous of the intertexts that they rigorously deconstruct. Their narratives can be understood as discursive attempts to enter into a dialogue with former works and it is within this ambiguous dialectical relationship that the meaning(s) of these texts are most compellingly produced.

Finally, the novels that I will be addressing all use intertextuality as an expression of their involvement in the postmodernist project; specifically, as a tool with which to deconstruct their own narrators (from within, as they speak to us) in order to demonstrate "the exhaustion of the autonomous self as a formal principle"(Pecora 1) in postmodern fiction. Each of these texts uses intertextuality as the primary device with which to violate our conventional understanding of the boundaries of text *and* of the self, and to reconfigure a postmodern self that is no longer stable, coherent, or outside of text, but one that is wholly constructed, the result of a convergence of discourses. My methodology and the organization of each chapter will, therefore, be a function of the three areas of similarity in each texts engagement and negotiation with their respective intertexts. I will first identify the submerged intertextual reference and then work through each novel in order to show the way in which it is used, with specific emphasis paid to the analysis of

text as criticism (of intertext) and as an attempt to deconstruct the notion of a pre-postmodern sense of self.

In Chapter 2 I will begin with an analysis of Julian Barnes' Flaubert's Parrot because it is a representative 'high' postmodern text; that is, one that explicitly and rigorously *flaunts* its interest in postmodern theory and practice. In this regard, it is a good starting point as it displays many of the different facets of the postmodern engagement of intertextuality as an integral narrative technique. However, although Barnes flamboyantly displays the numerous intertexts that constitute his 'trans-generic prose text', he simultaneously conceals those texts which are most influential to his work. While explicating the full extent of Barnes' use of Vladimir Nabokov's Lectures on Literature, I will suggest that if Geoffrey Braithwaite (an exemplary postmodern narrator) uses countless texts to deconstruct Flaubert (and, of course, his parrot), then Barnes uses Nabokov's text to deconstruct Braithwaite in many of the same ways. Indeed, in its entirety, Flaubert's Parrot can be read as a postmodern critique of the manner in which Lectures editor Fredson Bowers attempts to create Nabokov through language.

Chapter 3 consists of an analysis of a much less self-consciously postmodern text than the former, Jamaica Kincaid's Lucy. Although Kincaid's project is perhaps slightly more post-colonial than it is postmodern, she nonetheless uses intertextual references in much the same fashion that Barnes does, and with many of the same goals. Lucy, our narrator, very subtly alerts us to the presence of Paul Gauguin, the French painter, whose life and work (which are essentially inseparable) become intertexts and represent all that she must struggle to distance herself from as she attempts to create her own identity away

from the colonialist discourse of power that he embodies.

The final chapter contains an analysis of what is perhaps the most controversial (and critically reviled) book in recent memory, American Psycho by Brett Easton Ellis. In order to create a postmodern text that critiques wholesale the values of the narrator's (Patrick Bateman) world, Ellis uses *GQ* magazine as an intertext that is emblematic of the rampant consumerism and pathological obsession with surfaces that are the cornerstones of his existence. The much maligned novel contains famously excessive violence that need not be defended from those who argue that his text is not a critique of that which it presents, but an endorsement of it. It becomes gradually clear that the violence is *itself* an attack on the principles which *GQ* puts forth in its attempt to construct a masculine ideal (one characterized by wealth, physical beauty and strength, hedonism, cruelty, and self-obsession). Ultimately, as we come to understand the extent to which Bateman and his army of *GQ* men-friends are identical, Ellis reveals the extent to which postmodern identity is entirely constituted by the convergence of various discourses, many of which are profoundly dangerous.

As should be clear from the very different novels that I have chosen to study, the way in which these postmodern texts use intertextuality may be relatively similar, but the (tentative) conclusion(s) that they reach are pointedly different. All engage intertextuality as a critical tool with which to deconstruct the boundaries of text (their own) and the self (those of their narrator's) in an effort to articulate a distinctly postmodern view of human experience. And, although this thesis involves the independent study of three novels, it is at the same time an investigation into a specific way of marshalling intertextuality, an

intertextuality that “presents itself not as a closed system of binary and triadic sign relations, but as an opening-- not to say a ‘rupture’-- toward a new epistemology whose terms we ourselves, still at least partially enclosed in the modern episteme, cannot quite ‘think,’ except to call its new space the ‘postmodern’” (Morgan 273-274).

Chapter 2

'Nabokov' as Both String and Hole in the Postmodern Net of Flaubert's Parrot

Literature was born not the day when a boy crying wolf, wolf came running out of the Neanderthal valley with a big grey wolf at his heels: literature was born on the day when when a boy came crying wolf, wolf and there was no wolf behind him. That the poor little fellow because he lied too often was finally eaten up by a real beast is quite incidental. But here is what is important. Between the wolf in the tall grass and the wolf in the tall story there is a shimmering go-between. That go-between, that prism, is the art of literature.

Vladimir Nabokov, "Good Readers and Good Writers"

In "Parrot as Paradigm: Infinite Deferral of Meaning in 'Flaubert's Parrot'.", James B. Scott examines the way that postmodern novelists "strive to undermine hermeneutic responses to art by foregrounding the discourse that informs their artifact, thereby implying that not only is the 'final meaning' of a work of art forever unknowable, but also any orthodox truth is a discourse generated fluke." (Scott 57) Clearly, in his 'high' postmodern novel Flaubert's Parrot, Julian Barnes flaunts this technique to an unusual degree, but a close analysis of his 'trans-generic prose text' reveals the extent to which some of the most influential discourses that constitute his novel are purposefully *not* foregrounded. I begin my study here because the intertext that I will posit as the most important is caught up in a project that is similar to Barnes' although in precisely the opposite way. Both involve an attempt to create a unified self (that is, to 'get to the bottom' of a character outside of text) but whereas Nabokov's Lectures purport to create

their ostensible narrator, Flaubert's Parrot involves a recognition that it is impossible to do so and becomes a postmodern interrogation of why this is so.

Although Flaubert's short story A Simple Heart is Barnes' most overt intertextual referent, containing the infamous titular parrot, countless other texts are present in the fabric of the novel with wildly differing degrees of apparency. Although Barnes does not always specifically draw his readers attention to the full import of his numerous intertexts, he is certainly wont to disseminate hints and clues throughout, drawing us in to the same peculiar type of literary detective games that consume his chatty and ultimately unreliable narrator Geoffrey Braithwaite. If Barnes relentlessly shows how Flaubert's life and art are buried beneath depths of critical and biographical information so that he can never be 'known' to us in an authentic way, then he simultaneously challenges the notion that his own narrator is an autonomous and cohesive subject by subtly suggesting the presence of shadowy figures and texts that have participated in his construction. As Scott correctly observes, Braithwaite "plays a diversity of literary roles - biographer, scholarly essayist, omniscient narrator, existential philosopher - and as such he underscores Barnes' central premise that identity is a mercurial consequence of discourse"(58). However, the critic never manages to recognize the ways in which Barnes uses patently different intertextual strategies to deconstruct his narrator than he does to Flaubert. A fairly reliable rule seems to be that Braithwaite freely identifies those literary figures and sources that have impacted on his 'creation' of Flaubert, but that he only slightly suggests the existence of those who are implicated in Barnes' creation of him and, indeed, of the entire text.

More so than Roland Barthes or Jean-Paul Sartre, who are both profoundly influential intellectual forces in the text, the writer and scholar that (barely appears) to have most indelibly marked Barnes entire project is Vladimir Nabokov. Not only are Nabokov's interpretations of Flaubert (and of all literature) frequently adopted and reflected in this novel, but its entire purpose and structure may well be a reference to the text in which Nabokov most deeply articulates his understanding of the French writer, Lectures on Literature. Barnes uses this (inter)text and its somewhat strange framework, in an occasionally satirical fashion, in order to create a postmodern investigation into "the relation of the fictive to the real"(Shiner 167) which uses the creation of a literary persona as its starting point. In Lectures on Literature, Nabokov devotes a large section to his analysis of Madame Bovary, but he also speaks generally about his understanding of the methods and purposes of literary art. Although Barnes makes no direct reference to this book (although at one point he cites the lectures in a manner that suggests he was in attendance) its enormous influence and his conspicuous silence about it warrant serious critical examination.

The genesis of this project seems fairly clear. Nabokov's biographers, his published letters (to Edmund Wilson), and editor Fredson Bowers introduction to the Lectures text all tell the same story. Before his arrival in America in 1940, Nabokov had prepared about one hundred lectures on literature (primarily Russian) which he supplemented with another one hundred (on Austen, Kafka, Joyce etc.) in the few years subsequent to his immigration. After a brief lecture tour and a few months teaching a summer course at Stanford University he was hired by Wellesley College where he

lectured from 1941 to 1948 on Russian language and literature.. Immediately following this tenure he was named Associate Professor of Slavic Literature at Cornell University where he taught two classes: Literature 311-312, Masters of European Fiction (including Flaubert's Madame Bovary), and Literature 325-326, Russian Literature in Translation. Nabokov intended to eventually publish his lecture notes in book form but ultimately never began the project, perhaps because of the magnitude of his eventual success as a writer of fiction. He did, however, leave behind thousands of pages of notes, diagrams, and corrected translations from which he lectured, and from which Lectures on Literature is constructed.

However, Nabokov's book (like Barnes') is not what it first seems to be. Most apparently, it is not in any conventional sense written by Nabokov. Although presented as a collection of famous essays that "evokes his distinct classroom style and the brilliance of his personality", Fredson Bowers' 'Foreword' reveals the extent of his editorial role and immediately forces us to consider the extent to which he is *at least* as much the author of the text as Nabokov. Of his editing methods Bowers states "The fact cannot and need not be disguised that the texts for these essays represent Vladimir Nabokov's written-out notes for delivery as classroom lectures and that they cannot be regarded as a finished literary work"(Bowers ix). Bowers goes on to explain the various obstacles that he was forced to overcome in the preparation of this project, and in doing so reveals that he can only possibly come as close to creating Nabokov as Braithwaite comes to creating Flaubert, and for many of the same reasons. The majority of the lecture notes were written by hand, many were illegible and others contained references that were

unidentifiable. Even the few pages that were typed (by Mrs. Nabokov whom we are told also “exercised normal editorial discretion”(ix)) were covered with revisions and cryptic or decontextualized allusions. Occasionally, the notes do not lend themselves to a smoothly ‘authentic’ narrative and, in such instances, “the present ordering of the material is almost entirely the responsibility of the editor”(ix). Bowers piles upon the reader a surely insurmountable quantity of extraneous source material that he chose to include, always in a rather apologetic tone. Noting a discrepancy that he aims to disguise in the body of his text, he notes “Stylistically the most part of these texts by no means represents what would have been Nabokov’s language and syntax”(xiii). Ultimately, despite obviously exhaustive research and academic labour, and even with the help of Nabokov’s wife, son, and former colleagues and students, in his ‘Foreword’ Bowers seems resigned to the fact that he cannot, without significant qualification and explanation, authentically present the ‘real’ Nabokov to us. And then he proceeds to do so. In this respect he bears much similarity to Nabokov’s metaphor of the young boy crying wolf, wolf; the wolf, however, is not in the tall grass as he suggests but in the tall story. Bowers’ doomed attempt to make Nabokov for us is in many ways similar to Braithwaite’s attempts to know the real Flaubert or the real stuffed parrot, and although their methodologies are often similar, the difference is in the execution. While Bowers initially makes his apologies and then proceeds to try and persuade the reader that he has done what he set out to do by virtue of the near seamlessness of ‘Nabokov’s’ lectures, Barnes text is about why these difficulties exist and the ways in which our inability to grasp a stable truth occurs both in the ‘real’ world and in the realm of the literary. A

simultaneous analysis of the two works together will show the extent to which Bowers' (pre-postmodern¹) Nabokov, although wholly (and literally) a creation of texts, differs significantly from Barnes' rigorously postmodern conception of an intertextualized narrator.

Just as Barnes' novel transcends and examines its literary form primarily through the inclusion of a wide diversity of different sources of information, Bowers' interpretation of Nabokov's lectures is attained using a similar strategy. Barnes' novel is made up of journal entries, dictionary definitions, three different (often contradictory) chronologies, personal anecdotes and correspondences, exam questions, and often preposterously detailed analysis of the seemingly insignificant minutiae of Flaubert's life and writing. The purposefully muddled depiction of Flaubert that emerges is presented as an accumulation of information from many different (and none definitive or unbiased) sources. We hear from scholars, critics, biographers, friends, and lovers of the writer, each serving to further confound our narrator's desire to attain a clear and unmediated understanding. In a very deliberate although seemingly contradictory manner, it is precisely because of the massive amount of data which must be acknowledged that Flaubert remains a mystery. Barnes explains each detail or morsel of trivia with great precision and then swiftly undermines its validity or, at least, its supremacy or 'truthfulness'. This effect is masterfully and comically achieved and reiterated repeatedly throughout the novel, as in the early "Chronology" section when we read a seemingly

¹ I use this term in order to forcefully not imply that Bowers' creation of Nabokov is modernist, and to reaffirm that the term postmodern as I use it throughout this paper designates "less a period than a poetics or an ideology." (Hutcheon 28)

comprehensive and useful account of a facet of Flaubert's life only to have its authority undermined by a second and then third perspective. Unlike the seemingly reliable and unbiased chronologies that Nabokov includes in his lectures (or those that Bowers includes in his 'Foreword'), Barnes flaunts the extent to which no definitive truth is accessible to us. Frequently, different entries for the same date directly contradict one another, as is the case with the year of Flaubert's death in 1880, about which we are initially told "Full of honour, widely loved, and still working hard to the end, Gustave Flaubert dies at Croisset"(Barnes 27) only to later read that "Impoverished, lonely and exhausted, Gustave Flaubert dies"(31). Characteristically, the rest of the text in no way clarifies this apparent paradox, and indeed the other information which we are exposed to only further confounds the confusion.

Bowers' technique of including broad ranging materials in his text (including diagrams, students notes, and photocopies of the text from which Nabokov taught) is similar to Barnes', although the latter writers use of this information is much more postmodern and sceptical than his predecessor. Flaubert's Parrot is in some ways an attempt to show why Bowers' task is doomed to failure and essentially pointless. However, both texts are similar in that the wealth of tangential material has a curious attraction to the reader. Although Braithwaite is frequently dismissive of those who seek out traces of the writers real life or collect literary paraphernalia, wondering "Why does the writing make us chase the writer? Why can't we leave well enough alone? Why aren't the books enough?"(12), his assertions are always undercut by the fact that his entire quest is motivated by the deliberately ridiculous search for a decrepid, one hundred and

fifty year old, fictional parrot that may never have existed outside of Flaubert's imagination in the first place. In much the same way that Braithwaite is obsessively interested in the collection of Flaubertian trivia, Bowers uses the 'humanizing' details and artifacts of Nabokov's life in order to essentially undercut his initial cautions about the dubious 'authenticity' of the lecture notes. Without these introductory editorial interventions, the reader would feel what is clearly Bowers' intended, and somewhat daunting, effect; a replication of the experience of being an English student at Cornell University in 1953, enrolled in Literature 311 (jokingly referred to by students, we are affectionately told, as either 'Dirty Lit.' or simply 'Nabokov'). This course is summarized in the curriculum catalogue in this way; "Selected English, Russian, French, and German novels and short stories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will be read. Special attention will be paid to individual genius and questions of structure."(Bowers vii)

Despite, and arguably because of, Bowers' editorial decisions, the reader is transported back through time into this lecture hall, and the text becomes a strange kind of dramatic transcript which allows us the thrill of 'hearing' the insights of one of this centuries most revered writers.

