CHARACTERISATION IN THE NOVEL: AN AESTHETIC OF THE UNCANNY

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Ph.D. is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to devise techniques for characterisation in the novel which eschew the dominant, rational and integrated model of subjectivity promoted in creative writing discourse. It examines the Freudian uncanny and cognate concepts of the sublime, the abject and ontological confusion which lead readers to hesitation, doubt and misrecognition in the process of 'reading' character.

The emergence of creative writing degree programs and the popularity of guidebooks on the subject have had a modularising effect on approaches to novel writing: decomposing the process into constituent *teachable* parts. Within this discourse about novel writing, characterisation has become a chronically fixed element in which received models of the self, drawn from reductionist behavioural psychology, tend to dominate. The dissertation examines the grammar of this *modular* characterisation and the series of explicit and implicit rules of selection and transformation upon which it is based. It argues that it is necessary for the writer to disidentify with this discourse and re-examine their being-towards-others to achieve one of the primary critical or epistemological goals of the novel: exalting the wisdom of uncertainty with relation to the representation of self and other.

Concepts drawn from structuralist and poststructuralist philosophy, social cognition, postmodern literary theory, cognitive science, analytical philosophy and psychology are examined for their usefulness to this creative problem of eliciting reader reactions of hesitation, misrecognition, ontological confusion and doubt about the nature of the characters. The novel trilogies of Samuel Beckett and Paul Auster are offered as contemporary prototypes of the effect, with their non-referentiation and disorientation effects in characterisation. The "grammar of the uncanny" is then analysed with respect to two important aspects of characterisation: name and character behaviour. Commentary on the approach to characterisation in *Monsters Worse to Come* is also presented.

Chapter One

Introduction

1: INTRODUCTION

> Those who refuse to re-examine the rules of art pursue successful careers in mass conformism by communicating, by means of the 'correct rules', the endemic desire for reality with objects and situations capable of gratifying it. Pornography is the use of photography and film to such an end. It is becoming a general model for the visual or narrative arts which have not met the challenge of the mass media.
>
> (Lyotard 1986:75)
>
> And when it comes to rejecting fundamentals, I think I have nothing to learn, and indeed I confuse them with accidentals.
>
> (Beckett 1994:80)

The aim of this dissertation is to devise techniques for characterisation in the novel which eschew the coherent, rational and integrated model of subjectivity upon which the dominant poetics of characterisation, as espoused in popular creative writing guides, is based. The objective is to outline strategies which create a "disquieting estrangement" for the reader in her[1] decoding or reading of characters. It attempts this by performing a discourse analysis of a set of popular creative writing texts and outlines the epistemological framework for the understanding of otherness which defines them. With the aim of generating an opposing epistemology, a variety of ideas, drawn from research in social cognition, (Fiske and Neuberg 1990; Schank 1958), psychoanalysis (Freud 1919; Schelling 1936; Kristeva 1982; Lacan 1955; Žižek 1973) poststructuralist philosophy (Lyotard 1994; Kearney 2000; Heidegger 1997), analytical philosophy (Kripke 1982; Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), discourse analysis (Fairclough 2000; Teo 2000), cognitive science (Lakoff 1980; Rosch 1970; Haslam and Rotschild 2000), and neuroscience (Ramachandran 1998; Dejode et al 2001) are presented.

In particular, the Freudian concept of the uncanny and, to a lesser extent, those of categorial confusion, the sublime and epistemological pathology are considered

for their usefulness in the development of such techniques. The novel trilogies of Samuel Beckett (*The Beckett Trilogy*) and Paul Auster (*The New York Trilogy*) are presented as examples of the uncanny approach to characterisation. The application of this uncanny characterisation aesthetic in the creative writing component, a novel entitled *Monsters Worse to Come*, is discussed.

The examples of creative writing discourse which are examined are books selected from reading lists for aspiring writers which are circulated on mailing lists, through writer support websites and online booksellers. They have been written by people formally involved in the academic and publishing worlds, as teachers, lecturers, writers and literary agents.[2] While their work does not wholly represent the heterogeneity of advice, assumptions and approaches which circulate within creative writing discourse, their mutual co-validation of approaches, coherence and popularity (gauged by sales, testimonials and inclusion on reading lists) attest to the fact that they are, at the very least, indicative of the commercially-driven facet of the genre. That they are marketed to, and seek to advise, beginning novelists has the result of encouraging the nascent writer's identification with the singular philosophy of characterisation which the discourse promotes.

The following books were selected: *Stein on Writing* (Stein 2000); *The 38 Most Common Mistakes in Fiction* (Bickham 1997); *The First Five Pages* (Lukeman 2000); *How to Write a Damn Good Novel* (Frey 1987); *Novel Writing* (Marshall 2000); *45 Master Characters* (Schmidt 2001); *The Writer's Guide to Essential Character Traits* (Edelstein 1999); *Creating Unforgettable Characters* (Seger 1990).

Critical discourse analysis examines how rhetorical strategies of identification, agency deletion, selectivity and elision within a set of texts tend towards making its contingent claims to knowledge appear to be self-evident truths in such a way that dissident points of view can be denied a space of articulation and the very existence of alternative viewpoints can be repressed or symbolically disparaged in their absence (Bourdieu 1992; Fairclough 1992). Or, as Teo puts it, its purpose is...

> ...to unpack the ideological underpinnings of discourse that have
> become so naturalized over time that we begin to treat them as
> common, acceptable and natural features of discourse.
>
> (Teo 2000: 7).

The novel, as viewed by a succession of theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Wayne Booth and David Lodge is "the one grand literary form that is ... capable of a kind of justice to the inherent polyphonies of life" (Booth cited in Bakhtin 1985). When a meta-discourse about the novel reveals itself as monovocal (or homoglossic as opposed to heteroglossic) then the ideological (and epistemological) claims of the discourse are strengthened and serve to reduce the possibility of innovation upon which the novel as a form is based. It presents its conventions as ahistorical, eternal and unavailable to criticism. This stability of conventions seems to be both a cause and effect of the increasing popularity of creative writing tuition.

Writing novels, as a leisure pursuit, is serviced by university courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, ad hoc Internet discussion groups, websites and e-mailing lists, computer software and books for auto-didacts.[3] The literature offers advice on getting work published, 'writing better', structuring narrative appropriately and getting to grips with the vagaries of the literary publishing world. From the evidence of these books, the commodification of novel-writing knowledge has created a dominant set of practices for composition which in turn crystallise what the discourse calls *the* 'techniques of fiction'. The singularity of the determiner indicates the consensual nature of the discourse. The effect of the near universalism of these techniques is to present to the aspiring novelist the idea that his task consists solely of choosing and developing a situation of conflict and applying the fixed and finite set of rules for character and plot development to create a novel product.[4] The processes outlined in these creative writing guides ardently promote the idea of mimetic realism with regards to character because the techniques of this approach reflect those of classic realism, are more easily transcribed as a set of criteria and because they re-enforce extant social conventions for recognising and understanding other people without the need for the writer to reflect on how his knowledge of others is constituted.

This approach – the systematic reproduction of a single, particular epistemology of otherness – is premised on rationalist and behaviourist views of human behaviour and requires the writer to assumes an epistemological mastery of others. The discourse re-enforces the writer's assumption that crossing the self-other divide, to the extent that one can offer a transparent interior account of another type of subjectivity, is an uncomplicated and unproblematic element in creative writing discourse. Linda Seger advises the apprentice writer that the characterisation process begins with what 'you already know' and continues:

> No one else can tell you whether or not you've got a character
> that's credible, real and consistent. You must rely on your own
> inner sense of what people are all about.

> (Seger 1990: 25)

'What you know', it is implied, based on observation of human behaviour is that characters are 'credible', 'real' and 'consistent'. This ensures that the writer's special self-other relationship with character is fixed squarely within a particular way of knowing in which the Other can be assessed and presented according to the self's tendency to infer intention, order and coherence within other phenomena which do not necessarily possess these qualities. This is what Martin Heidegger describes as a projection of a being-towards-self onto a being-towards-other which is an epistemological instinct which always aborts contemplation of the nature of otherness and the self's ability to understand and represent it (Heidegger 1997). The difference between the self and other, and other others, is amplified to protect that orderliness and coherence:

> Readers don't read novels in order to experience the
> boredom they experience in life. They want to meet
> interesting people different from anyone they've met
> before in or out of fiction.

> (Stein 2000: 61)

The ideological implications of the assumed mastery others are vast, as is its impact on an understanding of the novel's role in proposing alternative ways of understanding aspects of existence. Milan Kundera writes about the impact of the systematicity of such representational schema on the novel:

> Some novels add nothing to the conquest of being. They discover no new segment of existence; they only confirm what has already been said; furthermore: in confirming what everyone says (what everyone must say), they fulfil their purpose, their glory, their usefulness to that society. By discovering nothing, they fail to participate in the sequence of discoveries that for me constitutes the history of the novel; they place themselves outside that history or, if you like: they are novels that come after the history of the novel.

> (Kundera 2000: 280)

From moral, political and aesthetic considerations, the novel works best when it is heteroglossic and so, the domination of any particular type of voice, or epistemological framework within a popular discourse about the novel's function, calls for critique. One doesn't need to valorise one approach to characterisation over another or to deny the pleasures, uses and gratifications of 'conformist' chaacterisation in order to argue that the novel is better served by having a greater space for alternative epistemologies of character within its meta-discourse. Such positivist assertions make no sense if one regards each novel as a way of investigating a different aspect of existence. Totalising rhetoric is not useful if one subscribes to the view that the business of the novel is to "exalt the wisdom of uncertainty".[5]

It is the form of this exaltation that I will investigate.