Curiously, it is when Bowers most overtly shows us the clues that enabled him to recreate Nabokov the lecturer that the illusion and the experience seem most authentic. Lectures on Literature begins (after, of course, the "Editors Foreword" which is curiously detached from the 'real' text) with a biographical introduction by John Updike whose purpose is seemingly to introduce the speaker and set the scene vividly before us. Rather than challenge or examine the 'facts' of this biography (although information about

Nabokov is likely at least somewhat more reliable than that dealing with Flaubert by virtue of the former's relative modernity), Updike uses it to create some wonderful and nostalgic, yet wholly imagined scenarios. Having contacted former students, and consulted with his wife, a pupil so enamoured with the aging Nabokov that "she attended one lecture with a fever high enough to send her to the infirmary immediately afterwards" (Bowers xxiii), he uses their testimony to place the reader firmly within the classroom, often relating irresistible stories. We learn about the tone and texture of the professor's voice, his demeanour, and his "enthusiastic, electric, evangelical" (Bowers xxiii) lecture style. It is difficult to understand how anyone, although particularly a student, could not succumb to the charm of a nostalgic story such as this:

even his rare ideal student might fall prey to Nabokov's mischief. When our Miss Ruggles, a tender twenty, went up at the end of one class to retrieve her blue book from the mess of graded "prelims" strewn there, she could not find it, and at last had to approach the professor. Nabokov stood tall and apparently abstracted on the platform above her, fussing with his papers. She begged his pardon and said that her exam didn't seem to be here. He bent low, eyebrows raised. "And what is your name?" She told him, and with prestidigitational suddenness he produced her blue book from behind his back. It was marked 97. "I wanted to see," he informed her "what a genius looked like." And coolly he looked her up and down, while she blushed; that was the extent of their conversation. (Bowers xxiii - xxiv)

These compelling and very attractive hallucinations culminate in the glorious image showing how "Nabokov as a child, being read to on the porch of his summer home, would gaze out at his family's garden." (Bowers xxvii) This undeniably romantic portrait becomes something of a metaphor for the whole text, as the reader is gradually drawn into an unfamiliar time and place as a result of editorial savvy. Updike is surely

convinced of the authenticity that Bowers has created when he pleurably tells us, “Now here, wonderfully, the lectures are. And still redolent of the classroom odours that an authorial revision might have scoured away.” (Bowers xxiv) It is also in this section that we must particularly remember Barnes’ assertion that “hypothesis is spun directly from the temperament of the biographer” (Barnes 40), although considering the unusual degree of necessary editorial intervention it would be well to keep this maxim close at hand at all times.

The first section of the book attributed to Nabokov is “Good Readers and Good Writers” and is “reconstituted from parts of his untitled written-out opening lecture to the class” (Bowers xiv-xv). Here, Nabokov reveals the qualities he expects his students to display, and explicitly states the ideas and theoretical positions that inform his reading and interpretation of all literature. Not only do his perspective and personal interests seem quite similar to those revealed by Barnes, but he observes that “my course, among other things, is a kind of detective investigation of the mystery of literary structures” (Bowers 1). This assessment can be easily applied to Flaubert’s Parrot, as it reveals an enduring obsession with examining the way in which literature works on its reader.

Nabokov shares with Barnes a profound distrust toward those who use literature as a point of access into a foreign culture or who attempt to mine from art instances of sociopolitical oppression. His statement that “Literature is invention. Fiction is fiction. To call a story a true story is an insult to both art and truth. Every great writer is a great deceiver, but so is that arch-cheat Nature. Nature always deceives” (Bowers 5) can be considered as a brief summary of Barnes’ general philosophy. Both men ultimately

display the belief that we should not look to fiction to find empirical 'truths', and that the notion that this lack somehow diminishes art is, at best, ridiculous; Braithwaite's weary, outraged response in "The Case Against" to the accusation (number fifteen) against Flaubert "That he didn't believe Art had a social purpose"(136) shows the degree to which he concurs with Nabokov that art is, and should be, pragmatically useless. If Barnes' novel in its entirety seems to reveal an almost overwhelming tone of futility (best embodied in the deliberately ludicrous object of his search), it is never an indictment of the value of Flaubert. Each text is, in different ways and using different means, a defence of art, and, in particular, a prolonged and often explicit set of recommendations about how art should be appreciated.

After this introductory lecture, the body of the Nabokov text is divided into seven sections each dealing with a different masterpiece. Amid each chapter, Bowers includes source and related material that motivates Barnes peculiar form and narrative, in some cases, explicitly. We are repeatedly shown reproductions of Nabokov's lecture notes, pages from texts that are covered with his writing, hand-drawn maps of various geographic settings of novels, complex diagrams showing how certain themes are related, detailed outlines of narrative structures, lists of mistranslated words in various editions, chronologies, elaborate metaphorical diagrams, drawings of insects and flowers, and various travelogues. If the accumulation of 'factual' material of this type in Barnes' novel reveals the impossibility of knowing Flaubert, Bowers' presentation has precisely the opposite effect. These details are irresistible and foster the fallacy that somehow a literary giant has been humanised. It draws us further into the illusion that we have

become a student in Nabokov's classroom. We seem able to divine from these scribbled notes what Nabokov genuinely felt, and this experience strengthens the realism of his lectures, rather than undermining them. Barnes' brilliant deconstruction of the figure of Flaubert (that he creates) is an inversion of this strategy. His achievement, although using precisely the same techniques, is exactly the opposite of Bowers.

This effect can be readily observed by focusing on any of the individual elements that Barnes presents and following its transformation through the novel. Louise Colet, Flaubert's lover and (for an entire chapter) Barnesian narrator, is a fine example of this radical shift in associations, particularly as Barnes includes the two, equally viable and defensible, assessments of her personality in his 'Dictionary of Accepted Ideas', where he explains:

Colet, Louise

a) Tedious, importunate, promiscuous woman, lacking talent of her own or understanding of the genius of others, who tried to trap Gustave into marriage. Imagine the squawking of children! Imagine Gustave miserable! Imagine Gustave happy!

b) Brave, passionate, deeply misunderstood woman crucified by her love for the heartless, impossible, provincial Flaubert. She rightly complained: 'Gustave never writes to me of anything except Art-or himself.' Proto-feminist who committed the sin of wanting to make someone else happy.

(Barnes 153-154)

The amassing of detail from unfamiliar sources that is used to create 'Nabokov' is cunningly satirised as the idea of 'Flaubert' (and ultimately of all knowledge) is gradually realised as it is simultaneously and ruthlessly dismissed by Barnes as being as much of a fiction as Emma Bovary or Dolores 'Lolita' Haze.

Structurally, Barnes comes closest to revealing the extent to which his novel is

indebted to, and a masterful inversion of, the Lectures on Literature in his bizarre inclusion of a chapter called “Examination Paper.” During this section, Barnes quite literally tests the knowledge and interpretive abilities of his reader (and student in the sense that we become students of Nabokov) in a manner that is similar to Bowers’ text for numerous specific reasons (reasons both too numerous and too specific to be considered a coincidence).

Most obviously, not only does the use of yet another format refer back to the similarly encyclopaedic Nabokov book, but Barnes’ chapter is a direct parallel to the “sample questions from Nabokov’s exams on *Bleak House* and *Madame Bovary*” (Bowers 383) contained in the ‘Appendix’ section. Here, the goal of replicating the student experience is directly enforced as we confront the same questions that Nabokov’s pupils would have had to answer based on his lectures. This explicit alignment of student and reader is the culmination of a process that has been ongoing throughout this particular presentation of Nabokov’s ideas.

It could be argued that Barnes’ inspiration for his novel stemmed most directly from this section, as the questions he asks are often concerned with similar elements of Flaubert’s writing that most fascinated Nabokov. For instance, Nabokov is relentlessly cranky and dismissive of all translated versions of Madame Bovary, asking in one of the exam questions, “All translations of *Madame Bovary* are full of blunders; you have corrected some of them. Describe Emma’s eyes, hands, sunshade, hairdo, dress, shoes” (Bower 385). Barnes makes numerous references to the inherent shortcomings of translated language as a factor which further precludes the possibility of meaningful

communication. Braithwaite examines a “bilingual rubbish bin with a spelling mistake” (Barnes 82) and a poorly translated sign on the window of a train (Barnes 111), each of which prompts him to consider how the structures of language seem inextricably bound, not only with ‘national’ character, but with individual identity and consciousness. Barnes notices even from a simple sign “How unEnglish the phrasing was; logical yet fanciful at the same time” (Barnes 111).

This connection between Barnes and Nabokov is particularly prevalent in Braithwaite’s denunciation of a certain type of scholar, embodied in the charmless figure of Enid Starkie. One of the many components of her character that ceaselessly infuriates Braithwaite is her “atrocious French accent” (Barnes 74), about which he notes “it did strike me as peculiar that someone who lived by French literature should be so calamitously inadequate at making the basic words of the language sound as they did when her subjects, her heroes (her paymasters, too, you could say) first pronounced them.” (75) The problem of pronunciation, inextricably and inevitably related to translation, is yet another barrier to obtaining a clear understanding of Flaubert. Barnes’ frustration with Starkie’s mispronunciation may not only return us to Nabokov’s obsessive concern with translation, but the specific fashion with which she is created may also suggest an affinity with another much loathed female whose character is remorselessly critiqued using her incompetence in foreign tongues as a starting point: Lolita’s Charlotte Haze. Dolores’ mother, “who thinks she knows French” (Nabokov 44) is viciously attacked for this perceived deficiency, as when she leaves Humbert a heartfelt letter that he mercilessly ridicules for many reasons including “that awful

French.”(Nabokov 68) Both Barnes and Nabokov place an unusual emphasis on knowledge of foreign languages to such an extent that the lack thereof is elevated to the status of an irredeemable character flaw indicative of laziness and cultural ineptitude.

Another facet of Enid Starkie’s personality that is related to Nabokov’s exam question is her relentless attention to detail, particularly Flaubert’s imperfect depiction of Emma Bovary’s eyes. Criticising this inconsistency, she says of the writer that “so careless is he of their outward appearance that on one occasion he gives Emma brown eyes (14); on another deep black eyes (15); and on another blue eyes.” (Barnes 74) Nabokov, extensively correcting what he perceives as a series of inexcusable errors in translation, presents Flaubert’s description of how Emma’s eyes are remarkable precisely because they alternately display different colours, citing “Black in the shade, dark blue in broad daylight, they had, as it were, layers of successive colors, which, denser at the bottom, grew lighter toward the surface of the cornea.” (Bowers 136) This phrase is also referred to by Barnes in his systematic destruction of Starkie’s assertion that Flaubert is a technically sloppy writer, although without Nabokov’s unique translation. Ironically, and presumably much to his and his student’s frustration, we are told by Updike that even when Nabokov was vigorously correcting mistranslations, “His accent caused half the class to write ‘epidramatic’ where Nabokov had said ‘epigrammatic’.” (Bowers xxiii) It may also be noteworthy that even with Barnes’ seemingly limitless familiarity with all of Flaubert’s writing, he too is prone to error and is therefore both separated from and aligned with his intellectual nemesis Dr. Starkie. In ‘The Flaubert Bestiary’, he proclaims “There are no parrots in *Madame Bovary*” (Barnes 59), although it is difficult to imagine

what other figurative animal fits Emma's description of "that marvellous passion which had hitherto been like a gorgeous pink-feathered bird floating high above in a splendid poetical heaven." (Flaubert 31)²

Of course, the importance of competent translations and the havoc caused by poor ones are used by Barnes as a tool with which to demonstrate the fundamental problems of human language and the inevitability of differing personal interpretations. Both Nabokov and Barnes tend to focus specifically on individual words as a point of entry into their examinations of the difficulties that language presents to understanding, such as Nabokov's detailed explanation of the various, highly subjective, meanings assigned to words such as 'naturalism' or 'realism' with regard to Madame Bovary. Attacking the popular idea that this novel was "a landmark of so-called realism"(Bowers 146), he observes that "realism, naturalism, are only comparative notions. What a given generation feels as naturalism in a writer seems to an older generation to be exaggeration of drab detail, and to a younger generation not enough drab detail. The *isms* go; the *ist* dies; art remains."(146-147) This inherent problem is also compounded and exaggerated because, not only is Flaubert writing in a different language, but his meanings are hidden by a frame of reference that is no longer prominent or even comprehensible during our time. Consequently, the meaning of a single word or image is often wholly unreliable, as Barnes' worries about the red-currant jam metaphor comically demonstrate. Although

² This passage is strongly reminiscent of the conclusion of A Simple Heart, when Flaubert describes the final powerful image that Félicité sees before her death. We read "as she breathed her final breath she thought she saw, as the heavens opened for her, a gigantic parrot hovering above her head."

Nabokov does not examine this issue as thoroughly as Barnes, he does give numerous examples. One particularly important one that is hinted at in Flaubert's Parrot takes place when Barnes asks us to consider the strange similarities between the lives of Marx's daughter Eleanor (who crafted the first English language translation of Madame Bovary) and Flaubert's metaphoric 'daughter' Emma Bovary. Countering the widespread belief that Flaubert was a hypocrite because, although a member of the bourgeois, he relentlessly criticized this group, Nabokov irately explains:

one thing that we should clear up once and for all is the meaning that Flaubert gives to the term *bourgeois*. Unless it simply means *townsman*, as it often does in French, the term *bourgeois* as used by Flaubert means "Philistine", people preoccupied with the material side of life and believing only in conventional values. He never uses the word *bourgeois* with any politico-economic Marxist connotation. Flaubert's bourgeois was a state of mind and not a state of pocket.... Let me add for double clarity that Marx would have called Flaubert a bourgeois in the politico-economic sense and Flaubert would have called Marx a bourgeois in the spiritual sense; and both would have been right, since Flaubert was a well-to-do gentleman in physical life and Marx was a Philistine in his attitude toward the arts. (Bowers 126-127)

This clear delineation is obviously a notion that Nabokov was quite passionate about as it also briefly appears in Lolita, and is the subject of much heated debate in his letters to Edmund Wilson, with whom he frequently and enthusiastically argues about the minutiae of translated works. Indeed, some of the scholarly bickering about individual words that occurs in the letters is duplicated in Barnes' novel as he is pondering how to interpret a dog with which Flaubert compares himself and notes that "Nabokov, who is exceedingly peremptory with all translators of Flaubert, renders this as a whippet"(63) and then proceeds to critique this translation. Ironically, he later attacks Christopher

Ricks for delivering a lecture on 'mistakes' in literature, including a passage in which we learn that "Nabokov was wrong - rather surprising, this - about the phonetics of the name Lolita."(76)

Clearly, this is a problem that Barnes becomes fixated upon in his novel.

Although he does not specifically engage Nabokov's distinction between different, historically-dependent types of bourgeois, his understanding of Flaubert seems to be informed by this knowledge. Moreover, he does significantly examine various shifts in meaning and signification in a manner that is implicitly reminiscent of Nabokov.

Examining how our dependence on language prevents us from being able to "seize the past"(Barnes 90) he observes that we cannot even safely grasp what Flaubert looked like because, during his lifetime, "The giants were not so tall... The fat men: were they less fat because they were smaller... or were they more fat, because they developed the same stomachs, but had even less frame to support them? How can we know such trivial, crucial details?"(90)

Shortly after recognizing this important concern, Barnes actually refers to Nabokov's lectures as he further examines the transformations that other words have undergone, this time, with personal implications. Fleetinglly returning to the subject of his dead wife (a figure that, like Nabokov and a handful of other figures, both is and is not a significant force in the novel), he reveals again the transient and insubstantial nature of words. Braithwaite muses:

I'm not sure what I believe about the past. I just want to know if fat people were fatter then. And were mad people madder?... Nowadays we aren't allowed to use the word *mad*. What lunacy. The few psychiatrists I respect

always talk about people being mad. Use the short, simple, true words. *Dead*, I say, and *dying*, and *mad*, and *adultery*. I don't say *passed on*, or *slipping away*, or *terminal*,...or *personality disorder*, or *fooling around*, *bit on the side*, *well she's away a lot visiting her sister*. I say *mad* and *adultery*, that's what I say....Do you know what Nabokov said about adultery in his lecture on *Madame Bovary*? He said it was 'a most conventional way to rise above the conventional.'(91)

It is at this point in Flaubert's Parrot that Nabokov's influence is most noticeable, not merely because his lectures are most overtly referred to (although the relevance of this admission should not be overlooked) but because of the specific moment of this reference. Here, Barnes teasingly alerts us to the full import of Nabokov's role while simultaneously presenting it as casual and almost irrelevant.

Firstly, the revelations in this passage about the death of Braithwaite's wife are far more explicit and seemingly heartfelt than that which we had previously encountered. Although our narrator is certainly very friendly and jovial, we learn very little about him personally as a result of (relatively) direct statements such as these. Braithwaite seems more vulnerable and exposed in these moments than anywhere else in the text, and his only overt allusion to Lectures on Literature seems to be almost a mistake, as if his words had been running beyond his control and he had carelessly revealed a closely guarded secret to the reader. Also, even the incessant and unusual use of italicization in this passage (used elsewhere by Barnes only for titles and foreign expressions) may be understood as an emulation of Nabokov's sporadic use of this same font to call attention to the varied meanings of 'bourgeois'. Both writers italicise to make the word the subject of analysis and to show the contingency and instability of its meaning or its relation with 'reality'. Our view of Braithwaite (and consequently his theories about Flaubert) shifts at

this moment as we are shown some of the discourses that constitute his character, a transformation as palpable as the one that Nabokov's students must have experienced when they were told about the different possible interpretations of the term 'bourgeois'.

The most protracted and elaborate demonstration of how language and continually changing perspectives make it impossible to 'seize the past' (or, of course, the present) is found immediately after the Nabokov quotation, and uses the metaphoric power of redcurrant jam as a way to explore the novel's central concerns. Essentially, Barnes aims to show that, when we try to gain any type of understanding, "our view suddenly lurches"(95) every time a new insight is gained, until all knowledge becomes called into question. Noting that in 1853 Flaubert "watched the sun go down and declared that it resembled a large disc of redcurrant jam"(92), Braithwaite begins to wonder how we can ever truly comprehend this seemingly vivid and stable comparison. In his dogged and peculiar style, he is approaching the same fundamental problem present in Nabokov's multiple definitions of 'bourgeois' only in a satirized and exaggerated manner. Whereas for Nabokov the dilemma is easily resolved (he *knows* what meaning Flaubert ascribed to the word bourgeois), Barnes' postmodern world cannot provide such comforting assurance. Braithwaite, never one to shy away from a little leg work, and realizing that if he cannot *know* redcurrant jam then he cannot know anything (in much the same way that if he cannot find Flaubert's parrot he can never know the great man himself), contacts the 'Grocer's Company' and discovers that:

Redcurrant jam is one of the purest jams, they said, and though an 1853 Rouennais pot might not have been quite so clear as a modern one because of the use of unrefined sugar, the colour would have been exactly the

same. So at least that's all right: now we can go ahead and confidently imagine the sunset. But you see what I mean? (93)

The fact remains that, despite this tentative assurance, we can never *know* for sure, never attain a knowledge that is safe from change caused by exposure to new information or alternative perspectives. Braithwaite can not ever definitively know how Flaubert viewed that sunset because at any moment a Nabokov could appear and explain that, in fact, Flaubert was not a hypocrite because the meaning of a given word is not what we thought it was. Ultimately, this view of language's susceptibility to, and profoundly intimate relationship with, knowledge and, therefore, consciousness and reality, is the fundamental characteristic of what has come to be known as 'postmodern' thought. Although this word is notoriously free of any stable meaning, the ambitious Scott makes a noble effort when he states:

This postmodern view, then, is that consciousness is a consequence of (not a producer or perceiver of) a conjunction of systems - a conjunction that is both arbitrary and protean. There can therefore be no such thing as an absolute truth or a Meaning of Life, and yet any solipsistic sense of the self as *the* repository of meaning and value is equally a delusion.(Scott 58)

Barnes' text both implicitly and explicitly supports this assertion, as when he notes: "We no longer believe that language and reality 'match-up' so congruently - indeed we probably think that words give birth to things as much as things give birth to words"(Barnes 88). However, unlike many theorists, Barnes does not view Flaubert's work as in any way diminished by these 'new developments' in literary theory. Rather, he suggests, with Nabokov, that Flaubert was ahead of his time. Both writers repeatedly cite the lines from Madame Bovary when Flaubert woefully states: "Language is like a

cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, while all the time we long to move the stars to pity.”(51) This realization of the discrepancy between what language does and what we try to make it do (or believe it does) is an element of Flaubertian thought that, for obvious reasons, is persistently attractive to both Barnes and Nabokov.

Throughout Flaubert's Parrot, the difference between art and life becomes completely undermined, and Braithwaite is all too aware that the shortcomings of language are just as prevalent in his daily life as they are in the artistic realm. He is painfully aware of the inadequacies of language at every turn, but particularly so when he tries to communicate his feelings about his wife's suicide. Just as the accepted conventions of personal advertisements necessitates a certain manner of self presentation, forcing the advertiser “even at the one time they need to be candidly personal - into an unwished personality”(95), he is wholly unable to find consolation for Ellen's death, explaining:

people think you want to talk. ‘Do you want to talk about Ellen?’ they ask, hinting that they won't be embarrassed if you break down. Sometimes you talk, sometimes you don't; it makes little difference. The words aren't the right ones; or rather, the right words don't exist... You talk, and you find the language of bereavement foolishly inadequate. You seem to be talking about other people's griefs. I loved her; we were happy; I miss her. She didn't love me; we were unhappy; I miss her. There is a limited choice of prayer on offer: gabble the syllables. (61)

This unfortunate (postmodern) relationship between language and that which it seems to represent, about which Barnes observes “It's the sort of thing you fret about” (92), is metaphorically represented in the novel's seemingly meaningless opening passage in which Braithwaite describes six men “playing boule beneath Flaubert's statue”(11).

The goal of the game is to end up with your (individually engraved) boule closest to the jack (a small wooden ball that serves as a target), a task that is made considerably more difficult because competing boules can either knock your ball away from the jack or knock the jack away from your boule. If we consider the jack to represent a stable and intransigent meaning and the boule to stand for language, then the purpose of the game becomes an attempt to perfectly align signifier and signified and can be taken as metaphor for many of the prevalent themes and curiosities that inhabit the body of the text.

However, if this introductory image alludes to the novel's postmodern interest in the way that language and reality 'match up', it is another of Barnes' metaphors that draws us back to his strange intertextual inclusion of the version of Nabokov that is found in Lectures on Literature. Elaborating on his ideas about biography (which both Flaubert's Parrot and Lectures strangely are in their own unique ways), Braithwaite explains:

You can define a net in one of two ways, depending on your point of view. Normally, you would say that it is a meshed instrument designed to catch fish. But you could, with no great injury to logic, reverse the image and define the net as a jocular lexicographer once did: he called it a collection of holes tied together with string. You can do the same with a biography. The trawling net fills, then the biographer hauls it in, sorts, throws back, stores, fillets and sells. Yet consider what he doesn't catch: there is always far more of that. The biography stands, fat and worthy-burgherish on the shelf, boastful and sedate....But think of everything that got away, that fled with the last deathbed exhalation of the biographee.(38)

In Lectures on Literature, Nabokov is a massive hole tied together with string but who Fredson Bowers presents to his readers (or rather, his *students*) as a cohesive net. This creative but illusory process is the proper subject of Flaubert's Parrot, whose

narrator increasingly comes to view the Flaubertian net as more hole than string as Barnes deconstructs the strategies that enable such a transformation to occur. However, although we realize that no coherent version of Flaubert can ever be present to us, the character of Braithwaite seems (at first glance) decidedly 'un-postmodern' (that is to say, autonomous, coherent, a self outside of discourse), even if his outlook isn't. Essentially, in this labyrinthial text, if Barnes uses Braithwaite to deconstruct Flaubert, then at precisely the same moments he is also using the process of creating a simulacrum of Nabokov (in Lectures) intertextually in order to deconstruct his own narrator, to show which discourses converged to create Braithwaite and Barnes' own text. In the net of Flaubert's Parrot then, Nabokov is both primarily hole (almost erased, concealed, dispersed) *and*, by virtue of his enormous structural and thematic intertextual *presence*, primarily string.

Chapter 3

Manao Tupapau (The Spirit of the Dead Keeps Watch): Traces of Gauguin in Jamaica Kincaid's Lucy

“I am leaving in order to have peace and quiet, to be rid of the influence of civilization. I only want to do simple, very simple art, and to be able to do that, I have to immerse myself in virgin nature, see no one but savages, live their life, with no other thought in my mind but to render, the way a child would, the concepts formed in my brain and to do this with the aid of nothing but the primitive means of art, the only means that are good and true”

Paul Gauguin, “The Writings of a Savage”

Much of the scholarship directed at Jamaica Kincaid's impressive body of work has dealt with her attempts to negotiate a post-colonial identity for her heroines with particular attention given to her complex depiction of mother-daughter relationships. This wholly justifiable focus has, however, caused certain of Kincaid's less overt (inter)textual strategies to be overlooked or marginalized. Although Kincaid is widely regarded as one of the most gifted and compelling writers of post-colonial writing, her use of postmodern techniques have not been significantly examined. They are, however, an integral part of the sustained critique which she launches at colonialist ideology; possibly the most quietly powerful weapon in this assault. While her novels are perhaps not *as* (or *as overtly*) postmodern as those of Barnes (or, as we shall see, Ellis) which often flaunt their postmodern concerns and techniques, she nonetheless engages intertextuality as a tool with which to articulate a postmodern formulation of the self as

contained and constituted by (in this instance, an abhorrent colonialist) discourse. Accordingly, critics of her work have understandably displayed a far too rigid focus on the mother-daughter dyad presumably because it is one of the more prevalent tropes in minority women's writing (in the work of Morrison, or Kingston) and because one need not look too hard at Kincaid's novel to see it find expression. While the power structure of this important relationship is indisputably implicated in her indictment of colonial ideology, Kincaid also engages other provocative (postmodern *and* intertextual) narrative strategies to deconstruct oppressive discourse.

In Lucy, for instance, she brilliantly enacts a radical reversal of discursive hierarchies by suggesting the slightest trace of a figure who represents or embodies all that her narrator must overcome in order to tease out an identity for herself away from the masculinist and colonialist hegemony which attempts to define her. Lucy develops as an artist in opposition to the almost mythical figure of Paul Gauguin, whose attitudes and behaviour now exemplify the most virulent patriarchal, ethnocentric discourse. Kincaid does not explicitly direct our attention to the significance of Gauguin, but rather, she reverses the subject positions which each character would typically be inscribed with. As a result, the artist becomes placed in precisely the same situation as his Tahitian subjects who were paradoxically erased and silenced by his process of representation.

Gauguin has enormous metaphoric significance in this text because his art and philosophy are instrumental constituents of the hegemonic system which privileges and naturalizes his beliefs always at the expense of marginalized figures such as Lucy. The legendary painter famously exoticized and eroticized the 'savage' cultures which he left

'civilization' to explore. As part of his resolutely essentialist quest to find a new 'real' way of living and creating art, he used Tahitian (anti)culture as a way of denouncing his own as false and illegitimate. In his life and work, he rendered the island's natives into subjects or 'others' upon whom he could impose any meaning he chose. In doing so, of course, he stripped them of agency and voice, presenting Tahitians to the world only as he saw them, through dangerous European eyes. It is, then, both significant and appropriate that Gauguin is not overtly present in Kincaid's narrative schema which becomes an attempt to give voice to those who have been silenced. The binary logic which enables the creation of exclusionary hierarchies is cleverly reversed so that the near complete *absence* of Gauguin is only made apparent by the conspicuous intertextual traces of *presence* disseminated throughout the text. He becomes almost completely erased by the postmodern rules of the game which Kincaid established: stripped of agency and presence, what he *means* can be deconstructed and ultimately rejected.

Much critical attention has been paid to Kincaid's inclusion of figures who embody Eurocentric ideals in Lucy but this scholarship has curiously de-emphasized the importance of Gauguin to her text in favour of a focus on more explicit allusions. The Western writer whose presence has received the most rigorous analysis is Wordsworth, whose daffodil poem has undeniable importance in the novel's anti-colonialist project as an example of the Western tradition of romanticizing nature as a symbol of something which it is *naturally* not. Similarly, Christopher Columbus's explicit appearance has also generated much fruitful criticism about the power structure which Lucy is trying to subvert. Obviously, his direct and troubling involvement with colonization (he has the

power to name) positions him in an adversarial position against both Kincaid and her heroine. However, the majority of scholars, perhaps failing to realize the full import of this marginalized and less overt intertext, have insufficiently and incidentally analysed the role of Gauguin. This critical oversight is particularly surprising in a novel which so rigorously intertwines colonialist representation, discourse, and practise, because Gauguin (perhaps moreso than any other figure in history) explicitly attempted to breach the perceived divide between artist/philosopher and explorer/anthropologist. Despite Kincaid's partial erasure of him, she subtly and rigorously draws our attention to him by the proliferation of often obtruse intertextual signifiers. Essentially, it is Gauguin who comes to represent, more so than Columbus or Wordsworth, the full range of behaviours and attitudes which constitute colonialist practice.