1.1: THE VIABILITY OF A SUBVERSIVE AESTHETIC OF CHARACTERISATION
In bringing what Paul Ricoeuer calls an "hermeneutics of suspicion" to creative writing discourse, I do not intend to dispute its applicability to the tasks which it sets itself (Ricouer 1976). Instead, I want to question the effects of its implied claims to comprehensiveness. There is a tacit assumption in the discourse that a novel is only a novel when it is published and widely read (that is, becomes an object), and that publication is a process of selection which proceeds according to certain natural laws. The cumulative effect of the ideology of this discourse and the operations of the publishing industry is to narrow the range of presented possibilities for what the novel is, what its function is, what the writer's task is and what its relationship to its condition of production can be. It presents the

production of the novel as an algorithmic task, without presenting it also as a task carried out within a specific historical, social and epistemological framework to which it owes some of its attributes. Evan Marshall, agent, novelist and creative writing instructor, writes:

> Editors think in terms of genre when they acquire books,
> mostly from agents, who think the same way when they
> take on books from authors, who need to think this way
> too. Many writers resist categorising their novels, insisting
> that it will stifle their creativity. But a novel written without
> a genre in mind can be difficult if not impossible to sell.
> Challenge yourself within your genre's conventions.

(Marshall 2000: 9)

The implications being that the only goal of writing a novel is to produce a consumable object which fits easily into the machinations of the publishing world. No critique as to how the political economy of selection which informs this process could reasonably be expected from Marshall – and none is delivered – but the failure to acknowledge that the novel, throughout its history, has continuously re-defined itself, given rise to new genres, and that innovation within the domain takes place when adherence to generic constraints and conventions is abrogated, leaves the aspiring writer without an alternative position with which to identify.[6]

In opposing these trends, I seem to be suggesting that the novel must – or even can - always be non-conformist or subversive or confrontational in its relationship to what has come before.[7] By way of a short corrective, I am instead arguing that there simply needs to be space for representing the novel which has opposing ends; approaches to composition which have a different way of objectifying the novel, and an aesthetic which, at the very least, privileges insecurity about self-other relations and issues of interpersonal epistemology. Because of this necessity, directives about how to write a novel are liable to arouse suspicion when they speak with one voice. I will try to defend an argument for what I have called the necessity of a particular type of nonconformism before proceeding to show how the writer, by identifying himself with the form of conventional approaches, denies that space a point of articulation.

The first question to be approached is can an aesthetic of characterisation be subversive? And, if its subversive potential can be declared, against what authority does it set itself? These questions are tokens of the debates which, in the last century at least, find their keenest expression in the critical philosophy of Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin and Kellner (Adorno and Horkheimer 1991; Benjamin 1996; Kellner 1989). The split posited by the Frankfurt school and neo-Marxists such as Althusser between the false consciousness imposed on or interpellated by the subject in capitalist society, and the unmediated or liberated subjectivity which lies elsewhere has given way, in late twentieth-century thought, to a splitting of that subjectivity (Althusser 1970). The restriction of the subject within power relations which legitimate his containment to him – and the utopianism of the liberation which the dialectic implies – has a mirror in theories of cultural production in which the function of literature is often decried as affirming those values – reinscribing dominant values which sanctify and naturalise contingent social practices and ways of seeing. One such 'way of seeing' is the epistemological mastery, recognition, direct contemplation and uncomplicated familiarity with others espoused in creative writing discourse.

Alternatively, art can be seen as a means of liberation through the renegotiation of the terms of subjectivity and through the opportunity it presents to demonstrate the contradictions which lie at the centre of any and all ideologies. It is into this split that the debate between high culture and mass culture has fallen. Although the relativisms of postmodern theory would seem to have dispensed with such a distinction, as Tania Modleski points out, in popular discourse it is still strong. In fact, postmodernism, in most of its forms, still clings to this opposition in its discourse on popular culture (Modleski 2001).

In this debate the issue of conformism in art, and its consequences, is to the fore. Lionel Trilling's comment on objections to mass or popular art defines this objection as one premised on its willingness to offer the reader or consumer comfort over discomfort:

> We are repelled by the idea of an art that is consumer-oriented
> and comfortable, let alone luxurious.

> (Trilling 1963:178)

The reader's comfort, from within what is called an elitist discourse on the nature of art, is what the artist is trying to distress. This attitude is consonant with the Frankfurt school's attack on the 'spurious harmony' of popular culture which the artist should attack. Barthes similarly criticises the absence of *jouissance* or 'aesthetics of disavowal' in mass cultural products, revealing the disdain that is doled out to those writers who cater for the pleasure-seeking reader (Barthes 1970).

The distinction between experimental fiction – as a cipher for high art – and genre fiction - as a token within popular or mass culture – made in creative writing discourse strikes me as a convenient piece of rhetoric often used to bolster an argument against questions about the fundamentals of novel technique. The defence of generic conventions is strengthened by appeals to commonsense - that commonsense being that readers know what they want, which ignores the counterargument that the reader can only want what the market provides. Readerly pleasure does not correlate exclusively to the pleasure of genre and its comforting resolutions, the encountering of familiar types who act in accordance with received ideas about human behaviour. There are pleasures other than the readers, and even the provenance and fixity of those pleasures cannot be taken for granted.

1.2: A DEFINITION OF CHARACTER

The term 'character' has a number of connotations. It would be useful at this stage to clarify what is meant by its use. When I speak of characterization I am speaking of stylistic and narrative techniques for the representation of human features, actions, intentions, desires and traits in the novel form and how these interact with reader's cognitive strategies for recognising and developing knowledge (or the feeling of knowledge) about other people. The implication of this approach is that strategies for reading 'real' people are similar to strategies used for reading fictional characters. As a form of discourse, this kind of analysis has strong similarities with research in social psychology: cognitive judgements about other people; folk psychology and the inquisition about the nature and knowability of 'other minds'; philosophical debates about understanding alterity, epistemology as well as more the more traditional concerns of feminist and Marxist discourse analysis *viz.* what frames of interpretation are hoisted around other social groups and minorities, essentialising them into types and social roles,

limiting their imaginable nature?[8] It follows from this that, when looking at strategies for characterisation in novelised fiction, we can also enquire into the cognitive and epistemological strategies which we, as readers, use to access and fix knowledge about other people.

The epistemological concerns which are the principal defining features of poststructuralist literary criticism and postmodernist expression are most pronounced in the examination of discursive strategies for explaining and defining other people or social groups. Rationalist discourse, which underpins most characterisation in the novel, articulates the thoughts and desires of the characters in a way which represents their qualities as something other than contingent facts of self; packages them as the character's essence. If we are to be concerned with the political aspect of representation, we should ask what are the writer's obligations when electing to speak on behalf of others, to name and classify them, prepare them for audience recognition and in so doing to fix the subjectivity of the reader through her identification with the character's projected and coherent selfhood? This can be framed as a supplementary research question: What alternatives exist for the writer who wishes to avoid the schema of this particular kind of psychological realism and to expose the construction of identity – and the crisis of its disintegration – within the conventions of the novel form?

1.2.1: CHARACTER AND THE UNCANNY

One obligation on the novelist who wishes, through representational argument, to replace the sovereign ego as the model for characterisation is to demonstrate that oppositions and differences between the self and other are not fixed in nature but are part of our interiorised, shared representational schema for understanding experience. This has relevance with regards to novel characterisation in that characters require strong differentiation at every level (name, appearance, moral qualities, narrative function etc.) to allow for readerly recognition and, in effect, to ensure their own survival as plausible others. Creative writing manuals insist upon these differentiators as a key to successful characterisation (Bickham 1997; Marshall 2000). The implication is that the reader will begin to feel unease at the intrusion of some other model of selfhood when her expectation of the character's coherent and unique identity – of the wilful, stable and self-knowing

ego battling against an opposing force – is not met; when the character's selfhood ceases to be hermetically sealed from the other selves against which it is counterdefined. We can summarise this effect on the reader as the feeling that the individual identifying qualities of the characters have somehow become shared or that their distinguishing characteristics have ceased to function properly (i.e. their unique identifiers are neither unique nor do they meaningfully identify them). Dennis Barone remarks on this senstation on reading Auster's *City of Glass*:

> When a character loses self-identity, it is as if that character has been overfed on the character of another.

> (Barone: 1995: 10)

The pursuit of this evocation of readerly unease about character is what I have labelled an 'aesthetic of the uncanny' *(das Unheimliche)*. Freud and Kant use the term separately to refer to the perception of something which is at once familiar but strange; an aspect of existence pre-cognitively *known* about the self but not consistent with the self-concept as defined under the aegis of the sovereign ego. The uncanny provokes a feeling of dread at an aspect of selfhood (in this case it's contingency or the possibility of its disappearance) which has been forsaken, forgotten and which has no corollary in other aspects of *authenticated* experience by which it might be known again. Evoking a feeling of uncanniness through the creation of novel characters therefore has the effect of directly stigmatising the model of the coherent rational self and of inviting the reader in to a feeling of disquiet at the fluidity of selfhood.

I have chosen the trilogies of Samuel Beckett and Paul Auster to illustrate the formal qualities of this aesthetic. Their work is not part of the conventional canon of uncanny literature but its qualities of muted identity and existential angst within different re-workings of the novel are what first alerted me to the concept of revisiting characterisation through the province of doubt and epistemological insecurity. Because of these choices, and because my focus is on the formal and generative qualities of the uncanny in novel characterisation, a discussion of how different classes of split subjectivity and fractured identity occur along gender, class and ethnic lines in different cultures is outside the scope of the dissertation. In the discussion of particular approaches to the representation of others, I will

point out areas in which the uncanny might manifest itself in relation to particular instances of dispossessed or split subjectivity.