This critical silence is understandable because the invocation of Gauguin is much more subtle and dispersed than that of his ideological peers. Most obviously, we are never told his name even when it is most clear who Kincaid is referring to, an inversion which demonstrates the erasure of unique colonized identities by the powerful. The process of naming, so linked in all of Kincaid's writing to dominance and control, is used ironically as a tool with which to strip Gauguin of his identity. From Lucy's marginalized position as one of the powerless, his explicit identity is irrelevant; it is what he means, as a paragon of the colonialist instinct, which defines him in relation to her. The closest Kincaid comes to explicitly 'outing' Gauguin is when Mariah (typically unable to distinguish between anyone from the homogenous "islands") takes Lucy to the museum:

to see some paintings by a man, a French Man, who had gone halfway

across the world to live and had painted pictures of the people he found living there. He had been a banker living a comfortable life with his wife and children, but that did not make him happy; eventually he left them and went to the opposite part of the world, where he was happier... Of course his life could be found on the pages of a book; I had just begun to notice that the lives of men often are. He was shown to be a man rebelling against an established order he had found corrupt; and even though he was doomed to defeat - he died an early death - he had the perfume of a hero about him. (Kincaid 95)

It is of enormous ideological significance that Kincaid provides us with more than enough autobiographical information about the painter that we are left with no doubts as to his identity, but she does not explicitly name him for us. Perhaps more importantly though, the specific ways she does characterize him suggest multiple points of comparison with other textual characters. By choosing this late moment in the text to (not) introduce Gauguin intertextually, she reduces him to an object whose meaning is more relevant than his actual identity. As a symbol of the powerful, whose position is naturalized by discursive hierarchies as the 'real' or 'normal', his overt invocation is not necessary. He is the faceless embodiment of the colonialist discourse who has *always* been a presence in this text and in Lucy's life. Only at this point, when Kincaid hints at the real importance of his role in the novel, are we forced to look back and recognize the significance of the traces of him which she has dispersed.

What we are told about Gauguin at this moment draws indisputable similarities between his life and that of Lucy's stereotypically 'liberal' employers. Clearly, the fact that it is Mariah who takes her to the museum is not incidental. Her superficial generosity is inflected with signifiers which demonstrate how she perceives Lucy as apparently needing the help of an 'equally' marginalized woman to become content. Mariah gives

her African beads and takes her to the Gauguin exhibit because, as a woman of colour, these 'familiar' scenes might help alleviate her 'homesickness'. Moreover, presumably in an attempt to emphasize their shared oppression (now forgetting the definitive importance of Lucy's race), she gives her a copy of Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex - a white feminist tract replete with Eurocentric (and therefore *universal*) discourse. Similarly, she attempts to compare herself to Lucy by proudly flaunting her Indian ancestry, although she characteristically does not specify which type of 'Indian' she means. Lucy, despite her limited affection for Mariah, is always able to recognize the ideology behind her good intentions, as when she scathingly asks "How do you get to be the sort of victor who can claim to be the vanquished also?"(41). In her role as an adoptive mother figure, Mariah is complexly characterized to represent the condescending concern which constitutes what Frank Chin would call 'racist love'. Her treatment of Lucy is at all times indicative of her positioning of her as an exotic other, very similar to Gauguin's rapturous and troubling idealization of the lives of the 'savages' with whom he lived.

 Mariah is also linked to Gauguin's abandoned Parisian wife in by her own failing marriage to Lewis, another banker who rejects his family in order to pursue a different life with a new lover. This relationship is resonant of Lucy's vaguely prophetic (of Lewis's and Gauguin's infidelity) dream from earlier in the text, when she imagines Lewis "chasing me around the house. I wasn't wearing any clothes. The ground on which I was running was yellow"(14). When Lucy recounts this dream to her adoptive employers, she is met with the nervous laughter which one would expect, but which is

nonetheless suggestive of the marital breakup which seems ever more inevitable. Also, although Kincaid's strange, self-conscious, and pervasive use of the colour yellow is related to Wordsworth's poem (and here also to the 'all-American' yellow brick road), her vibrant palate is also yet another link to Gauguin's work. His attempts to represent Tahitian life as an Edenic paradise caused him to use various bright vivid colours sharply contrasted with one another with no desire to 'accurately' reflect his surroundings. With a frequency that is more than coincidentally linked to Lucy, Gauguin's Tahitian paintings are often characterized by large bursts of dazzling yellow (which he called the colour of 'pure truth') backdrops, sombre natives (none of his Tahitian subjects are ever seen smiling), and eroticised young women. This scene, as with many other images in the text, is described in such a way that it is reminiscent of Gauguin's life (the married white man in sexual pursuit of the much younger native) and particularly his paintings. Any survey of the work Gauguin produced during the 'Noa Noa' years reveals the affinities Kincaid's use of prose in this novel has with his unusual images, and this is clearly not a coincidence. Lucy's dream then, with its conflation of Gauguinian techniques, becomes yet another way in which Lewis and the painter become symbolically linked.

This understanding of Mariah and Lewis as 'racist-lovers' has been noted by many critics, but their particularized similarity with Gauguin has been completely unacknowledged although it is made manifest in much of their behaviour. They collect 'exotic' artifacts from around the globe such as the table imported from Scandinavia and, like Gauguin, "From wherever they had gone, and they seemed to have been all over the world, they brought back some tiny memento, and they could recite its history from its

very beginning” (12-13). Possessing the colonialist drive not only to explore ‘primitive’ lands but to *own* and *know* them, the couple replicate Gauguin’s attempts to impose ‘exotic’ meaning on the artifacts which he vigorously gathered, ostensibly in an attempt to *understand* the natives as he exoticized them. Even when they travel only as far as their summer cottage, their idealization of the ‘virgin nature’ is evident. Characteristically though, as Lucy wisely observes, “they made no connection between their comforts and the decline of the world that lay before them” (72). Mariah is particularly like Gauguin in this respect, romanticizing ‘primitive’ nature and bemoaning environmental destruction (even writing and illustrating a book about these ‘vanishing things’) while blissfully ignorant of her own complicity. Living in a state of bourgeois (in both the Flaubertian and Marxist sense of the term) comfort in which she “had too much of everything, and so she longed to have less”(87), we are told of Mariah that “less, she was sure, would bring her happiness.”(87). Although she presents an air of elegant affluence, as a young woman travelling the world she “wore her yellow hair long and unkempt, and did not shave her legs or underarms as a symbol of something”(80). This yearning for simplicity or the ‘real’ further shows the extent to which Mariah operates from a position of power. Her values are always predicated upon the binary system wherein she represents civilization and culture and ‘savages’ such as Lucy stand for primitive and natural. In this respect, her fleeting attempts to ‘go native’ in no way transgress the boundaries which she believes they do, but rather, they reestablish and maintain the authority of each position.

What is so strange about Kincaid’s shadowy suggestion of Gauguin is that he is not simply compared (or mostly compared) to a single character but seems completely

broken apart into countless signifiers which are strategically disseminated throughout the text. His presence/absence is to varying degrees applied to every character and event in the novel. While this technique certainly has implications with regard to the notions of identity as a stable, autonomous, and coherent entity outside of discourse which Kincaid subverts, it is also an attempt to show how pervasive and naturalized colonialist ideology has become. As linguistic structures, both Lucy and Lucy are never distinct from the colonial discourse to which Gauguin is intimately related.

Paul initially becomes associated with Gauguin as a result of his specific moment of entry into the text. Immediately after discussing her visit to the museum with its escalation of traces of Gauguin, Lucy embarks on her own 'thrilling' journey to a strange new locale, the home of an artist that she "had never visited before" (96). Significantly, despite the urban setting of his apartment, Paul has tried to foster a jungle motif with 'rain forest' greenery, an exotic fish tank, and scents of "myrrh and marijuana". Before Lucy meets Paul, she is exposed to his artwork which has undeniable affinities with the paintings she has previously seen at the museum:

There were paintings of people, some of them women without their clothes on, some of them just faces. None of the paintings was straightforward; instead, the people all looked like their reflections in a pool whose surface had just been disturbed. The colours were strange - not the colours any real person would be, but as if all the deep shades from a paintbox had been carefully mixed together in a way that still left them distinct. (96-97)

If the aesthetic similarities between Paul's style and Gauguin's are not numerous enough to link the two painters in the reader's mind, then Kincaid explicitly makes the connection on the following page to emphasize its importance. Lucy is observing that

Paul and his friends belong to the strange group of people known as 'artists' and are "like the man whose paintings hung in the museum that I liked to visit" (98). Significantly, this exotic journey results in the discovery of a new 'type' of people, one of whom she will become sexually involved with. This episode can be read as a microcosm of Gauguin's exploits; but one that is reversed to recast the 'other' as the curious expatriate. As the narrator, and our window into the landscape of the novel, Lucy is the one now casting an exoticizing gaze on this new world. Furthermore, her comprehension of artists as an alien 'species' and the specific traits which she believes they possess concretize the important links between Gauguin and his namesake. Most notably, before she meets Paul she has been warned by Peggy that he is 'a pervert', a term she does not understand. If Gauguin now offends certain contemporary sensibilities because he seems emblematic of an abhorrent discourse (colonialism), then he was equally reprimanded in his own time for creating vulgar art but, more specifically, for his sexual involvement with numerous Tahitian women. He was harshly attacked for 'taking' a thirteen year old bride whom he famously depicted in a sexual light (lying nude and suggestive on his bed) in *Manao Tupapau* among many other troublingly erotic paintings. All that we learn of 'the artists', or those who "seemed to take for granted that everything they said mattered" (98), is certainly descriptive of various individuals, but seems *particularly* applicable to Gauguin. The requisite traits which an artist must display are that he be male and (therefore) irresponsible, that he die insane and a pauper, and that he be disliked by everyone but other artists. It seems natural then, knowing the qualities which Gauguin fetishized (native, unsmiling, naked), that Paul would be so immediately attracted to Lucy

and vice-versa. His desire for her is always characterized by his view of her as an exotic object (the texture of her hair is “new to him” (100)). She compares herself (through his eyes) to the plants he uses to transform his home into a wild jungle, observing:

These two plants grew so plentifully where I came from that sometimes they were regarded as a nuisance, weeds, and were dug up and thrown in the rubbish. And now here they were, treasured, sitting in a prominent place in a beautiful room, a special blue light trained on them. And here I was also, a sort of weed in a way, and across the room Paul’s eyes, a sparkling blue light, were trained on me (99).

Subjected to his western gaze, she is rendered into an exotic object onto which meaning can be imposed. Paul, representative of all of the privileged terms within the binary logic of colonialism, is always described as residing at the centre; he is the lucky marble about which Lucy notes “when I played a game with it, always won” (99). In his room “all attention was directed at Paul”(101), and all the guests instinctively understand “that when everyone left, I (Lucy) would not leave with them”(100). Her marginality is contrasted with (and defined in relation to) his centrality, which strips her of agency until she *acts* the way he would want her to, albeit fleetingly. Paul’s masculinist confidence, permitted and enforced by an awareness of his privileged position, causes her to emit “a laugh that I could not believe came out of me; it was a gurgly laugh, a laugh shot full of pleasure and insincerity.” (100) This is one of the many moments in the text when we see the extent to which Lucy has internalized the expectations of the privileged observer; she is temporarily stripped of agency and self-control, transformed by Paul’s gaze into that which he expects to see.

Tellingly, the party scene abruptly halts when Lucy, inspired by the sight of Paul’s

intrusive hand in the fish tank, remembers a story of her friend Myrna's sexual molestation as a young girl. The genesis of this interruption in the flow of the narrative is crucial because it draws our attention to the multiple simulacrum present in this meticulously constructed image. Paul's obsession with the foreign is amplified by the fact that he is searching for a 'fake' starfish earring, on a 'fake' exotic beach (the aquarium), within the 'fake' tropical landscape of his apartment. Furthermore, this transition is particularly revealing because in Lucy, the hand and the phallus are synonymous signifiers (and enforcers) of logocentric discourse. Peggy memorably teaches the less experienced Lucy to examine the hands of a potential lover in order to discover his penis size, conflating both hand and phallus with male sexual power. Paul (like Gauguin, exerts and asserts colonial authority using both his hands (to define the subjects of his painting) and his phallus (to defile the objects of his sexual relations). By repeatedly drawing our attention to this interconnectedness in her novel, Kincaid shows the ways in which sexual power and the act of representation are inextricably involved in the creation and sustenance of phallogocentric and colonialist discourse.

The intrusive hand in Myrna's tale belongs to Mr. Thomas, a local fisherman, who would meet Myrna in the dark and "put his middle finger up inside her"(104). This image has numerous echoes of Gauguin's child bride Teha'amana, about whom many historians have observed that he treated her in a way that "resembled the white treatment of the colonies: all condescension, he kept her in dependence."(Metken 10). Also, because of its textual proximity to Paul's party, Kincaid further solidifies this connection by subtly disseminating further traces of Gauguin throughout the scene, such as the

'sixpence' which Myrna receives as payment, seemingly an allusion to Somerset Maugham's (re)fictionalization of Gauguin's life in The Moon and Sixpence. The fact that the subtle references to Gauguin such as these are less overt than those to Columbus or Wordsworth by no means diminishes the primacy of the painter's importance in this text. Rather, his near absence is a symbolic affirmation of the largeness of his presence; what Lucy does to Gauguin is an identical reversal of the act of erasure which he performed on his Tahitian subjects. In the discursively inverted world of Kincaid's novel, the less a representative figure is directly shown to us, the more expansive and pervasive their influence is.

Paul's allegiances with Gauguin extend far beyond his initial meeting with Lucy. In him, the broad ranging assumptions and desires of colonialism are made manifest. Lucy characterizes their sex life as 'an adventure' and is thrilled "by the violence of it." (113). In the rare moments when they are not in bed together, Paul (also an exoticizer of 'primitive' nature), drives her out to the country to gaze at:

an old mansion in ruins, formerly the home of a man who had made a great deal of money in the part of the world I was from, in the sugar industry...As we drove along, Paul spoke of the great explorers who had crossed the seas, not only to find riches he said, but to feel free, and this search for freedom was part of the whole human situation.(129)

This co-existing fascination with the other, interest in colonization/ exploration (inflected with sexual overtones), reliance upon the 'universal', and his ultimate infidelity with Peggy, are all used by Kincaid in order to firmly establish Paul as a textual surrogate for his intertextual namesake.