The investigation of how to achieve this project and a demonstration of how this consideration informed the characterisation in *Monsters Worse to Come* is the central purpose of this critical dissertation. I also hope to demonstrate the relevance of different models of intersubjectivity to the creative process by annotating their influence on these efforts. This seems particularly important given the apparent failure of the academicisation of creative writing to engage with ideas which circulate within the exploratory traditions of the human, social and cognitive sciences.

1.3: CREATIVE WRITING DISCOURSE AND ACADEMIA

The postmodern championing of the contingent or inessential aspects of lived experience - usually accompanied by a questioning of epistemological issues of narrative trustworthiness and a problematising of the conventions of characterising human behaviour as rational, coherent and self-willed - is more evident in the field of literary criticism than in the world of publication. The popular novel, as with all popular narrative forms, remains essentially conservative in its deployment of representational strategies.

An aversion to what is loosely called experimental fiction is also prevalent in university creative writing courses which have an often uneasy and sometimes fractious relationship with their English Literarture counterparts. James N. Frey, a lecturer in creative writing at Stanford University, has this to say about the deleterious effect of literary analysis on creative writing:

> In English 102A, The American Novel: your professor taught you to hunt for hidden symbols and historical references, to look for vague literary allusions, to cull the philosophical nuances, to divine the sociological implications, to fathom the existential ramifications. This kind of nonsense has ruined a lot of writers as well as a lot of readers. Your primary object as a novelist is to move the reader emotionally.

(Frey 2000: 94)

My focus on characterisation arises partly from a concern about the way in which creative writing discourse seems to divorce itself from debates about representation, self-other relations and cognate issues which literary criticism, narratology, contemporary philosophy and discourse analysis, amongst other disciplines, continue to interrogate. In remaining aloof, or dismissive, it fails to avail of an opportunity for expanding its range of techniques for dealing with the construction of 'character'. Instead of a cross-fertilisation of ideas about representing the human other, the academicisation, or what I have called the 'modularisation' of creative writing, seems to have resulted in a rationalist and behaviourist hypostasis.

In the rationalist novel, character is chronically established through a series of actions, themselves represented as a natural and necessary reaction to clearly presented stimuli. The clarity of the presentation ensures the reader's instant comprehension of the character's motive:

> *Homo fictus* may be complex, may be volatile, even
> mysterious, but he's always fathomable. When he isn't,
> the reader closes the book, and that's that.

> (Frey 2000: 2)

Such a formula ignores the influence of any number of pre-rational, ideological or contingent forces on human behaviour and suggests nothing about the arbitrary, mysterious or unwilled aspects of human behaviour and our understanding of it. It assumes the self to be fixed, stable and capable of transcendent knowledge and epistemological mastery of any other who is simlarly stable. These tendencies, and the philosophical assumptions and psychological models which support them, are at odds with the critical and imaginative aspects of the exaltation of the wisdom of uncertainty. The potential for interaction between creative writing and other disciplines is largely ignored. Systems views of creativity insist that creativity thrives when domains of knowledge, instead of becoming stagnant through institutionalisation, are put under stress by the arrival of models and ideas from other disciplines.[9]

In writing this critical dissertation and, particularly in writing the novel, I had in mind that doubt and epistemological humility were the values which I wanted to

inscribe within my own self-other relationship with character in the novel. Doubt is found in the avoidance of closure, the continuation of a dialectic with those aspects of existence which tend to hide behind conventional narrative forms and stable signs. The uncovering of hidden knowledge is what defines the uncanny and it is also what creative writing stands to gain by opening itself up more fully to other human knowledge sciences.

1.4: STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

This theoretical discussion is accompanied by a creative writing component (a novel entitled *Monsters Worse to Come*). It comprises six chapters. These chapters focus on separate issues but each contribute to addressing the main research question either by examining approaches to the task of characterisation which express or subvert the rationalist, behaviourist model of selfhood which dominates in writing about creative writing, or offering ideas about how the promise of an uncanny alternative may be developed. The discussion then focuses on specific elements of the uncanny characterisation process.

Chapter 2 - Approaches to Characterisation in Creative Writing Discourse

This chapter discusses the techniques of characterisation in fiction, highlighting research from social and personal cognition which outlines a framework for reader's processing of information about character. The approaches to characterisation advocated in creative writing discourse and the epistemology of otherness which inheres in it is analysed. Its 'modular' approach is argued to re-enforce particular models of otherness which endorse received ideas about human agency and identity. The elements or discreet components which comprise the characterisation process are presented. It is argued that the view of self-other relations espoused in modular approaches to characterisation relies on unreflexive models of selfhood and self-concepts which exhort the writer to conform to convention for characterisation by uncritically accepting his own being-towards-others as the ideal basis for characterisation.

Chapter 3 - The Grammar of the Uncanny

This chapter examines alternatives to the modularised approach to characterisation in the novel through an analysis of techniques for achieving uncanny effects and reader hesitation in fiction. It presents the Freudian concept of the uncanny and cognate concepts from neuroscience and contemporary philosophy which introduce doubts into the self-concept and rational

assumptions about intersubjective communication. These concepts are used as the basis for the design of provisional techniques which produce the effects of hesitation and estrangement associated with aspects of the uncanny in literary fiction. Examples of characterisation from the postmodern works of Samuel Beckett and Paul Auster, and their relationship to characterisation in *Monsters Worse to Come*, are foregrounded.

Chapter 4 – Names and Naming Strategies
This chapter discusses an integral aspect of the process of misrecognition: the referential functions of names and the possibilities which exist for their creation. It is argued that modular creative writing discourse implicitly relies upon a correspondence between language and reality, such as that espoused in analytical and empiricist views of language in its rules for generating character names. The analytical approach to names and name functions is presented in detail to foreground the staple philosophical basis of the modular approach and folk psychological concept of names: that a name uniquely refers to, connotes the qualities, and is an internal attribute of the character. Poststructuralist notions of the proper name, are used to devise a series of opposing rules for naming characters and treating the onomastics (the act of naming) which occurs within the narrative, in a way designed to elicit an uncanny reaction by demonstrating the contingency of their provenance and their potential for disconnecting from the things they would denote. The chapter leads towards the development of guidelines for uncanny naming and onomastics in literary fiction.

Chapter 5 – Character Action and Free Will
This chapter discusses the role of action and behaviour in the characterisation process. Within modular discourse, action is typically regarded as the means by which characters are most efficiently differentiated from each other. Equally, behaviour affirms the character's membership of sociological and psychological classes and, by relating behaviour to underlying psychological traits, allows for characters to appear as coherent, rational and integrated subjects. Causal, rational and economic behaviour is thereby established as the default mode for all characters. In contrast, it is argued that the epistemology of otherness – the interrogation of which is one of the novel's functions – with regards to action can be approached from an interrogatory perspective in which repressed fears of automatism, unbounded identity and adualism are invoked to create an uncanny

effect. The uncanny approach to characterisation-through-action – using techniques of non-transformation, external agency, sublime obstacles and epistemological uncertainty – are then presented.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

This chapter summarises the preceding discussion of the uncanny approach to characterisation and places it in comparative contrast with the conventional, rationalist modular approach promoted in popular creative writing discourse. The different solutions they present to the representation of human nature and behaviour in the issues of epistemology are used to form an explanatory model of the uncanny effect. The role of rules or guidelines of any kind in the production of creative writing is discussed and it is argued that, while constraints are necessary for productive creativity and meaningful communication, what Margaret Boden calls the 'heuristic of constraint-negation' is one way in which a creative domain can be expanded and dominant assumptions or chronic tendencies can be destabilised (Boden 1990). The idea of 'conceptual space' is presented and its relevance to characterisation is examined (Fauconnier 1997). The application of conceptual space blending to the transformation of author-character relations, and other modes of characterisation which might ensue from this, are then outlined.

1.5: A COMMENT IN CONCLUSION ON THE TWO-HEADED NOVELIST
I would like to make some concluding comments about the dual process of creative and critical writing.

Writing critically about writing a novel is problematic.

It has been argued that the most useful commentaries about the literary novel are to be found in examples of the form. That is to say that each novel is indirectly a proposal about the novel's function and is best characterised as an investigation into the way in history and the self (structure and agent) interact and co-define each other. According to this view, a novel should create and contain its own hermeneutic code by implying the novel's epistemological limits and the author should not have recourse to a meta-linguistic ordering of this argument. As such, a critical adjunct to a novel, such as this, can have a deformative effect on the

novel, closing off certain ways of reading it through its valorisation of what looks like the author's preferential interpretation. As Paul Auster writes:

> The question is the story itself, and whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell.

(City of Glass: 3)

The authorised interpretation, the supposed centre of meaning, should not therefore lie so obviously outside (or in this case, beside) the text. This is particularly the case with a novel which aspires towards creating an uncanny effect where much of its power is lost when an accompanying contextual frame serves to sensitise the reader by preparing them for the effect. Where I have referred to *Monsters Worse to Come*, I have tried to avoid asserting anything that looks like a pronouncement on 'what it means', or even what I (think I) intended by it. Meaning doesn't spring directly from the writer's intention but through how what he was written interacts with the cultural and psychological context which a reader brings to the work. Textual analysis which bears this in mind can teach a writer humility about the creative work and his relationship to it.

There is a second problem in that creative writers, being under no obligation, are frequently unaware of what kinds of conventions or compositional strategies they are employing when writing a novel. Being overly conscious of the systematicity with which a story can be put together, and how these systems often forget the political aspects of representation and largely ignore the problematic of linguistic or narratorial determinism, is anathema to the business of telling one. And so the writer revisiting, in analytical mode, the scene of his creative act can fail to recognise the evaluative, ideological aspect of his writing or can overdetermine the importance of certain writerly features (the avoidance of incoherent metaphysical assumptions or the inclusion of cryptic intertextual references) and ignore others which provide more insight into what will be read and how the reader can and will use, or interact, with the text. Research into the use and development of linguistic intelligence suggests that creative writing is a process which involves a large input from the subconscious in enmeshing the disparate parts of a narrative together (Gardner 1983). Story-parts may get sutured to other parts in a particular sequence by order of the author's (unarticulated and largely inexpressible) feeling for 'what is best' at the time of

composition. It is not until the creative stitching is accomplished that such decisions are subjected to rationalisation and a solid justification of intuited, *ad hoc* decisions.

But there is a benefit to the writer in bringing the rigour of critical analysis to bear on the creative task. It allows him to see how different discourses inflect each other, by highlighting how the strengths of one can illustrate the weaknesses of the other. If the two processes are allowed to act within the best interest of the critical agenda of the novel which creativity embodies, aspiring novelists have the opportunity to interrogate the novel's form from different approaches and re-discover within its repertoire of possibilities those which have been repressed by the monologic of the rational 'modular' aesthetic.

CHAPTER ONE NOTES

1 Pronouns are always problematic when used in the abstract. Since I'm dealing with three different classes of abstract beings (writers, readers and characters) I have decided to adopt the following conventions: the writer, since I am indirectly referring to myself when I use the word, is referred to as male. The reader is female and, with regards to character, I have arbitrarily assigned a gender in each case of its usage. I am aware that in assigning gender values to these roles I have assigned the active task of writing to a masculine agent and the passive task of reading to the feminine. My only justification is that referring – even indirectly - to myself as feminine would be more intrusive and necessitate a further rationale which might strike a reader as whimsical or misjudged.

2 For example, Jack M. Bickham was a professor at the University of Oklahoma; James Frey a lecturer in creative writing at Stanford University and Noah Lukeman runs the Lukeman Literary Agency in New York.

3 The following are among the most common and popular writer-oriented websites. They each have their own commercial wing and particular product which, it is promised, will enable a writer to finish a novel in 28 days:

http://www.writersonlineworkshops.com

http://www.writersdigest.com

http://www.writequickly.com

http://www.writingclasses.com

http://www.newnovelist.com

The rhetoric of these sites is itself something which calls out for analysis. The newnovelist website, which sells software to aid the novel-writing process, claims that:

"We believe that by providing you with the structure, you are in fact freed up to be even more creative as a writer". The idea that dealing with structure is part of the creative writing process would seem to have been overlooked.

4 Evan Marshall's 16-step writing program advertises its approach as follows:

It breaks down the novel-writing process into small, manageable tasks that even the most inexperienced writers can achieve. Readers will learn how to find a hook, create a conflict, develop a protagonist and set her into motion. His expertise illuminates every subject, from insightful advice about choosing the right story to strategies for building that story with an eye toward publication. He includes plenty of diagrams, charts and section sheets to make following the program easier, and there's even a section with proven advice and information for writing effective query letters and submitting manuscripts for publication.

Source:http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-
/1582970629/qid=1082806694/sr=1-2/ref=sr_1_2/103-2348943-
6431818?v=glance&s=books

5 This is the function of the novel as advanced by Milan Kundera ((Kundera 2000: 95).).

6 For histories of the novel, particularly its 19th and 20th century forms, see Pykett 1995; Walder 2001.

7 In fact, creativity which involves innovation *within* a formal discipline is only really made possible by the existence of constraints which can maintain the structure of the work within the domain. I discuss how the domain can be transformed by changes and how 'constraint negation' is a useful heuristic for developing new creative methods in Chapter 6.

8 For a discussion of the Other Minds problem in philosophy and, in particular its discussion in artificial intelligence circles, see Dennett 1992.

9 On the subject of blending between the creative and critical disciplines, Lauri Ramey writes that:

Ideally, literature may be viewed as a totality that can be effectively represented by the image of the blended space itself. By allowing ourselves to freely imagine the critical and creative acts mapped over one another, we can perform some powerful acts of cognitive creativity and whole new worlds – circuses, even - can evolve.

(Ramey 2001)

The uses of domain and discourse blending in generating new approaches, combinations and forms is treated in Chapter 6.

Chapter Two

Modular Approaches to Creative Writing

2: APPROACHES TO CHARACTERISATION IN CREATIVE WRITING DISCOURSE

This chapter discusses the techniques of characterisation in fiction, highlighting research from social and personal cognition (Fiske and Neuberg 1990; Schank 1958; Secord and Backman 1974) which outlines a framework for reader's processing of information about character. The approaches to characterisation advocated in creative writing discourse (for example, Bickham 1997; Marshall 2000; Stein 1999; Ballon 2003; Edelman 2001; Frey 2000; Lukeman 2002) are then presented, and the epistemology of otherness which inheres in it is analysed. It is argued that through its uniformity of advice and injunction, discursive cohesion and insistence on readers' immediate recognition of and identification with characters, this user-centred approach to characterisation limits possibilities for the writer's representation and understanding of otherness. What I call its 'modular' approach results in the re-enforcement of particular models of otherness which endorse received and behaviourist ideas about human agency and identity coherence. It is argued that the view of self-other relations espoused in these approaches to characterisation relies on unreflexive models of selfhood and self-concepts which exhort the writer to conform to convention for characterisation by uncritically accepting his own being-towards-others.

2.1: MODELS OF CHARACTER

David Lodge writes that of all the elements of fiction which are recognisably discreet, character is the most difficult one to discuss in isolation (Lodge 1992: 67). That is because it is not achieved in isolation but is, to a large degree, facilitated or co-constructed by other narrative processes: emplotment, dialogue, narrative voice, point of view and the situation (place and time) in which the narrative unfolds. In the subtle narrative interplay between plot, place and style of mediation, characters emerge as the focus of the novel's animation. They move, speak, interact with other characters and with the world of the novel. Their relationship to others and to their surroundings is complicated; they act on and are acted upon by the world of the not-self in which the narrator finds them and, through this process, become more distinct.

It has been observed that despite a wealth of literature discussing the significance of fictional characters within particular dramatic and literary works, and the

consensus amongst writers that it is the most important aspect of fictional writing (Lodge 1992), very little work has been concerned explicitly with a theory of characterisation (Chatman 1978; Culpepper 2001; Culler 1975; Van Peer 1989)[1]. Assumptions made within literary discourse about the function of character in fiction have fallen into two categories: humanist and textual. Of the former, the formalist approach is the most heavily represented. Humanist notions suggest that character should be read and studied as a representation of people and is characterised by psychological and sociological speculation which seeks to uncover the motivation for the character's behaviour. In response to formalist criticisms that fiction is not an appropriate means with which to unearth the 'truth' about human nature, and that character is more productively regarded as a text effect which functions to serve narrative necessities, Wallace Martin has responded that:

> Our sense that (many) fictional characters are uncannily similar
> to people is not something to be dismissed or ridiculed, but a
> crucial feature of narration that requires explanation.

(Martin 1986: 120)

The explanation of the effect of characterisation on fiction readers, in its promotion of a feeling of identification or recognition of human attributes and behaviours, has drawn on theories of social cognition, interpersonal communication and sociolinguistics. Culpepper proposes a model for understanding characterisation in which the process is taken as a communicative act in which the dynamic process of meaning-making involves the writer, the reader, the context and the utterance (Culpepper 2001: 24). He argues that readers use cognitive strategies, reading and life experiences and textual cues to decode the meaning of character actions and behaviours and to predict where such attributes will lead the character in the context of the narrative. These reading strategies have variously been called schemata, scripts and cognitive models (Semino 1997; Schank and Abelson 1977). They could equally be called 'heuristics' (Duncker 1945; Gigerenzer and Reich 2000). There are distinct differences in the meaning of these terms but they correspond broadly in that they each offer a cognitive account of how the impression of understanding a person arises from a reader's active, if unconscious, reading of the character

information which the writer has encoded. Schemata are the reader's explanatory and predictive mechanisms in which experience, textual and contextual information combine to orient her towards an understanding of, and emotional identification with, the character, just as they apply in 'real life' to the understanding of people. They also serve to create expectations, based on reading experience, about how the character will act in future situations. Neisser describes schemata as "anticipations: they are the medium by which the past affects the future". (Neisser 1976:22).

Because its audience is one concerned with the techniques of production, and not the politics or other issues of representation, discussion of characterisation techniques in creative writing discourse has come to focus on just these aspects of 'anticipation', the better to harness the reader's swift engagement with character. In some respects it seems as though the wealth of publications offering advice on characterisation for the novel can be explained by the absence of an accepted and accessible model of characterisation within literary criticism.[2] Picking up on ideas from earlier commentators within literary philosophy (specifically Aristotle, Lajos Egri, EM Forster, and Vladimir Propp), the discourse has tended to ignore debates about representation and its problems and has reified the notion of character as the best vehicle for assuring reader-recognition and emotional engagement. There are, for obvious reasons, many differences between academic critiques of characterisation and popular advice about how to successfully undertake it. The principal difference lies in the differing conceptions of the character's coherence of personality and the writer's responsibilities with regards to representing what otherness is like:

> The process of selecting and organizing semes is governed by an ideology of character, implicit models of psychological coherence which indicate what sorts of things are possible as character traits, how these traits co-exist and form wholes, or at least which traits co-exist without difficulty and which are necessarily opposed in ways that produce tension and ambiguity.