A recognition of this shadowy narrative technique is the only way to facilitate a

true comprehension of Lucy's character, for her close relationship to Gauguin is far more complex than the existing scholarship has acknowledged. He is not, as most have suggested, only a representative figure always depicted in an adversarial stance to Lucy. In "*Lucy and the Mark of the Colonizer*", one of the very few articles in which Gauguin is subjected to any analysis, Moira Ferguson suggests that Lucy is irate about being taken to his exhibit because she views him solely as "a cultural interventionist in Tahiti, who became famous for painting representations that reflect an ethnocentric gaze." (Ferguson 247). Although he clearly is a symbol of discourses which Lucy tries to place herself apart from, their relationship is much less negative or much less *exclusively* negative than critics like Ferguson have briefly argued. Contrarily, Lucy frequently articulates a feeling of complicity and affinity with the painter's project, from when she is first directly exposed to his work at the museum, and tells us that she immediately "identified with the yearnings of this man" (95). While she clearly recognizes her position in relation to him (as an exotic other) she gradually problematizes his relation to her by performing an intertextual reversal of the binary logic which privileges one and marginalizes the 'other'. In numerous interviews Kincaid has repeatedly expressed a desire to overturn discursive hierarchies by reversing the prevailing hegemony and 'stealing' power from the colonizer, a technique which she adopts in her depiction of Lucy as (not dis)similar to Gauguin:

when people in the conquering position take things it doesn't threaten their identity. But the weaker people *feel* - that's why they clutch or hold on so tight and define them narrowly, really leading even more to their defeat. Things are the things about themselves so they have all these cultural crises, cultural nationalism. But it didn't bother the Dutch at all to take a flower that didn't grow in their country and just take it so that now the world thinks of tulips as Dutch. And it adds to the Dutch ... What you

ought to do is take back. Not just reclaim. Take - period. Take anything. Take Shakespeare. Just anything that makes sense. Just take it. *That's* just fine ... Jane Austen and her people would not hesitate for one second if they found something in Zimbabwe that they liked. They would just take it. (Ferguson 168)

In her characterization of Lucy, Kincaid shows herself to be a masterful thief.

Lucy does not simply reject everything which Gauguin has come to mean, but she 'reclaims' much of his identity. The two characters have too many points of overlap to merely be emblematic of wholly different world views. The process of drawing our attention to the similarities between Lucy and Gauguin begin at the opening of the text. Her trip to America is depicted in terms of rebirth, the creation of a new identity, from the strangely expressed first sentence when she tells us "IT WAS MY FIRST DAY" (Kincaid 3). Although she is certainly a bemused critic of the Western culture she encounters, her own 'gaze' is foregrounded by the simplicity and awe of Kincaid's language. Symbolically reborn, her writing is reminiscent of the anthropological curiosity of Gauguin's journals, which at least convey his sense of excitement and bewilderment in the 'primitive' land he encountered. Moreover, Lucy immediately tells us of a fantasy she had about America which shows the conflation of sex and exploration within the colonialist discourses of dominance. Envisioning the landmarks she believed she would encounter, she has eroticised her own adventure, noting "I would imagine myself entering and leaving them, and just that - entering and leaving over and over again - would see me through a bad feeling I did not have a name for." (3) Again in concordance with Gauguin's journey to Tahiti, she is quickly met with the 'disappointment of reality' as she understands that the dreamy eroticisation she had imposed on this 'new' land can never

be fulfilled. Her immediate characterization as a ‘visitor’ to a strange land not only facilitates a critical outsider’s (or other) view of the dominant culture, but begins the process by which Kincaid has her narrator deconstruct the Gauguin myth from within, from his position of power.

The few details we learn of Lucy’s familial history suggest even more subtle collocations between her life and the painter’s. Her past is marked by absent, adulterous, and excessively procreative fathers, who die penniless and leave their wives “paupers”, a word which draws us back to her categorization of ‘artists’. More explicitly, her grandfather left his wife and young son “and went off to build the Panama canal” (123), an overt alignment between Lucy’s biography and Gauguin’s. Lucy frequently seems to be partially constructed out of fragments of an ‘other’ life, that of Gauguin. Although she is a harsh cultural critic, like the painter, she is drawn to the foundational texts of that which she attacks. She is proud of the etymology of her name because she recognizes its demonic significance from her exposure to the *Book of Genesis* and *Paradise Lost*; both works which helped to articulate the mythical Eden that Gauguin tried to make Tahiti become. As is so often the case, she finds all signifiers of colonialism as compelling as she does repellent.

As in all of Kincaid’s fiction, the heroine is on a journey toward an identity outside of colonialist discourse, and Lucy explicitly tells us that she is “inventing myself, and that I was doing this more in the way of a painter than in the way of a scientist” (134). The significance of this statement can not be overestimated, for in very important ways it foreshadows her ongoing quest to become an artist, like (*and unlike*) Gauguin. By the

end of the novel, Lucy is both an author (of this text) and a photographer, two other mediums which Gauguin used to articulate his philosophy on numerous occasions. She buys herself a camera from a man who not only reminds her of her father, but who is also from Panama and Martinique (two other of the 'primitive' nations Gauguin lived in briefly). Here, again, (as in her response to Paul) we see the inseparability of representation and sexual desire because she is instantly desirous of the camera store clerk. Just as she attempts to discover a disengaged mode of representation, she also seems intent on enjoying a sexuality that is free from patriarchal assumptions about the colonized female body. We see this particularly in the fact that in all of her sexual liaisons, Lucy is described *penetrating* bodies as frequently as being *penetrated* by them, a clear violation of the "normal" rules of sexual engagement. Although she is keenly aware that her erotic behaviour will earn her the label of a 'slut' from those within this discourse such as her mother, she is boldly unconcerned about how her sexuality will be viewed from the position of the colonizer. Similarly, one of her early photographic endeavours shows the extent to which her new creative pastime is a transgressive act. During a domestic feud which she 'inappropriately' tries to capture on film, Lewis storms out in anger: although we know he takes hundreds of pictures in faraway lands, he refuses to be stripped of agency by an underling in the colonialist power structure. His is the dominant position and he should be the one responsible for creating images of (and therefore policing and defining) the 'other'.

It is Mariah who initiates Lucy's interest in photography by giving her a book containing pictures "of ordinary people in a countryside doing ordinary things, but for a

reason that was not at all clear to me the people and the things they were doing looked extraordinary - as if these people and these things had never existed before”(115). As well as reaffirming the power of images not only to represent but to *make*, this moment also constitutes the beginning of Lucy’s developing interest in issues of representation in general, and the ideological implications of photography in particular. She realizes a need to be on the other side of the lens, but it also gradually becomes clear that the manner in which she will take pictures must be fundamentally unlike that of anyone else in the text, so she proceeds to test out and critique various modes of representation in order to find her own artistic voice. She does not wish to replicate the artificial perfection of Mariah and Lewis’s family portraits. Nor does she wish to be like Timothy Simon, the advertising photographer who really wants “to roam the world taking photographs of people who had suffered horribly and through no fault of their own.” (159) Her resistance to this type of overtly political photography is reminiscent of her mixed responses to the ‘racist love’ of her previous employers, who also display an excess of superficial good-intentions which are predicated upon the maintenance of the hegemony which privileges and sustains them.

The final mode of representation which Lucy rejects is Paul’s, whose photography (like his painting) seems decidedly similar to Gauguin’s, with his emphasis on the idealization, exoticization, and eroticisation of his ‘subject’. In the photograph which he gives to her, Lucy is “standing over a boiling pot of food...naked from the waist up; a piece of cloth, wrapped around me, covered me from the waist down.”(155). The construction of this image is replete with signifiers of Paul’s ideological position, as we

see when he interprets its meaning. Lucy tells us that “He thought I was in a certain state of mind, having to do only with him. But it was just a song I was singing; I meant nothing at all.”(155-156). Significantly, while Paul is clearly revelling in the patriarchal beauty of the artifact he has created and kisses Lucy in ‘that possessive way’, she comes to a crucial recognition that marks the beginning of the end of their relationship. She realizes that his attraction to her is motivated by the same impulse which causes him to love “things that came from far away and had a mysterious history”(156) and she can no longer be subjected to his gaze, with all its implications of dominance and authority. She will not allow herself to be stripped of agency, rendered into an object upon which ethnocentric discourse can be inscribed.

What she tries to do in her photographs, then, is defined negatively against the other possibilities, all of which seem fraught with colonialist ideology. She enrolls in a night school class but tells us “it was not with any ideas about my life in mind- it was only that I enjoyed doing it.”(161). From her subject position, she is both unwilling and unable to create the same kind of art as Paul (or) Gauguin, noting:

They were not pictures of individuals, just scenes of people walking about, hurrying to somewhere. I did not know them, and I did not care to. I would try and try to make a print that made more beautiful the thing I had seen, that would reveal to me some of the things I had not seen, but I did not succeed.(160)

Repeatedly throughout the novel, Lucy has asked herself postmodern questions about the implications of representation, questions which she is never able to answer. Frequently, this inability causes her considerable psychic pain, as when she wonders “Why is a picture of something real eventually more exciting than the thing itself?”(121)

and is thrown into a depressive condition wherein “I was lying there in a state of no state...thinking nothing, feeling nothing”(121). Because Lucy’s otherness is foregrounded (she becomes nothing, a void) during these moments, it is significant that Kincaid never answers any of these questions for us. Rather, by the end of the text, Lucy has turned her back on these concerns because she realizes that there is no way to transcend or escape from the omnipresent colonial discourse which is at all times trying to define and police her. She will no longer dwell on issues which (falsely) valorize the pre-discursive power of art, but which resolutely depend on (ideologically potent) notions of the ‘real’ and the ‘fake’, ‘culture’ and the ‘primitive’. She relinquishes her desire to create images which capture ‘essential’ truths or the illusory ‘thing in itself’ and seems no longer concerned with holding up a mirror to either American or Antiguan culture in order to teach it about itself in relation to an ‘other’.

Instead the final moments of the novel are marked by a shedding of all ties, a rejection of the potential subject positions which each character represents. We find Lucy alone in a room of her own with a journal which Mariah has given her as a parting gift, typically accompanied with a lecture about “women, journals, and, of course, history.”(163). Choosing her own path (or at least tentatively trying out an ‘other’ one), she proceeds to commit an(other) act which radically transgresses her position as a colonized subject: she decides to write herself, to represent her own identity. She will attempt to adopt the position of colonial authority and rewrite herself in a way that does not reflect ideology, or at least not the *same kind* of ideology. Her uncharacteristic attempt to use autobiography draws our attention to the text she has already written for us,

Lucy, which *in itself* constitutes a powerful act of resistance against the colonizers. If her last attempt at self-representation is not a resounding success or a neat answer, then it is nonetheless a positive move toward empowerment.

However, less overtly, the final passage is also a reaffirmation of the text's complicated intertextual relationship with Gauguin. Not only does her atypical engagement of an autobiographical narrative suggest her alliance with the painter who turned to this technique exclusively in his later years, but what she is able to write is powerfully reminiscent of Gauguin's grandiose musings. While it is certainly not surprising that Lucy would choose to write in the style of Gauguin given their numerous textual similarities, she is attempting to use this new method without the discursive content of his form. She wants to write herself in the style of Gauguin but with an (other) meaning. What Lucy realizes, and what causes her to weep tears of shame, is the fact that, for her, there is no way to absolutely free herself from text, from the colonialist discourse which precedes and exceeds her. The words she writes ("I wish I could love someone so much that I could die from it" (165)) are not her own, they do not correspond with the distinctive voice with which we are now so familiar because they are spoken in the voice of the other, Gauguin. Kincaid is not so naive that she would find for her heroine a place outside of ideology (a place where the self exists apart from discourse) as the setting for the novel's conclusion, but what she accomplishes is a remarkable convergence (rather than resolution) of the text's postmodern themes in a single image. Lucy's words may not yet be her own, but in the striking description of her tears falling on the page, we see the colonized body *literally* erasing what Gauguin and the colonizing

'spirit of the dead' has written on it.

Chapter 4

Deconstructing the *GQ* Man: Apocalyptic Intertextuality in American Psycho

Whereas Kincaid's Lucy has been recognized (and praised) by almost all critics as a novel about a young woman's attempt to negotiate an identity for herself apart from patriarchal and colonial discourse, the next text that I will examine has been met with precisely the opposite response. Although it does, I will suggest, critique many of the same concerns as Lucy, it has been widely (and often wildly) misread as *being* that which it purports to attack; essentially, it has been broadly argued, it is very much a part of the racist, misogynistic, and capitalistic discourse which it pretends to undermine. Accordingly, in recent memory, no novel's release has generated more controversy or critical outrage than that which accompanied the publication of Bret Easton Ellis' American Psycho, a fact which any analysis of the text must inevitably confront. Since the overwhelming majority of critics considered the novel to be vile, boring, and irresponsible--*in itself* an act of violence against women--these views must be confronted by any scholar who aims to defend the novel (and the much beleaguered novelist) from those who argue that it is merely a work of 'sophomoric pornography'. However, rather than simply dismiss or ignore the arguments so vehemently expressed by the novel's harshest detractors, it is much more rewarding to show the extent to which these positions (many of which are quite correct) are motivated by a fundamental misunderstanding of

the text and its marshalling of intertextuality as a critical tool in a manner that is very similar in its impact and execution to that found in Lucy.

Perversely, although almost all of Ellis' critics have recognized the themes and concerns that are at play in American Psycho, most have argued that his text works precisely in opposition to its intended project. Essentially, it has been rather disingenuously proposed, his text constitutes that which it seems most desperately to critique, it advocates that which it pretends to abhor. First, I shall briefly summarize the existing criticism of the novel¹ and then move on to suggest the ways in which many critics, while sporadically acknowledging Ellis' use of intertextuality as a narrative and thematic strategy, have nonetheless failed to recognize the extent to which it constitutes a defence to their attacks, a justification for the novel's obviously excessive violence. Essentially, although most argue that there is no critical distance *between* American Psycho and the unpleasant episodes and characters it depicts, Ellis' use of a borrowed structure and style reveal, intertextually, the extent to which the novel (in its most troubling moments) is a radical critique of *precisely* those same elements that critics found so abhorrent. Furthermore, the critics have, in their woefully misguided critiques of the novelist's perceived 'inability' to create 'genuine' characters with rich internal lives, completely failed to appreciate the ways in which Ellis has used intertextuality as a tool with which to articulate a distinctly postmodern view of the self, one wholly constituted by the disturbing discourses of its times.

¹ For a much more thorough review of the truly bizarre public and critical response to American Psycho, see Chapter Four of Novel Controversies: Public Discussions of Censorship and Social Change, an exhaustive study by Rosa A. Eberly.