(Culler 1975:237)

Whereas Culler, writing as an academic, can speak explicitly about an ideology of character - that complex of assumptions about the function and limits of

characterisation, its projection of coherent selfhood and its relationship to models of understanding or representing people – and the task of presenting traits which conflict with each other and problematise an easy understanding of others, creative writing discourse tends to eschew the idea of 'tension and ambiguity' and treat characters not as ways of understanding people, but as idealised, coherent textual subjects, or what James N. Frey calls *homo fictus*:

> When depicting the life of a fictional character, a novelist must choose to include only those impressions, thoughts, reflections, sensations, feelings, desires and so on that bear on the character's motivations development and decision-making - those aspects of character that will affect the way in which the character copes with the dilemmas he will face in the story.

> (Frey 2000: 2)

This ontological distinction between people and *homo fictus* is repeated throughout the guidebooks: "In fiction, real people aren't vivid enough. Good characters have to be constructed, not copied from actuality" (Bickham 1997:17). The distinction is only mentioned where it allows for humanist criticisms to be repelled. It also serves to undercut anticipated criticism about the difference between goal-oriented characterisation and other approaches to the representation of subjectivity. A few lines later, Bickham informs his readers that:

> Readers must make a leap of faith or intuition of some kind: they must use their imagination to picture physically and emotionally a person inside their own head, believe this imaginary person is somehow real and even care about him.

> (Bickham 1997: 17)

And so the 'non-real' construct of the character is replaced with the idea of the real person so as to maximise reader empathy, recognition and emotional involvement. This kind of ontological incoherence defines the discourse. Bickham's advice provokes a central question, which is unresolved by purely textual approaches and at which I will now look: how is it that characters can evoke such a response of recognition and identification from the reader? What social and cognitive processes influence the way that readers infer the humanity

from the description of a textual, fictive construct and imagine the character as real?

2.2: SOCIAL COGNITION ABOUT OTHERS

The analysis of how readers' impressions of characters are formed on the basis of inferences they draw from character behaviour has been studied from sociolinguistic, social psychological and cognitive science perspectives (Bennison, 1993; Bockting 1995, for example). These approaches take as their starting point the idea that the impression formation process which underpins evaluations of newly encountered people in real world settings is very similar to how readers create cognitive models of fictional characters during the reading process. In real world encounters with people, we have no opportunity to see into the mind of the acting others to understand the internal thoughts, traits and desires which (we assume) produces their externally observable behaviour. And so a series of inferential mechanisms, or heuristics, and cognitive schemata derived from prior knowledge and experience, are what we typically use to gain knowledge about others on the basis of their observable sociological properties and self-presentation. What ensues from these first steps at knowledge of another is the attribution of abstract psychological or temperamental characteristics (typically adjectival descriptors like 'grumpy', 'flirtatious', 'boring' etc.) on the basis of the behaviour within what Levinson (1992) called demarcated settings which frame the meaning of such behaviours.

This is one outcome of the heuristic evaluation process. More importantly though, and preceding these impressions, information about the actors' group or category membership (in terms of age, race, gender, occupation, social class) and social roles (kinship roles and function) are gleaned and used to trigger schemata which can then produce further information which are culturally salient. For example, in Western patriarchal systems 'mothers' tend to have particular traits more closely associated with nurturing roles and qualities, while 'fathers' are more closely associated with actions which re-enforce authority. In each case, contextual information such as the type of behaviour expected within the physical setting in which the character is acting will affect the interpretation at which a reader arrives about who or what the character is[3]. A character is regarded as being prototypical of their type if his or her behaviour does not

change from one context or setting to another. (A person is prototypically 'boisterous', for example, if they shout in a situation in which this behaviour is highly atypical, such as in a church).

The role of prototypes and categories in organising human thought about the external world is central to all of these readerly schema. The prototype theory of Eleanor Rosch (1980) after Wittgenstein (1958) disputes the Aristotlean view that categories distinguish between 'natural kinds'. In the Aristotlean view, membership of a category is defined on a binary basis and is determined by whether or not the object or person passes certain necessary conditions. The Roschean notion of prototypicality suggests that there is no binary system in place because categories are fluidly but hierarchically structured and can cope with non-obvious examples of a category by suggesting that it is simply less typical than other examples (a dodo is a less typical bird than a robin, for example). The continuum of category membership in this model enables us to think differently about the social categories which apply to character: a character labelled a detective, for example, if not distinguished by markers in the text from the prototypical detective of the novel's genre, will be inferred to possess such characteristics by the reader.

Fiske and Neuberg (1990) propose a model of steps involved in this kind of impression formation through unconscious categorisation. They suggest that people use visual and behavioural cues, categorisation techniques and experience-related knowledge schemata to create a mental picture of a newly encountered person which will in turn be used to produce expectations about that person's future behaviour, provide a context within which to interpret their present behaviour, and allow for attributes and traits to be assigned to them which are consistent with their 'type'. These are: Initial categorisation; Confirmatory categorisation; Recategiorisation; Piecemeal integration; Ongoing dynamic integration.

Let's consider how this process can be applied to the analysis of fictional types and the inferences drawn from their actions, starting with the example of Paul Auster's character Quinn (the writer/detective in *City of Glass*:

Initial categorisation: Quinn is male, middle-aged, a widower, white, a writer, an ersatz detective, a bereft father. At the story's beginning, he has no extant social roles: being an ex-husband, ex-father and ex-friend. Membership of particular classes generates an expectation about the actor possessing prototypical properties of that class. Since Quinn has no determinable social roles, his writing and, latterly his detecting activities, are the ones which are most salient in this regard. Prior knowledge about the detective genre interacts with the reader's knowledge about the properties of the detective type which Quinn exhibits to allow for assumptions to be made about his character, which are either re-enforced, refreshed or refuted by the evidence of his later behaviour in the text.

Confirmatory categorisation: Without any other information to the contrary, it may be temporarily assumed that the character has the prototypical qualities of the class or classes to which he belongs. If the text supports this interpretation, by demonstrating that Quinn is male, middle-aged, cynical, hard-drinking, aggressive and womanising, for example, then the impression is re-enforced. If not (if it transpires that he is young, abstemious, homosexual and idealistic), this impression has to be re-negotiated, either by assigning him to a new category or by de-centreing him within the 'detective' category, so that he is no longer conceived of as its prototype and the inheritance of attributes – the inference mechanism – is thwarted, in which case further inference processes need to be called upon.

Recategorisation: In the event that the prototype does not apply, the salience of the class to the character's identity may be downtoned or even dismissed, so that Quinn comes to be viewed from within a 'bereaving father' schema, for example, instead of a detective schema. Since the hardboiled detective prototype does not apply very well to him – does not allow for accurate inferences about traits and predictions about behaviour – it is replaced or its importance is relegated in the ongoing evaluation. In some cases, if the character behaves in a way which radically alters their basic category memberships (such as gender and race), the effect can be startling and can cause the reader to hesitate between two interpretations. Many texts exhibit these properties. Dill in Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* and Coleman Silk in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, for example,

achieve this effect when the cues which respectively established their gender and race are shown to be erroneous. In the case of *The Crying Game*, viewers have to decide between relinquishing their existing and well-developed impressions of the character as female, or to cling to it and dismiss the traumatizing "sign" of his/her male genitalia as irrelevant noise (Jordan 1991; Roth 1999).

Piecemeal integration: Or what Van Dijk (2000) calls textbase reading. Typically, people do not possess simply the properties of the prototype of the class to which they belong but have traits and habits which individuate them from this generic. These individuating signs or behaviours are encountered as episodic pieces of information about the character's behaviour which supererogate the details of the prototype. This is what Northrop Frye refers to as a rounded character – someone for whom the reader must always strive to dynamically update an impression (Frye 1957). Rounded characters, despite the underdefinition of the concept, act in ways which refute the applicability of the inherited prototype and, for this reason, engage the reader who is suspended between feeling confident about their familiarity with the character type and an awareness that the character is capable of behaving in ways which are inconsistent with that type.

Ongoing, dynamic negotiation of character impression is then achieved by incorporating new information (new behaviours and revelations) into the extant model or by changing the category schema which is being used to interpret the actions of the character.

There are many types of actions which provide cues to these kinds of inference processes. Herman (1995) and Culler (1975) discuss the linguistic behaviours which provide paralinguistic information about the speaker's register, dialect and accent amongst other things. Sociolinguistic analysis (such as Bernstein 1972; Labov 1972) of attitudes to such features demonstrates how these features in turn are used as clues to infer other attributes, such as social class, origin, ethnic background, age, level of education. All of these evaluations also, of course, are acts of social judgements which can serve to re-enforce or dispute existing prejudices about social groups. These kinds of attributions are culture-specific but their mechanisms, being cognitive, are often quite global and are not restricted to linguistic behaviour. Other information about class, gender, age,

race, profession, personality traits is indirectly presented by behaviour in dress sense, locomotive mannerisms, direct expressions of attitude, physical comportment and reaction to specific situations (Worman and Orr 1996; Vrij 1997). This is a way of saying that the presence of traits, and of the character's membership of particular social classes or typologies, are inferred from their behaviour in a dynamic way in which bottom-up processes, influenced largely by the reader's experience and their choice of schema through which to view the character, meet with top-down process such as category thinking and inference mechanisms.

In the next section I will present the approach which creative writing discourse advises novelists to adopt to characterisation so as to maximise the influence of these top-down processes by eliminating the possibility that the reader will be undecided as to which categories the character belongs, or that they might be inferred to belong to mutually exclusive categories.

2.3: CREATIVE WRITING DISCOURSE

The advice offered by creative writing instructors can be regarded as a single discourse system in that its intended audience (aspiring writers), its stated objective (advice on how to write successful novels) and its genre (instruction, demonstration) are the same. Typically, within a discourse system, one expects to encounter a dominant set of assumptions or values against which a rival, dissonant element competes for priority in what Fairclough calls the order of discourse. (Fairclough 1988). Mikhail Bakhtin argues that the novel, as a piece of discourse, is always 'heteroglossic'. This means that the novel is necessarily the site of tension between many different discourse modes and incompatible ideologies which are (locally) incoherent with the (global) consensus that emerge from the text (Bakhtin 1966). Heteroglossia is an ideological failsafe in that, according to Bakhtin, it prevents the novel from becoming a vehicle for the valorisation of particular political, religious or secular philosophies. It is for this reason that the novel remains, for some, the best means for critical engagement available in the creative domain (Petry 1950; Sternlieb 2002; Mastrogianakos 2003).

It is difficult to find a radically dissenting voice, or the evidence of great heterogeneity, in creative writing discourse. The rhetoric of commercial

imperatives, reader-orientation and disdain for 'amateur' or innovative styles of composition is endemic in the genre. There is also a strain of anti-intellectualism running through some of its injunctions against 'smart fiction'. Jack Bickham, a Professor at the University of Oklahoma and author of 65 novels[4], admonishes the aspiring writer who would pursue literary experimentation at the expense of alienating the reader:

> Wouldn't it be better not to consider yourself so smart? To try to figure out what contemporary readers like and then to work to give them the best stories of that type they ever read?

(Bickham 1997:4)

This dichotomy between the writer's pursuit of pleasure – Barthes's writerly texts (Barthes:1968) - against the reader's entitlement to pleasure through reading known story *types* is the bogus schism that runs through much of the discourse suggesting, as it does, that the reader is a singular static entity whose demands do not extend beyond the re-reading of familiar and consoling fictions and that the writer must elect to sate that demand or otherwise fail as a writer. In this view, creative writing, and characterisation as its main staple, becomes what Bickham calls a "fiction delivery system" (op. cit. :15) in which the objective is to convey the fictive information as effectively and economically as possible for fear that the reader will 'never go any further' (op. cit. :19) , will reject the object and stop consuming, if the expectation of recognisable characters with well-signalled motivations and intense conflicts is not gratified.[5]

This implies or assumes that the reader is the one to be pleasured, not the writer. The writer's 'pleasure' – or, more accurately, his incentive - comes from successfully attaining publication, a readership and attendant (financial) rewards. In other words, the writer's benefit is an ancillary by-product which is contingent upon pleasing the reader through the creation of a 'text of pleasure' (Barthes 1968). Pleasure, in this view, for the reader derives from discovering familiar people in familiar places; revisiting sites of conflict which have their own narrative logic and prescribed outcome. The pleasure in this could be what Slavoj Žižek, after Jacques Lacan, has described as the automatonic pleasure of encountering the Real which is experienced when a story is resolved, or a story element occurs, just as we had expected it but which expectation had been

repressed because it constitutes a confrontation 'with the Real of one's desire' (Žižek 1995:74). The audience or reader's anticipation about 'what a character will do', and its validation within the story, is both flattering (in that it approves of the reader's inferences) and consoling (it re-enforces the idea that the world is familiar and knowable) and thereby constitutes the reader's reward for understanding the types encountered, deciphering the laws of narrative logic and knowing how to read its signs.

In all of this, characters are the vehicle for the delivery of this pleasure and they must, if the reader is not to be thwarted, be drawn in gross outline, their signals outsized to aid the reader's recognition of their type.

It is with this process of 'recognition' that creative writing discourse identifies itself. This recognition is not simply of the sensory kind where prior familiarity with the character's physical type allows the reader to summon up a visual accompaniment to the textual fictive dream. The power of recognition lies in its priorness: it means *immediately* recognising the character's motive, emotion, goals and the possibilities which exist for their resolution of these goals within the genre which, in turn, must itself be recognised by clearly signalled indicators. This recognition involves the recurrent use of markers, signifiers, of character traits and intentions and, most centrally, of category membership. Recognition is the key to the pleasure delivery system and, to succeed, it requires constant iteration. As Bickham says:

> All those (character) tags you devise will be waved often, not just
> occasionally, as they might appear in real life.

(Bickham 1997:18)

Real life is presented in this discourse as the site of lifelessness, chaos and contingency upon which it is fiction's job to improve. In this context, improvement means cohesion and rewarding the reader who knows the psychological, historical and teleological rules of the genre and the novel's world. 'Improvement' is the imposition of a rational set of schema which can account for how people are the way they are:

> Real people act on impulses that grow out of things in their
> personalities that even they sometimes don't understand. But in

fiction there is considerably less random chance... It's just one of several ways that fiction surpasses and improves upon life. And that's a good thing, isn't it?

(Bickham 1997:19)

This universe of the novel is one where the contingent and the inexplicable aspects of real experience – of the enigma of the Other - hoves away from sight and are replaced by conventions of explication and orientation. This is its consoling function. This is particularly the case in explaining character behaviour where action is always preceded by self-interested, rationalised decisions. Arbitrary decisions and prevarication are anathema to this clearly-signalled account of human behaviour. To do this effectively, creative writing discourse proposes what might be called an ergonomics of characterisation – a methodology which places the reader's pleasure-through-consolation at its centre and which lends coherence to experience by always presenting the integrated, recognisable and rational side of character. Without expressing any concern about the politics of representation, creative writing discourse promotes a particularly limiting set of rules to ensure that characterisation functions properly to always orient the reader within the comfort of their own expectations. This follows on from Aristotle's injunction against the intrusion of the irrational features of everyday life into poetic representation: "events that are impossible but plausible are preferable to ones that are possible but implausible" (Aristotle 1961: 66).

The eradication of contingency results from harmonising the signifying potential of the different elements which comprise the characterisation process. The next section presents creative writing discourse's treatment of some of these elements and how they are used to create a character impression which is inetgrated and coherent.

2.4: ELEMENTS OF CHARACTER COMPOSITION

It's physically impossible to work on dialogue, viewpoint, characterisation and all the other aspects of writing a novel at the same time. When the process is broken down into its steps, it's clear that creating a novel is, in fact, a linear process.

(Marshall 2000: x)

The humanising of character proceeds by equating broadly recognisable human behaviour with character traits which are the outlined in exposition and description, often using a technique of gross relief. Characterisation, within creative writing discourse, requires that each of the components which comprise the impression formation process cohere in the way in which they decode 'character essence'. They conform to most of the aspects of the prototype or, in Wittgensteinian terms, have an abundance of family resemblances (Wittgenstein 1967).

Within the discourse, character is defined in various phases and types of composition: name, physical description, internal state, (historical) relationship with other antagonists or characters, membership of social and psychological categories, for example. Ewen Marshall advises writers to use a profiling method to enable the successful exposition of the lead character and to allow for a smooth economical binding of character to action (Marshall 2000). This requires the writer to explicitly describe, in the form of what looks like a database entry, what Lajos Egri calls the three dimensions of character: sociological, psychological and physiological (Egri 1946). It is advised that this should be done in advance of the composition of the story. James N. Frey suggests two methods for getting to know the character: interview and biography. (Frey 2000: 14). In each case, the objective is the same: what is called intimate knowledge and understanding of character will proceed from understanding their category memberships, their appearance, their objectives and how these features interact within the context of the situation in which the novel places them.

I have used the term 'modular' to describe the approach of this discourse (and will use it from now on) because in its willingness to impart the rules of novel writing, it decomposes the process into formal, discreet and teachable parts of which characterisation is just one. It technicises the novel through the adoption of a partially algorithmic approach to its composition. Even the titles of some of these books resemble those of manuals which ordinarily concern themselves with mechanical assembly or DIY (*How to Write a Damn Good Novel: A Step-by-Step No Nonsense Guide to Dramatic Storytelling; Writing Fiction Step by Step*) as well as conveying a corrective message (*The 38 Most Common Fiction Writing*

Mistakes: (And How to Avoid Them); Write fiction the easy way!: how to enjoy writing fiction plus secrets to revisions!).

'Modular' seems appropriate because it describes the fate of any subject of study which, once introduced as a formal discipline in educational institutions and guidebooks, necessarily becomes an object of utility which will come to have a unitary order and sequence imposed on it which the process of instruction will then naturalise. In this way, creative writing, and in particular, characterisation, is in danger of becoming another discipline of the information sciences. Characterisation is always discussed as an 'element' of fiction, a technique which bears no relation to other kinds of self-other relations, social interactions or representations of otherness. It is also decomposed into further submodules, which the discourse advises must cohere. This coherence re-enforces the impression which was formed by the inheritance of attributes from prototypical reasoning.

Marshall (2000) lists 17 submodules of characterisation.[6] The most important ones, from the point of view of understanding the representational conventions advised within creative writing discourse, are those which allow for prompt recognition of the character's membership of particular social, narratological and ontological categories, so that schemata or heuristics which allow the reader to develop a coherent impression of what the character is likely to do in the world of the novel can be activated. I will briefly discuss the discourses approach to three character concepts: name, type and objective.