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The strange and unique tone of the critical furor which surrounds American Psycho began, suggestively, well before its eventual publication in March of 1991. Simon & Schuster, the original publishing house, apparently received numerous complaints from (predominantly female) staff members who expressed their unwillingness to work on the project. Advance reviews of the book were uniformly negative to the extent that both 'Spy' and 'Time' (under the headline 'A Revolting Development') ran extremely critical editorial pieces accompanied by typically decontextualized excerpts from some of the book's most violent passages. This negative publicity attracted the attention of S & S CEO Richard E. Snyder, who read the manuscript over the course of a weekend. Days later, Snyder contacted Binky Urban (Ellis' agent) and announced that he would forfeit the \$300, 000 advance paid to the promising young author but that he would not be publishing the book. Within two days of this November 15th announcement, Sonny Mehta of Alfred A. Knopf intervened and bought the now infamous manuscript in order to publish it as a part of his Vintage Contemporaries Series.

Four months before the rescheduled publishing date, Tammy Bruce, the president of the National Organization of Women's (NOW) Los Angeles Branch, called for a national boycott of American Psycho, which she deemed a "how-to-book for the torture and murder of women", and every other book carried by the publishing company (excluding feminist novels which presumably she felt this was *certainly* not). Articulating the vicious statements that would soon become commonplace, she claimed that the novel "is not art. Mr Ellis is a confused, sick young man with a deep hatred of

women who will do anything for a fast buck. And Mr. Mehta is worse. Ellis could have gone on writing until he choked on his own vomit if Vintage had not agreed to publish this misogynist garbage”(Cohen 14). Other powerful feminists such as Kate Millet and Gloria Steinem wrote angry letters to Knopf supporting the boycott and expressed their outrage in various other very public forums, including Steinem’s disturbing suggestion on the popular ‘Larry King Live’ show that Ellis had better be prepared to fully accept responsibility when women are inevitably murdered in the sadistic manner that he describes. Ellis received so many death threats (including numerous photographs of himself mutilated in ways that are similar to those described in the novel) that the typical book promotion tour had to be cancelled, although, it should be noted, by this stage it was probably unnecessary. Even the cover illustrator hired by Knopf, George Corsillo, weighed in with his contribution to the debate by refusing to complete his assignment because “I felt disgusted with myself for reading it”(Plagens 59).

This media frenzy continued to escalate until the book’s release, when critical reactions seemed to be merely a repetition of the claims of the earlier reviewers. Washington Post reviewer Jonathon Yardley summarily, and disturbingly, dismissed the novel as “pure trash, as scummy and mean as anything it depicts: a dirty book by a dirty writer”(Yardley 3). Unquestioningly repeating the oft cited accusation that American Psycho is inherently an act of violence against women, Pico Iyer noted in Time that “it is painfully easy to see the damage such a book can do to the way in which men see, and therefore treat, women”(Iyer 94). Newsweek’s Peter Plagens denounced it as “base, misogynous, and dangerous”(Plagens 59). Although almost every critic focussed their

attacks on the novel's pornographic scenes of violence, numerous more *practical* reviewers also tried to diffuse the enormous amount of free publicity that had been heaped upon the novel by drawing attention to the strange, flat prose style that Ellis adopts and suggesting that the perversely curious reader will be terribly disappointed by what is at bottom an essentially badly written and stunningly boring piece of work. Chicago Tribune reviewer Joseph Coates posited that amid the decontextualized printing in the popular media of "stomach-turning scenes from the novel, no one bothered to mention the most startling fact about American Psycho, which is that it is a stupefying bore"(Coates 1). In a ludicrous column entitled 'Snuff this Book' in the New York Times Book Review, Roger Rosenblatt vigorously argued that "So pointless, so themeless, so everythingless is this novel, except in stupefying details about expensive clothing, food and bath products, that were it not the most loathsome offering of the season it would certainly be the funniest"(Rosenblatt 3).

What is somewhat unusual about most of the critical responses to the novel is that almost everyone seemed to comprehend what Ellis was trying to achieve. Scathing reviewers such as Caryn James noted that "Though American Psycho also seems to redress the violence of contemporary society, in fact it is too mindless to be revealing"(James 21). While emphasizing the author's complete failure to do so, Terry Teachout pauses to acknowledge that "Ellis's all-too-obvious purpose was to write a scathing satire of Eighties materialism"(Teachout 44). So why then did critics have such difficulty acknowledging that Ellis was critiquing absolutely the behaviour that he described, that he was aligning capitalism with sadism and psychosis and denouncing

them wholesale? Why was it easier to propose (perversely and inexplicably) that the author was *endorsing* the violent rape and mutilation of women? How were critics such as Roger Kimball able to so assuredly claim that American Psycho is dangerous pornography and “no more a ‘commentary’ than is Deep Throat”(Kimball 7). The answers to these questions are numerous, but ultimately may be explained by an analysis of Ellis’ prolonged and incessant use of intertextual narrative strategies, his apocalyptic positing of a postmodern ‘self’, and his bizarre conflation of form and content.

The New York story unfolds in a series of very short, often completely disconnected chapters which replicates the format of a magazine. Often wildly different in content, the reader is repeatedly and jarringly thrown from excruciating protracted rape and murder scenes to chapters that deal exclusively with specific consumer information, helping to ultimately blur the line between consumption of products and the commodification of bodies that enables people to be (often literally) consumed by anyone with the money to afford them. The most bizarre examples of this device are found in the entire chapters that are constited by music reviews, generally following moments of appalling violence. Ellis describes the frantic, mechanical, and terrifying rapes in the way that Patrick sees them, as if they were the violent pornographic films (which they often are, as he always seems to be taping) that he repeatedly rents. The language is mean, vicious, and completely devoid of humanity, showing the degree to which he places absolutely no value on human life. He repeatedly describes his victims as meat and does not even seem to *understand* why he should feel remorse for their suffering. Contrarily, when Bateman is describing objects that he has purchased, we witness an impromptu shift

in the tone of his authorial voice. Essentially devoid of any original thought, he is written to sound *precisely* as if he is merely regurgitating things he has read. He becomes an automaton when commenting on anything he has purchased, spewing either the information provided by the manufacturer or passing off the opinions of other reviewers as his own. In the entire chapter devoted exclusively to his warm feelings about the music of Whitney Houston, he states that her gushingly sentimental “The Greatest Love of All” is “one of the best, most powerful songs ever written about self-preservation and dignity”(254) and adds “Whitney sings with a grandeur that approaches the sublime. Its universal message crosses all boundaries and instills one with the hope that it’s not too late for us to better ourselves, to act kinder”(254). Christopher Lehmann-Haupt suggests that “Mr. Ellis’s true offense is to imply that the human mind has grown so corrupt that it can no longer distinguish between form and content”(18), and in this he is precisely correct, because Bateman (and indeed everyone *in* the novel and *including* the novel) is unable to separate the two. In this respect, American Psycho occupies a distinctly postmodern space, one in which what is said is entirely inseparable from the way in which it is said, and where language is not a disinterested tool with which we convey reality but intimately involved in determining that reality.

The first-person narration which Ellis uses to tell Patrick Bateman’s story is unusual and daunting in that it achieves precisely the opposite of what this technique normally does. After spending about 400 pages within the resolutely unpleasant landscape of this yuppie’s psyche, we know virtually nothing about him, his ‘true self’ never seems to be revealed. However, rather than attribute this strangeness to Ellis’ inability to create

'real' or 'authentic' characters (as many have), it makes more sense and is infinitely more rewarding to view this unsettling flatness in the way that the text demands, as a profoundly disturbing critique of a certain contemporary mind set. If Ellis' narrative structure does not facilitate any kind of conventional character development, it is because his characters are fundamentally devoid of any traditionally imagined sense of self or identity. It is precisely the sustained use of this technique that is, I suspect, at the core of the critical backlash which has plagued the novel since well before its publication. In his meandering and self-indulgent review for Vanity Fair Norman Mailer argued that although he appreciated Ellis' attempt at a sweeping social critique, American Psycho fails as a work of art because it does not allow us any great psychological insights into the mind of its serial killer protagonist. Similarly, Jonathon Yardley complained that "not a single one of his characters is interesting, distinctive or sympathetic : all dissolve into a blur of mere names that, like the brand names, are both interchangeable and indistinguishable"(Yardley 3). R.Z. Sheppard notes that "[i]nstead of a plot, there is a tapeworm narrative that makes it unnecessary to distinguish the beginning of the novel from its end"(Sheppard 100) and he is, for the most part, absolutely correct *until* the moment where he takes this fact as being indicative of poor craftsmanship. While this bold literary experiment may occasionally make for some perversely frustrating repetition, it is nonetheless a technically brilliant and utterly necessary attempt to create the kind of world which would be populated by people like--and *only* people like--Patrick Bateman.

From its opening moments, American Psycho is replete with an unprecedented

proliferation of specific references to objects and texts outside of itself, unfailingly in the form of recognizable signifiers of enormous material wealth. Bateman's conspicuous consumption, like that of all his friends, is seemingly limitless and ultimately pointless. He and his yuppie cohorts all wear the same clothes, eat the same obscure dishes in the same upscale restaurants, and, as far as we know, are all motivated by the same desires. Seemingly oblivious to any element of life which exists beyond the boundaries of their immediate surroundings (except for the equally venomous hatred they all direct at those outside their group - the homeless, artistic, homosexual, essentially anyone who is an 'other'), Bateman and his companions have in place of intelligence an encyclopaedic knowledge of the rules of their existence. Indeed, a good portion of his homicidal rage at the less fortunate members of society stems from the fact that they are not as well versed as he in the rules of 'gentlemanly conduct', a reality that becomes clear through the unadulterated horror he expresses at those who simply do not know how to dress or live 'properly'. Attempts by the less knowing to try to understand his world particularly disgust him, as when he notices a prostitute that he is about to torture flipping "through an issue of *GQ* that's three months old... looking confused, like she doesn't understand something, anything. I'm thinking, Pray, you bitch, just pray"(Ellis 301). It becomes quickly apparent that his group all come by this often painfully detailed and esoteric knowledge from the same outlets, and it is one of these sources that takes on great importance as the text develops and can be used to understand why so many critics failed to appreciate the novel's postmodern logic.

Although American Psycho contains mentions of numerous texts (slasher films,

television shows, novels, restaurant guides, et cetera) which are thematically important, I would argue that the frequent allusions to *GQ* magazine are the most provocative and suggestive. In both form and content, the novel often appears to be a dramatization or fictionalization of any given edition of the popular men's magazine². Patrick Bateman is the *GQ* man, a simulacrum of the masculine ideal that the magazine is always explicitly and implicitly positing. He is extraordinarily wealthy, ruthless, and powerful; easily able to purchase seemingly any of the infinite number of objects he desires. He is also, to say the least, one of 'the beautiful people'; he is in perfect physical condition, terribly strong, unusually handsome, and meticulously well kept. If we are to believe the messages sent to us through the white noise of popular culture and the mass media, he is very much living the American dream that *we all desire*. If anything distinguishes *GQ* from its competitors, it is the fact that it assumes that the reader is already in this comfortable position or at the very least, well on his way. Bateman is, then, both the target audience of *GQ* and the product that it is selling.

Although not exclusively, *GQ* is renowned primarily for its' high-end fashion content. Not only does the magazine generally feature hundreds of pages of advertisements from all of the most expensive designer clothing labels, but it also contains many pages of photo shoots which are essentially inseparable from the

² In interviews, Ellis has been quite candid about how indebted he was to various media outlets for help with the construction of his book, particularly *GQ*, about which he states "*GQ* was inordinately helpful in costuming the characters in the book. They should have gotten credit"(Love 49). When one considers the extent to which the landscape of *American Psycho* is populated by characters who are *nothing but* the sum total of their costumes, the great influence of the magazine begins to come into focus.

commercial placements. The models are utterly irrelevant, all they have to be is beautiful as they stand in exotic locales or generally desirable situations. Their world is flawless and the people have no value other than as immaculate bodies upon which, and ultimately to whom, clothes are sold. They live in the same world as Bateman, a place in which “Sex is mathematics. Individuality no longer an issue....^{of screen?} Surface, surface, surface was all that anyone found meaning in”(375). Furthermore, although the clothes are identified on each sleekly constructed page (by their all important designer labels), every publication also features a ‘Where to Buy it’ section enabling the (wealthy, desiring) reader to purchase the featured clothes at various upscale stores. This product information enables the magazines reader to, as the cover frequently proclaims, ‘look very *GQ*’. Patrick Bateman looks, and *is*, very, very *GQ*. Not only does he possess the requisite sculpted physique and astronomical salary needed to transform himself into a vision of style and beauty, to place himself inconspicuously on the magazines pages, but the world in which he lives *as he sees it* (which is the text of American Psycho), is clearly and cleverly constructed to resemble that which is presented in the *GQ* fashion layouts.

It becomes immediately apparent to the reader that Ellis is using this technique *ad nauseam*, a fact that was not lost on the many critics who cited this as one of the reasons that they found the novel to be such a shallow and boring read. Peter Plagens complained about the “almost trance-inducing mantra of brand names; every character, right to the bitter end of the book when the point has been made a hundred times over, is introduced, item by item, by his or her designer clothes and accouterments”(Plagens 59). Every character’s impeccable appearance is unrelentingly described down to the most

pointlessly specific details, from the novel's opening when Bateman's friend, amid a characteristically mean spirited 'discussion' of ruthless solutions to the homeless epidemic in New York, pauses and:

asks without looking over, "Why aren't you wearing the navy blue blazer with the gray pants?" Price is wearing a six-button wool and silk suit by Ermenegildo Zegna, a cotton shirt with French cuffs by Ike Behar, a Ralph Lauren silk tie and leather wing tips by Fratelli Rosetti. (Ellis 4-5)

While this arduously descriptive technique initially possesses an unusual quirky appeal, it rapidly becomes both comically excessive and excessively annoying as the reader is forced to trudge through sometimes many pages of such mind-numbing detail. Tellingly, what is most bizarre about this surreal listing is that it is not descriptive in any normal sense of the term because it does not help the reader visualize what Bateman is seeing (or wearing). As in the bylines in the *GQ* fashion layouts, what the clothes *mean* (as status symbols signified by designer labels) is ultimately more important than how they look. Lacking the glossy visual component of the magazines perfectly composed images, all we are left with is clothing stripped of all of the practical utility which would normally be placed on it in favour of an absolute emphasis on what the clothes represent. In the above cited passage, we know that Price is wealthy and powerful enough to wear the *right* clothes (and, of course, to know what those clothes are), but we do not know how he looks. We know who made his thousand dollar suit and hundred dollar tie but we do not, for instance, know what colour they are. And, of course, we do not know anything about the man inside the suit. He is irrelevant, a non-entity beyond the products

he consumes³.