2.4.1: NAME

> A well-heeled New York Attorney might be named Roger or Eliott or Arthur. But those names wouldn't suit a Cuban drug lord working out of Miami, who might be called Jesus or Roberto or Jaime.

(Marshall 2000: 15)

The name, being the first mark of identification, works on a number of levels: referential, connotative and sociological. Orson Scott Card advises that no two characters can have the same name or names that sound alike, as the lack of sign difference can lead to reader confusion about who is being referred to (Card

2003). In Marshall's example, a cosmetic social realism is being employed with the aid of conventional and highly conservative ideas about class, ethnicity and names. Modular creative writing espouses an unreflexive attitude to names, suggesting that, in effect, any name which is plausible (meaning socially typical), differentiated from others and does not refer to an already existing entity or character, will suffice.

Other methods for generating names which are proposed within the discourse include consulting the telephone directory, guides for naming babies and the use of name generation software which takes into account the fact that different genres have different subrules for naming conventions (Bickham 1997; Frey 2000; Marshall). The function of names – their playful potential – is not a feature of modular creative writing discourse, as it is in literary theory and semiotics, as though to suggest that the polysemy of the sign, and the philosophy of naming (onomastics) upon which its discourse rests are irrelevant to the reader, because it leads to a diffusion of meaning as opposed to a constraining of it.

This mismatch between literary philosophy and creative writing discourse, in terms of the amount of attention devoted to the discussion of names in the latter, suggests that the topic is part of the Other discourse which is excluded from creative writing because it undermines its epistemology and, in this way, reveals its inability to account for some features of naming which are problematic to its approach. I have devoted chapter four to this topic.

2.4.2: CHARACTER TYPE

Although it tries to distance itself from accusation of stereotyping by deriding the use of uni-dimensional characters, modular discourse retreats to a position of conventionality and formalism in its espousal of character-types. Schmidt's *Master Characters* revisits Joseph Campbell's mythology via behavioural profiling to devise 45 character types whose traits and responses to particular phenonema can provide all necessary animation to the fictional arena. Linda Edelstein's *Guide to Character Traits*, (Edelstein 1999) attempts a decomposition of human behaviour into complexes of desires, habits and tendencies. Character behaviour, like human behaviour, she argues is always context-dependent but reveals itself through the actualisation of traits such as introversion, dominance, blame avoidance (see Plotnik 1996). Trait theory, as a

branch within the psychology of personality, has been applied to many social forms of type classification and has been accused of over-extending itself in an attempt to explain human behaviour in particular settings and, as a scientific model, it fails to meet Popper's criteria of predictivity (Popper 1972) in that it only seeks to explain or narrativise past behaviours and says nothing about how these might change in the future or otherwise impact upon a character's behaviour.

> Character is like looking at a box I hold up in front of your eyes.
> You clearly see the side facing you. You can know that segment
> of the box, unless I have concealed portions of it from you. But
> you are naïve if you think that one side is all there is... We see
> (characters) embedded in this context or that and, over time, we
> learn all about the sides that had previously been out of view.

(Edelstein 1999: 8)

Edelstein implies that the character of others, like their personality, is not unknowable or in any way the outcome of the writer- or reader- self's projection or desire, but is simply multi-faceted: it reveals itself completely in increments when context elicits the actualisation of particular traits. Compare this with Paul Auster's remark on his approach to characterisation:

> This is how novels are written. You don't know where it's coming
> from and you don't know why these characters are inside you.
> And if you did know, you probably wouldn't have to write the
> book. You'd be a journalist, I guess. A journalist is someone who
> knows where his story comes from, but a novelist doesn't. That's
> why the writing of a novel is a great adventure for the writer.

(Auster 2000)

At the root of the modular approach is the argument that the writer must know in advance of riting why the character is there and fashion them in such a way that they appear cohesive to the reader. Extensive research from the psychology of creativty and testimonies of writers suggest that this degree of advance planning is greatly at odds with the process which underpins discovery and innovation (See: Gardner 1993; Csizzentmihalyi 1990; Boyd 1991). There is also an elision between the cohesion of personality and the cohesion of the construct

of the dramatic character which is evident in the enchainment of "real people" with "believable characters" in the title of the first chapter of Edelstein's book. The real or authentic character she argues, is one who is believable and believability is a product of conforming to expectation. Typology, with regards to characterisation, has the same problem as trait theory within the field of psychology: it always tends towards stasis in making an object of others. It can predict nothing because human behaviour is highly contingent, its motivation sometimes hard to discern, and instead imposes an interpretive structure on only the barest outline of observations.

2.4.3: STORY GOAL, OBJECTIVE OR MOTIVATION

> In a well constructed story, the events are causal. Event B cannot happen unless event A happens. The cause and effect nature of events makes for a finely woven tapestry.

<div align="right">(Frey 1987: 79)</div>

Motivation is a third key element in the discourse about characterisation. Unconsciously, because the writer (and, later, the reader) must work within the boundaries of categories for representing other people, these categories become interlinked through (often unspoken) causal mechanisms. For example, details about a character's development and background foreshadow, and are used to account for, her motivation and personality. Similarly, gender delimits the kinds of characteristics which are predicted or easily recognised by the reader. Ewen Marshall's hymn to foresightedness, in advising the development of a database in which these qualities are kept in account, is intended to enable the writer to better anticipate the character's key motivations and likely reactions to the situations in which the narrative places them. The result is a list of restrained categories which trammel the writer into a particular narrative code and epistemology of otherness from the off.

A stubborn relic of behavioural psychology infuses such a model of human behaviour. In the area of character exposition, each tic of the character's behaviour must be recognisable, to the reader, as a response to a presented stimulus. Behaviour is posited as intentional and must correspond to solving the problem or achieving the stated objective. In this method, there is no room to manouevre out of the nexus of cause and effect. The reader must know why an

action has been undertaken and the plausibility of that explanation is highly correlated to its conventionality. Bickham discusses the criticisms that such an approach to characterisation writing often elicits and argues that it is not the job of fiction to represent people *as they are* but to amplify their qualities for the purposes of reader comprehension and engagement. This insistence on the orientative function of writing inflects the approach to character to the extent that it is advised that each element in the process be designed so that it re-enforces the impression of character which is formed by the others. In other words, traits, name, social category membership, actions and motivations must correspond in terms of the character impression they tend to generate.

2.4.4: Inter-relatedness of Traits

> In fiction, characters and their backgrounds are almost always
> much more consistent than real people in real life.

<div align="right">(Bickham 1992: 19)</div>

The first question to which a reader applies a character-centred heuristic is 'Who is this character?'. This is in effect a series of questions which together centre on the identity markers of the character. When they cohere in expected patterns they provide the answer to the main question which is - what *type* of character is this? Knowing the character's type (and closeness to the prototype) produces an anticipation about the behaviour that can be expected from them, as well as outlining their quest and hinting at whether or not it can be achieved. In this way, everything is subsumed to the task of profiling the character in decodable ways: within detective fiction the type 'detective' typically implies 'male' and 'middle-aged', with some additional elements including 'cynical' and 'divorced' and so on, as discussed earlier. James N. Frey suggests that novel characterisation of detectives should involve:

> ...selecting features that are the antithesis of those of most
> detective characters – features that have become stereotypes –
> old, fat and alcoholic. Your decisions on what characteristics to
> include in your characters should be based primarily on two
> considerations: breaking stereotypes and good orchestration.

<div align="right">(Frey 2000: 9)</div>

Noah Lukeman suggests that innovation in this concatenation of attributes and action properties is both productive but also highly limited: one can't change more than one attribute without changing the genre, which Marshall suggests results in a failed novel because selection of genre is the first step to success (Marshall 2001:16). As a result, good-natured teenage girls are not *realistic* detectives. Realism, or believability, another cornerstone of fiction, is premised on allowing heuristics to work effectively in a way that does not confuse the reader. These heuristics are probabilistic information of sociologist and psychological types. Apart from re-asserting the principles of convention at the expense of innovation, what this reveals is the atomisation of characterisation into very strict rules of transformation. Within creative writing discourse, there are highly developed rules as to what is permissible within the system of fiction. Even departing from convention is highly regulated. Frey states that:

> The idea is to be creative within accepted form, as the architect
> will change the corners, pillars, slope of the roof, yet still have all
> the bedrooms, bathrooms and closets his clients have come to
> expect.

(Frey 2000: 8)

The analogy is revealing: the client's expectations are the most important object to be considered in the creation of character and innovation, if it is to be attempted cannot change the fundamentals, only the ornamentals. Creative writing discourse concatenates these traits in such a way as to reward the application of conventional inferential schema on the reader's behalf: a character's background is correlated to and often explains their behavioural traits. These traits are signalled by actions but are re-enforced by details about occupation and temperament. The name must only differentiate them from other characters and must be consistent with someone of their ethnicity, class and age. The traits which are produced by these assignations are what in turn produce the character's potential for action. This action will not take place until it is provoked by a suitable stimulus, which must be presented to the reader that she can understand the reasons for the character's behaviour. A stimulus must produce a response and at all times the character must behave optimally. So goes the logic.

This is a model of characterisation in which the techniques which amplify reader's recognition and emotional involvement with the character by vaunting rationalist conventions, and which valorise the reader's own ego, are presented as the only techniques worth pursuing. I will now try to develop these criticisms and account for the dominance of this particular epistemological framework in creative writing discourse by looking at how the ethic of reader-centred 'design' runs through its prescriptions for effective characterisation.