Again like the magazine, Bateman's exotic and extensive consumption habits extend well beyond the clothing he wears. Every aspect of his life and consumer habits are related to us in the same flat and arduous style, emphasizing surface perfection and the ways to achieve it. It is not enough for Bateman to simply dress like a *GQ* man, he relentlessly attempts to make his entire world very *GQ*, a fact which is intimately related to his pathological hatred of those who would seem out of place (the homeless, for instance) within a glossy fashion shoot. The landscape that he creates for himself and the manner in which he lives are recounted in a style that is unmistakably reminiscent of the pages of *GQ*, a complete emphasis on surface detail related in a 'how-to' style that, again, allows the reader to replicate an affluent lifestyle. The novel's second chapter, entitled 'Morning' is ostensibly about Bateman's pre-work routine, but quickly becomes instead a six page description of the contents of his luxury apartment (where Tom Cruise also lives!) combined with a series of tips about how he achieves maximum physical beauty at the beginning of the day. His interior decor and cleansing routine are fundamentally inseparable from product information, taking the novel from the strangely descriptive to the explicitly pedagogical; Patrick wants to help us to learn to be more like him, that is, *better*. Typically, not only does Bateman tell us that his is a *Toshiba* VCR, but that it is

³ See [Epistemic Structuralism in the Postmodern Novel: The Examples of William Gaddis, J.G. Ballard, and Bret Easton Ellis](#) by Stephen Busonic for a more comprehensive analysis of Ellis' use of brand names. Busonic, who views the text as a Marxist critique of capitalism, provides (and calls for) an engaged reading of the novel in order to "explicate the operations of epistemic structuralism in the consumerist environment that *American Psycho* depicts and to account for the gruesome connection it makes between sadism and consumer culture"(Busonic 225).

“a super-high-band Beta unit and has built-in editing function including a character generator with eight-page memory, a high-band record and playback, and three week, eight-event timer”(Ellis 25). The extent to which for Patrick brand-name products truly have greater value and identity than people is most horribly apparent in scenes when the two are directly juxtaposed, when he is using one as he destroys the other. After raping and torturing a nameless prostitute with a deluxe *Black and Decker* nail-gun, he positions

the body in front of the new Toshiba television set and in the VCR is an old tape and appearing on the screen is the last girl I filmed. I'm wearing a Joseph Abboud suit, a tie by Paul Stuart, shoes by J. Crew, a vest by someone Italian and I'm kneeling on the floor beside a corpse, eating the girl's brain, gobbling it down, spreading Grey Poupon over hunks of the pink, fleshy meat. (327-328)

All pretense at typical description is lost when Bateman enters the bathroom to begin his extensive self-beautification project when the narrative becomes overtly educational. We are made privy to various tips about self-presentation, with preposterously specific advice about nail, hair, and dental care, cleansing and shaving, about which we learn:

Once out of the shower and toweled dry I put the Ralph Lauren boxers back on and before applying the Mousse a Raiser, a shaving cream by Pour Hommes, I press a hot towel against my face for two minutes to soften abrasive beard hair. Then I always slather on a moisturizer (to my taste, Clinique) and let it soak in for a minute. You can rinse it off or keep it on and apply a shaving creme over it - preferably with a brush, which softens the beard as it lifts the whiskers- which I've found makes removing the hair easier. It also helps prevent water from evaporating and reduces friction between your skin and the blade. Always wet the razor with warm water before shaving and shave in the direction the beard grows, pressing gently on the skin. Leave the sideburns and chin for last, since these whiskers are tougher and need more time to soften. Rinse the razor and shake off any excess water before starting. Afterwards splash cool water on the face to remove any trace of lather. You should use an after-shave

lotion with little or no alcohol. Never use cologne on your face, since the high alcohol content dries your face out and makes you look older. One should use an alcohol-free antibacterial toner with a water-moistened cotton ball to normalize the skin. Applying a moisturizer is the final step. Splash on water before applying an emollient lotion to soften the skin and seal in the moisture. Next, apply Gel Appaisant, also made by Pour Hommes, which is an excellent, soothing skin lotion. If the face seems dry and flaky- which makes it look dull and older- use a clarifying lotion that removes flakes and uncovers fine skin (it can also make your tan look darker). Then apply an anti-aging eye balm (Baume Des Yeux) followed by a final moisturizing “protective” lotion. (Ellis 27-28)⁴

If this instructional sequence seems excessive, it must be remembered that ‘correct’ shaving is only one of the literally hundreds of things that can be learned from the novel. Our hero seemingly possesses depths of knowledge about an incredibly diverse range of topics from bottled water to Carribean vacations, from the best ab workouts to the legality of designer label switching, and from the most obscure fusion cuisine to the most popular ‘Genesis’ albums. This list is by no means complete, indeed, Bateman is such a fountain of information about the best (the ‘right’) way to live one’s life that even his similarly well-informed friends come to him for advice about the issues that trouble them. Meeting his friends in Harry’s bar, a favourite hang-out, they immediately begin interrogating him with such pressing issues as “Is it proper to wear tasseled loafers with a business suit or

⁴ In order to see precisely how stylistically and thematically similar this preposterous passage is to *GQ* magazine, consult the ‘Personal Best’ section (of any issue) which exclusively offers advice regarding issues of personal beautification. For a more specific comparison to this particular segment of *American Psycho*, see pages 305-333 of the September 1988 edition which shows the reader how, in ten easy steps (for instance, ‘Step Three: The Shave’ in which we learn such essential information as “water will soften your beard hairs by 70 percent” and “The average man takes an incredible 150 to 300 stokes per shave....Know thy follicles”), they can transform themselves into a *GQ* man. Helpfully, the magazine also recommends well over 150 different toiletries (identified, of course, specifically by their brand names) which will facilitate this improvement.

not?"(Ellis 31) When he does not immediately answer, they threaten, "Bateman: we're sending these questions in to *GQ*"(31). This results in one of the novel's many running jokes as the yuppies engage in a contest to see who can get one of their queries published first in the magazine's 'Question and Answer' column. Bateman, though, already knows all the answers and is invariably the one his friends turn to for guidance, always asking him questions which would fit smoothly in the aforementioned column. This is not only a badge of honour for Bateman, but is also perhaps the only thing that even slightly distinguishes him from his peers. He is *better* at being a yuppie than they are; infinitesimally closer to their ideal of the *GQ* man. As well as his gift for memorizing entire issues of *GQ*, he is also able to effortlessly quote *verbatim* entire passages from Bruce Boyer's Elegance: A Guide to Quality in Menswear, 'Zagats' and 'New York Times' restaurant reviews, and is always among the first to know when a 'hip' club has passed its expiry date (generally a time frame of weeks, or occasionally, months). In one of the shockingly few moments in the novel when he displays any emotion other than hatred, a drunken friend at Harry's gushes that "Girls dig Bateman... He's *GQ*. You're *total GQ*, Bateman"(90) to which our visibly moved hero responds "'Thanks guy, but...' I can't tell if he's being sarcastic but it makes me feel proud in a way and I try to downplay my good looks"(90). Contrarily, he despises his younger brother Sean because he seems to be *even better* at being a yuppie than Patrick, who becomes so outraged at a dinner when he realizes that his sibling has even greater access to exclusive clubs than he does that he squeezes his "hand into a fist so tightly that I break the skin on the palm of my hand and the biceps of my left arm bulges then rips through

the cloth of the linen Armani shirt I have on”(226).

Of course, it must be emphasized that Bateman is only slightly more *GQ* than his friends, a difference so minuscule in fact that it would be imperceptible to anyone who was not already very *GQ* indeed. Many of *American Psycho*'s funniest, and ultimately most alarming, scenes stem from the fact that our hero and his friends are all so similar. Since they all look and dress almost equally perfectly, they are all routinely mistaken for one another to the extent that they are surreally unable to distinguish between even their closest friends or lovers. Not surprisingly, neither Patrick nor any of his replicants are at all concerned that they are completely devoid of any trace of unique identity, it is more properly something which they gladly accept as a kind of compliment to how good they are at being masters of the universe. After a lengthy conversation at a bar, Bateman realizes that:

Owen has mistaken me for Marcus Halberstam (even though Marcus is dating Cecilia Wagner) but for some reason it really doesn't matter and it seems a logical faux pas since Marcus works at P & P also, in fact does the same exact thing I do, and he also has a penchant for Valentino suits and clear prescription glasses and we share the same barber at the same place, the Pierre Hotel, so it seems understandable.(89)

The prolonged use of this de-individuating technique begins in an early scene where Patrick is (not unusually) attempting to persuade his girlfriend Evelyn to begin dating what seems to be his best friend. When they are in bed together after a party, he characteristically suggests, seemingly as a kind of foreplay:

“Why don't you just go for Price?”
 “Oh god, Patrick,” she says, her eyes shut. “Why Price? *Price?*”
 And she says this in a way that makes me think she has had sex with him.
 “He's rich,” I say.

“Everybody’s rich,” she says, concentrating on the TV screen.
 “He’s good-looking,” I tell her.
 “Everybody’s good-looking, Patrick,” she says remotely.
 “He has a great body,” I say.
 “Everybody has a great body now,” she says.(23)

Regardless of the fact that Patrick views both himself and his girlfriends as completely interchangeable with any of their identical friends, this conversation establishes the logic which rules the rest of the novel and which is, I believe, responsible for a good portion of the critical outrage with which it has been met. Many reviewers, like Roger Kimball, felt that the oppressive feeling that accompanies a reading of the text is generated by the fact that “American Psycho is utterly unredeemed by moral sensibility or critical distance”(Kimball 7). Similar responses were expressed when the novel was compared to Jonathon Demme’s film The Silence of the Lambs, as it frequently was by virtue of their ostensibly similar content and close release dates. Reviewers invariably found American Psycho to be wanting because it lacked the film’s moral framework, which made good and evil easily recognizable and divisible, and which ensured that the former would inevitably triumph over the latter. Contrarily, Ellis does not so much blur the forces of good and evil as completely disregard any possibility of the former making an appearance in a world where we should, as he warns us in the novel’s portentous opening line, “ABANDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTER HERE”(Ellis 3). There are no organizations diligently and earnestly pursuing Bateman, and even when Ellis teasingly allows us to believe that the reign of terror may come to an end, we see the killer inevitably escape (significantly) into the refuge of his corporate office. Because Patrick controls the narrative, we have no soothing authorial interventions to denounce his


impossibility of it all.

reprehensible conduct. He is resolutely remorseless and makes it explicitly clear that he has been committing atrocities since before the beginning of the novel and has every intention of continuing to do so indefinitely, until well beyond the anti-closure of the last line which threatens “THIS IS NOT AN EXIT.”(399)⁵

Furthermore, as all of Bateman’s clique are shown to be precisely the same as he is, there is a high and profoundly disturbing possibility that his behaviour is neither abhorrent or aberrant to them. The question which becomes increasingly intriguing as one progresses through the novel is not ‘Why is Patrick doing these things?’ as much as it is ‘Is Patrick the only one doing these things?’ and all indications are that most of his friends are rapists and murderers also, precisely because we have not been given any reason to believe that they are *not*. The viciously misogynistic conversations that we hear in Harry’s and various other hip locales suggest that our hero’s psychopathological hatred of women (and seemingly *every* minority) is by no means uncharacteristic of his colleagues appalling mindsets. Indeed, on several memorable (to the reader, but apparently not to his friends) occasions he openly confesses to various acts of barbarism he has committed or intends to commit and is, in some of the novel’s most blackly hilarious moments, completely ignored, misunderstood, or summarily dismissed.

because it's in his head

⁵ Ellis further emphasizes the longevity (and ‘normalcy’) of Bateman’s behaviour by making his narrator the elder brother of The Rules of Attraction’s Sean Bateman, who is also a college friend of Clay, Less Than Zero’s narrator, and thereby metaphorically extending Patrick’s murderous conduct beyond even the tenuous boundaries of American Psycho. This textual overlap has been noted by many critics including Pagan Kennedy, who in an all too rare moment of wit observed “Characters between books apparently belong to the same old-boy network of nihilists.... Yoknapatawpha this isn’t, but Ellis’s book mark a territory and can’t be considered in isolation”(Kennedy 427).



Not only does his similarity to the army of *GQ* men whom he calls his friends not interfere with his homicidal behaviour, but they enable him to *literally* get away with murder. The protection he receives from his wealth in an American justice system that is notoriously slanted in favour of the rich is complimented by the near complete anonymity that is also a function of his financial power. When a private detective comes to question him about the disappearance of Paul Owen, a friend and colleague previously dispatched with characteristic zeal, Bateman's first concern is that the man is "my age, wearing a linen Armani suit not unlike mine, though his is slightly dishevelled in a hip way, which worries me"(267). Despite this seemingly misplaced sense of anxiety, it is quickly apparent that Detective Kimball is one of the boys and Bateman has nothing to fear. After a brief fruitless interrogation (during which Bateman attempts to describe what he knew of his victim and responds "He... ate a balanced diet"(271)), the two men discuss "razor-burn balms and tattersall shirts"(277) and Kimball clearly understands the conflation of identities that will not make his task any easier. Apparently, he has already heard one report that Owen has been seen in a London restaurant but that his identity could not be absolutely confirmed by the close friend who allegedly spotted him. In fact, the surreal comedy of this problem becomes increasingly heightened as numerous Owen sightings are disseminated throughout the rest of the novel. After having confessed all of his crimes onto the answering machine of his friend Carnes, Patrick bumps into him at a club and can not convince him that what he said was the truth. Carnes (who believes Bateman is someone named Davis and begins to speak badly of him *in absentia*) angers him and Patrick reiterates "Listen to me. Listen very, very carefully. I-killed-Paul-Owen-and-I-

liked-it. I can't make myself any clearer"(388). Still refusing to believe him, Bateman asks:

"Why not?" I shout again over the music, though there's really no need to, adding, "You stupid bastard."

He stares at me as if we are both underwater and shouts back, very clearly over the din of the club, "Because... I had ... dinner ... with Paul Owen ... twice ...in London... *just ten days ago.*"

After we stare at each other for what seems like a minute, I finally have the nerve to say something back to him but my voice lacks any authority and I'm not sure if I believe myself when I tell him, simply, "No, you ... didn't." But it comes out a question, not a statement (388).

Moments such as these give considerable weight to Bateman's revelation

(experienced when staring at a hole in a urinal) that if he, or anyone in his society, "were to disappear into that crack, say somehow miniaturize and slip into it, the odds are good that no one would notice that I was gone. No ... one ... would ... care"(226). Bateman's enormous wealth literally permits him to fulfill what he believes is his earned right, which is "to be allowed to do exactly what we *want* to do"(74). The protection his money affords him enables him to murder others from his clique because they are essentially the same person and are, therefore, eminently replaceable and interchangeable. More disturbingly, the hedonism and nihilism which all of his indistinguishable friends agree is their social inheritance enables them to rape and torture whichever women they please (and they are only pleased by identical 'hardbodies') with complete impunity. While it is unfortunately all too easy to believe that he could get away with the anonymous murders he frequently commits on members of lower socio-economic status, we are also led to stunningly discover that he has sexually assaulted many of his 'own kind'. On numerous occasions he bumps into acquaintances that he has previously attacked but who have

what is first
believed

accepted his heinous conduct which further reinforces the terrible notion that his behaviour is both normal and accepted, that his friend's nights are also filled with rape, torture, and murder. Amid the typically vapid conversations at dinner with friends one night he casually learns that "Anne Smiley and I share a mutual acquaintance, a waitress from Abetone's in Aspen who I raped with a can of hairspray last Christmas when I was skiing there over the holidays"(94). References to incidents such as this occur with grotesque frequency, always showing that although these women are aware that they have been treated badly, they all seem to begrudgingly accept that, as Bateman repeatedly states "this is the way my world works"(77,328,399). Again, one night at Nell's, he remembers one of the group of women with which he is spending the evening:

I recognize Alison as a girl I did last spring while at the Kentucky Derby with Evelyn and her parents. I remember she screamed when I tried to push my entire arm, gloved and slathered with Vaseline, toothpaste, anything I could find, up into her vagina. She was drunk, wasted on coke, and I had tied her up with wire, slapped duct tape all over her mouth, her face, her breasts.... I suddenly remember, painfully, that I would have liked to see Alison bleed to death that afternoon last spring but something stopped me. She was so high- "oh my god," she kept moaning during those hours, blood bubbling out of her nose- she never wept. Maybe that was the problem; maybe that was what saved her. I won a lot of money that weekend on a horse called Indecent Exposure.

"Well ... Hi." I smile weakly but soon regain my confidence. Alison would never have told anyone that story. Not a soul could've possibly heard about that lovely, horrible afternoon. I grin at her in the darkness of Nell's. "Yeah, I remember you. You were a real ..." I pause, then growl, "manhandler."

She says nothing, just looks at me like I'm the opposite of civilization or something (207-208).

Patrick's indignation at the poor reception that his innuendo is met with is, in the perverse world that Ellis has created for us, entirely justifiable. He *is*, afterall, the *GQ*

man. He is precisely *not* the 'opposite of civilization' but rather the logical extension of it, the pinnacle of what his civilization has become.

It is precisely this fact that critics of the novel failed to comprehend. American Psycho is, very much like Kincaid's Lucy, an outraged critique of an abhorrent discourse which becomes an intertextual reference in the respective novels. Although the emphasis shifts somewhat from colonialism to consumerism, the manner in which the criticism occurs is very similar. Since the violence in American Psycho is shown to be directly and intimately involved with the mechanics of capitalism (represented here in the form of the *GQ* man just as Kincaid uses Gauguin as a symbolic intertext of that which is intertwined in Lucy's postmodern self), and because it is so surreally excessive, its position in the text, as the logical extension of the rest of Bateman's life, can *only be* critical.

The final interpretation of this most mistreated novel which must be confronted is that which suggests that the more horrible passages from American Psycho are not actually occurring but are merely the (bad) dreams of the narrator, who may be a yuppie but is not a murderer. This reading has much to recommend it and can be supported by a good deal of textual evidence (particularly, Bateman's frequent references to more unseemly events being 'like a dream', and to the general implausibility of his maintaining a career as an investment banker while simultaneously wreaking havoc in the city, sending body parts to friends of the deceased, and living in an apartment that frequently bears more of a resemblance to an abbatoir). However, although there is no definitive proof of this possibility there is also nothing to disprove it. Bateman may be a murderer in 'reality' or in his dreams, what is more important is that it doesn't make any difference.

Certainly, I think, the novel is more blackly comic if our narrator really has killed all the people he is constantly confessing to his friends about. Furthermore, it is a far more scathing indictment of our culture if Bateman does actually get away with murder over and over again, despite his complete lack of interest in not being captured. Others have argued that Bateman can not be a serial murderer because we are given absolutely no plausible reason why he would be this way. Mailer complains that our narrator is not given enough of an internal life to offer us any insights and, certainly, Bateman is no Raskalnokov. However, although Patrick is a resolutely flat and unidimensional character, we are given *nothing but* reasons to believe that he does what he claims to. Are you sure?

Ultimately, the entire text that he presents to us (with all its countless intertextualities) is the reason why Bateman does what he does. If Lucy always maintains enough agency to at least actively negotiate between those discourses that constitute her character, Bateman is *totally* a product of the texts which make up his culture. He is, in this regard, a far more *thoroughly* intertextual and postmodern narrator than either Braithwaite or Lucy, a character for whom (to paraphrase Derrida) there is nothing outside of text.

Conclusions

This thesis has not, of course, constituted or contained even a gesture at a 'final word' on either intertextuality or postmodernism; both phenomena that rigorously preclude even the potential for closure or resolution. What I have tried to do, however, is to show the engagement of a very particular type of intertextuality at play within three very different texts and to suggest how and why this paradoxical intertextuality has been deployed and to what ends.

Necessarily, I have had to make one very narrow section of the widening array of intertextual strategies my object of interrogation, focussing exclusively on those texts in which the intertext fulfills three specifications. Firstly, they have each contained an intertextual reference that is purposefully concealed, marginalized, or elided to a degree that misrepresents their relevance to the text's project(s). Secondly, each submerged referent has been the subject of a rigorous and sustained deconstructivist critique by the text that contains it. In this regard, intertextuality is seen to be not only "the critic's method of probing, fissuring, disorienting, and dangerously supplementing the text at hand so as to exhibit its implications and implicatedness"(Clayton 18), but also a tool with which postmodern texts enact this same critical procedure upon *other* (inter)texts. Thirdly, the intertextual reference is also involved in deconstructing the narrator's self; of displacing or replacing a seemingly unified and autonomous speaker with one that is

inextricably bound up within discourse, fragmented, and textual.

In Chapter 2, I began with an analysis of the role of Vladimir Nabokov's (and editor Fredson Bowers') Lectures on Literature as an overlooked intertext in Barnes' Flaubert's Parrot, a text that seems to flaunt its involvement with postmodern theory. Examining the two texts side by side, I hopefully showed how Barnes uses Braithwaite to deconstruct Flaubert but also how he (much more quietly) uses 'Nabokov' to deconstruct Braithwaite, while simultaneously critiquing the pre-postmodern epistemological assumptions that inform Bower's (re)creation of Nabokov's lectures. Chapter 3 contained an examination of Jamaica Kincaid's Lucy, a text that is more frequently assumed to be involved in the postcolonial project. However, although less explicitly postmodern than Barnes' novel, Kincaid does use Paul Gauguin intertextually as a symbol of the abhorrent colonial discourse from within which her narrator is trying to escape, in a manner that I argue is also resolutely postmodern. Finally, in Chapter 4 I argued that the astonishing and excessive critical attacks aimed at Bret Easton Ellis' American Psycho are a direct result of a widespread failure to recognize his intertextual critique of the 'GQ man', embodied in the extreme by Patrick Bateman, our serial killer cum narrator. Ellis' apocalyptic postmodern text is delivered to us by a character completely constructed out of the ideologically-inflected language of the popular magazine whose murderous behaviour *is in itself* a critique of the magazines (and our cultures) consumerist values.

Countless other intertextualities exist. The seemingly infinite proliferation of postmodern theoretical discourse continues with no end in sight and has forever impacted

on, among other things, the way that fiction is created and the way it is interpreted. Obviously, this influence is reciprocal, as much (particularly) contemporary literature is in itself compelling theorizing. Corresponding to this broadening in our understanding of postmodernism (as it is still being created), the incarnations of intertextuality have become increasingly diverse. Certain writers have created wonderfully varied intertextualities, destabilizing and usurping our (already rather shaky) understanding of its implications. I would have liked to engage many other texts in this limited work, and I hope that the work being done on them continues indefinitely.

But the analysis of these different intertextualities must be done elsewhere, and no-doubt will be, because some of the most compelling reading produced in recent memory has been deeply intertextual. D.M. Thomas's The White Hotel has been the subject of much heated debate as a result of its intertextual incorporation of Holocaust survivor testimony. However, this work is also replete with hundreds of other (inter)texts which have not yet fully been examined, such as his use of Freud's dual libidinal forces of eros and thanatos as a structural (as well as thematic) determinate; facilitating the inclusion of two radically different conclusions, one in which the narrator is raped to death and lies in the Babi Yar death pits, and another in which she evades the horrors of the Nazi's and finds herself in an edenic (or rather, eros-driven) transit camp. Thomas's intertextual relationship with Freud (a character in the book) is then, at the novel's conclusion(s), primarily seen in the troubling and non-linear arrangement of the chapters, as well as in his more evident denunciation of thanatos-driven behaviour.

More strangely, the ever inventive Will Self has, beginning in The Quantity

Theory of Insanity, created what is perhaps more properly an *infra*/intertextuality. This titular theory is that “there is only a fixed proportion of sanity available in any given society at any given time....any attempts to palliate manifestations of insanity in one sector of society can only result in their upsurge in some other area of society.”(Self 126-127) This bizarre formulation, developed in the novel’s latter stages, becomes a perverse kind of infratextual interpretive tool that can be used to explain the virtually invisible line dividing the sane from the insane presented in the earlier and later chapters, where characters routinely fall in and out of madness. However, if the ‘Quantity Theory’ is used infratextually in the novel of its genesis, then Self uses it intertextually in much of his subsequent writing. His own theory becomes a relevant intertext in such novels as Great Apes and Cock and Bull, whose characters respectively (believe that they) awaken to find that everyone but them has been transformed into an ape or begin to develop other-sex genitalia to awkwardly supplement their own.

Other more recent, but equally memorable and inventive, uses of intertextuality can be found in postmodern works such as Tibor Fischer’s The Thought Gang (in which the narrator robs banks each in a way that demonstrates some of the precepts of one of the schools of Western philosophy) and David Foster Wallace’s gargantuan Infinite Jest (which stretches the notion of flaunting ones intertextual references to new lengths by including almost 400 footnotes at the conclusion of his novel which is already overflowing with auxilliary references). Each of these novels somehow reshapes, revises, or redefines our understanding of the role of intertextuality in postmodern literature and each warrants continued critical attention. Indeed, I only mention them as novels which

can be looked to for a sense of the diversity with which intertextuality has recently been engaged and in the hopes of alerting the reader both to the broadness and to the intellectual possibilities that the phenomena currently offers as an area of scholarly inquiry.

However, although the confines of this paper have prevented me from exploring many other compelling texts and novel intertextualities, I will (in an appropriately intertextual manner) conclude *this* text with a moment borrowed from another, J.M. Coetzee's Foe. Unlike Flaubert's Parrot, Lucy¹, or American Psycho which (as I have demonstrated) frequently conceal or minimize the relevance of key intertexts, Foe is a self-conscious retelling of Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe from a postmodern position. A very brief plot summary will, I hope, be sufficient to render the significance of the novel's closing passages to my project apparent.

Foe begins as a seemingly straightforward 'realist' castaway story. Susan Barton washes ashore onto an island where she makes the acquaintance of its only inhabitants, Cruso and his speechless servant Friday. Time passes, and the trio are eventually rescued, but Cruso dies en route to England, where Susan returns with Friday to find a male writer who can legitimize her story for publication. The writer, of course, is one Daniel Foe, and we quickly learn that the beginning of the narrative has been a transcript of her

¹ Although different in this respect, many compelling points of overlap exist between these two simultaneously postmodern and postcolonial texts. Both engage a historical figure (Gauguin and Defoe) now intrinsically associated with the worst forms of gendered and racial oppression as an intertextual adversary which their marginalized narrators try to erase. Not only are the two novels thematically very similar, but their conclusions (each of which is an ultimately impossible attempt to find a way to 'speak' outside of discourse) also display several striking points of comparison and overlap.

explanation to him of her adventures, with which he can craft a marketable and therefore *male* tale. Once on English soil, the body of the novel consists of Susan's growing awareness that Foe is not what he seems to be (that his relationship to 'her' story is unclear at best), and that Friday must be given the power of speech if he is ever to be free.

Coetzee very cleverly uses his overt intertextual reference as a point of entry into a simultaneous analysis of the connection between postmodern issues of representation and those of race and gender oppression. This debate culminates in the novel's concluding chapter, during which the 'realistic', pre-postmodern narratology of the remainder of the text completely collapses. Susan and Friday arrive at Foe's London home in order to confront him about his increasingly complex and ambiguous relationship to her 'story' and her 'real' life (which, it is suggested, he has been writing all along; that is, both Susans have been characters in a book that Foe is writing and have therefore always been only textual entities). Despite Susan's fading protestations in the face of the knowledge that her subjectivity has all been an illusion (that she is no more or less than text), she nonetheless struggles to free Friday from his bondage. Understandably developing a growing awareness of language's power not simply to reflect reality in an unmediated manner but to make it, and of the troubling relationship between the ability to speak or write and one's agency (and, therefore, selfhood), she becomes caught up in an attempt to 'give' Friday a voice outside of (colonial) discourse, outside of (Foe's) text.

We are led to believe that this decidedly un-postmodern event will take place in the novel's final chapter, amid a surreal and destabilizing closing sequence. Previously, Friday, constantly in danger of being 'written out' of the story by Foe, has attempted to

learn to write but has only been able to produce a page covered with “rows and rows of the letter *o* tightly packed together”(Coetzee 152), a void which signifies his absence and his inability to signify. Immediately following this scene, the narrative becomes even more dislocated and alien; no longer even ostensibly under Susan’s control, and the (possibly new) narrator is seemingly a stranger to us. The disembodied voice describes a journey through Foe’s house which ends, inexplicably, at Daniel Defoe’s door. We enter, and the movement through the house is repeated although this time we are told by the narrator that they ‘slip overboard’ and descend into the dark body of a sunken shipwreck. Susan Barton is there, long dead, as is Friday, who does not respond to the narrator who confusedly asks “what is this ship?” (157) Friday’s ‘reply’ is the novel’s conclusion (offering no resolution) and, as it speaks to the possibility that language could ever refer to anything other than *other* language (that is to say, *intertextually*), it will also draw this thesis toward a conclusion. After asking for an explanation of this strange place, the narrator observes:

this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday.

He turns and turns till he lies at full length, his face to my face. The skin is tight across his bones, his lips are drawn back. I pass a fingernail across his teeth, trying to find a way in.

His mouth opens. From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up throughout his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face (157).

This ending, motivated exclusively by the urgent desire to find a space where

'bodies are their own signs', still cannot locate such a site within its postmodern epistemology. Friday, never able to signify within this text (where he *must* do so 'outside' of the postmodern), is left in the same subject position as Braithwaite, Lucy, and even Bateman; wholly unable to discover any part of their 'selves' outside of discourse, of language, of other (inter)texts.

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