2.5: "USER-ORIENTED" CHARACTERISATION

Remember what the reader wants. Don't try to inflict your author concerns on her. You must give her what she wants at the start, or she'll never go any further[...] Good fiction characters ... are never, ever real people. You have to provide shortcut identifying characteristics that stick out all over him, you have to make him practically a monster - for readers to see even the dimmest outlines.

(Bickham 2002: 12, 18)

The term 'user-orientation' has associations with the role of design within the world of human-computer interaction in the improvement of productivity and user comfort (Wickens & Gordon-Becker 1997). The approach of user-centered design is to posit a causal link between these two concepts. In the world of the text, the reader is more productively engaged with her task when she is comfortable about the objective she is being asked to attain, that is when she is familiar with all the elements and objects and norms of the fictional world. Similarly, the writer is productive when he is oriented towards a specific end and has a method for achieving it. Its objective of user orientation is the same as that that of other information design disciplines: to maximise the flow of information to the reader by minimising potential areas of confusion or frustration.

Other disciplines within the information sciences have a similar approach to text as modular creative writing. "Document design" revisits reader or reception theory from an engineering point of view (Schriver 1996) and does away with the troubling notion of the inestimable role of subjectivity in the reader's completion of the text by making of these responses a probabiility-based object to be factored into the document design process. Thus the reader becomes an

element. Whereas this empirical and behaviourist approach to composition applies itself mostly to technical writing, textbooks web pages and graphics, its influence – its philosophy of reader-orientation and its assumption that the only function of communication is the transfer of information – heavily mirror those of creative writing discourse, within which communication functions have become synonymous with the transference of information to the exclusion of other possibilities.

Other language functions such as performance, confusion, description, criticism (see Newmeyer 2000) therefore become occluded. The iconoclast of usability approaches to web design, Jacob Nielsen, echoes modular approaches to creative writing when he writes of non-conformist web design that:

> Every page that doesn't conform to expected behavior and design conventions undermines users' ability to build a conceptual model of the web, and thus reduces their ability to use other sites with ease, confidence, and pleasure.

> (Nielsen 2002)

The recurrence of the fixed notions of 'ease' and 'pleasure' as somehow cognate and interdependent is the same ellipsis which one finds in modular approaches to creative writing. This is evident in Marshall's argument that novel writing benefits writer and reader when it proceeds on a step-by-step basis. Information models of all kinds - text usability, information architecture and readerly-oriented schema for the presentation of text - are increasingly prevalent in universities programmes and reading lists (such as Fleming 1998; Nielsen 2002; Hartley 1994). The very idea of avant-gardism or experimentation is prohibited in advance by virtue of their insistence on adhering to established conventions. This approach, in common with those in creative writing discourse, fetishises the convention by sacralising it and dehistoricising it ("it's how people read"), giving rise to a philosophy of self-justificatory, circularly-argued conservatism ("so it's what they expect").

By pointing this out, I seem to be implying that this is necessarily an invidious development. This is, of course, debatable. Since the stated objective of many of these books and courses in creative writing is to facilitate commercial

publication, it can be argued that it makes sense that advice, such as that given by editor Noah Lukeman (Lukeman 2002), about how publishing gatekeepers read and evaluate manuscripts for publication assists writers in their task. But this depends ultimately on what one regards as the writer's task. The objection to creative writing discourse, the modular approach, which I am sustaining is that it does not address this question because it does not accept that it needs to: it *knows* that publication and reader consolation are those objectives. And it suggests that publication criteria are somehow machinic and uniform, another predictable, ahistorical element in the system of the novel which operates with natural laws. It is because of this that the attitude to characterisation which it espouses has the effect of calling out to the aspiring writer to align his subjectivity and being-towards-character to its naturalised conventions. It estimates the novel's value solely on its value as a commodity.[7]

This atomisation of the act of novel writing is coterminous with other developments within what might be called the "democratisation of creativity". Models of creativity have been a concern for mainstream psychology since the 1950s (Simonton 1996) and interest in the field has centred around descriptive, systemic approaches, exemplified by Newell and Simon's computational modelling of creative acts giving rise to the field of artificial creativity (Newell and Simon 1972; Lansdown 2001; Schank 1981). Attempts in cognitive science and artificial intelligence to develop models of creativity which are strictly deterministic and rule governed mirror the rationalist and positivistic approach to creative writing which can be found in the burgeoning number of university courses, self-help tutorials and guides to writing which have arisen in the past twenty years. These factors conspire to present the creative process of novel writing as the outcome of determinable modular functions.

A fear of the automation of creative acts is unfounded on the basis of low level of achievements in this field. But I am not making the point that acts of creativity should be, or even can be, devoid of the application of rules or rule complexes but that, in exhorting aspiring writers to always project a coherent and untroubled knowledge of another in the process of characterisation, this discourse validates the writers tendency towards unthinkingness, which because he is subject to normal social and cognitive influences, are the very tendencies from which he

should be trying to escape and interrogate. The availability of rules, delivered with such strong and admonitory rhetoric, serves to normalise these conventions and, in so doing, allows the writer to remain in the comfort of his own prematurely closed experience of others.

2.6: DISCOURSE AND WRITER-ORIENTATION

The reason aspiring writers might adhere to modularised rules is that it provides a model of novel writing which is as writer-oriented as it is reader-oriented. I mean that the process of modular characterisation provides a means for the author to create and preserve his own sense of a coherent subjectivity (or his "consistent self-ideology" as Epstein calls it (Epstein 1970)) as a social self and a confident, 'prototypical' writer through a mastery of the rules for representing others. Modular creative writing encourages the writer to step into the position of authority, to assume what Pierre Macherey calls the author's role as God, which already has its own battery of techniques and presuppositions for presenting people through comprehensive knowledge of their thoughts and actions (Macherey 1977). The danger is that the writer allows himself to ascend to the role of the author as constructed in public discourse and proceeds to enact the priveleged and inexplicable mastery of others associated with the Author function (Foucault 1977). In this, the writer re-experiences a kind of Heideggerean 'thrownness': his subjectivity has already placed him outside of direct contemplation of the object (the character) but he cannot know what the nature of his dislocation is and what options, if any, exist outside of the position of God into which conventional characterisation techniques place him (Heidegger: op cit). Owing to the homoglossic rhetoric of modular creative writing, he does not necessarily know that an alternative being-towards-character exists.

The writer writes from within a conventional tradition of self-other relations but his consideration of this problem is non-transparent and rushes towards resolution by the quickest way – by adopting the conventions which are ready-to-hand.[8] We can see why this matters so much, if we consider Kundera's comments on the novel's main epistemological concern:

> All novels, of every age, are concerned with the enigma of the
> self. As soon as you create an imaginary being, a character, you

> are automatically confronted by the question: what is the self?
> How can the self be grasped?

> (Kundera 2003: 13)

Modular creative writing proposes an instant problem to this question. It is not an investigative response but an effective, closing one. One of the principle reasons why the modular method of characterisation is popular is that it permits the novelist to function as an author without reflecting on how his knowledge-authority is constituted or validated. In other words, it is expedient and pragmatic. For a novelist to write without certain knowledge of the essential details of others (the safety net of a shared epistemology and ontology of otherness) is to flirt with apophasis: to risk having nothing that can be said or nothing to say. This would be to subscribe to what Peter Haidu calls the "tradition of ineffability with regards to the sublime" (Haidu 1995) or to allow the irresolvable epistemological question of what it is like to be another to overwhelm and displace the purpose of the novel which is to illustrate and exalt these kinds of uncertainties. That is to say that any alternative to the modular approach to characterisation treads carefully between the assimilation and reproduction of dominant representations of another and a refusal to acknowledge otherness as something about which anything can be said.

To see how the writer-self part of this highly particular self-other relationship impacts upon the characterisation process, requires a description of the novel as an encounter between the writing self and fictive others in which social forms of cognition about others is a major force. In this view, at the centre of the novel, articulating outwards its representation of action and character, and the intersection of the two, is the authorial voice: a self dreaming of others.[9]

To be able to characterise requires that a novelist makes assumptions about his self, and others, and the relationship between the two. In the modular approach this assumption is that he has complete knowledge of his own expository character (what T.S. Eliot called his 'writer's idiom' (Ricks 1989)) and is satisfied at the imaginability and possibility of faithful representation of others and that there is a natural and describable transparency of the difference between these two positions of being. This presents an image of the novelist as a Cartesian subject disinterestedly surveying the objects of his own fictive

imagination and describing and interpreting their actions. As Heidegger argues, this kind of being-alongside-self, in some magical space of contemplation in which objects are directly presented to consciousness, is itself the primary myth of rationalism (Heidegger 1962). One never gets outside of the symbolic structure and system of relations to consider others unblinkered and afresh: one is always-already implicated in ways of thinking which owe nothing to the ego and to which the self is mostly blind. This is the problem of representation which runs all the way through the novel: an epistemological problem which the novelist cannot solve by argument or demonstration and which modular approaches advise the writer to elide by concatenating the external signifiers of people to reveal the character thoughts and desires. And yet, this very problem is also the liberating attraction of writing fiction – knowledge of others can be presented without the need for empirical or rational validation.

Given this freedom to ignore this first problem of knowing and to avail of stylistic and narrative conventions for representing others without the need for explicit accounting of how any such knowledge can finally be authenticated, it could be argued that the writer has an obligation to reflect upon what assumptions he makes about the coherence and transparency of his own self-concept and how it influences him in the task of narrative characterisation. In other words, there is benefit, or a different form of pleasure, in reflecting on what kinds of tendencies underlie the writer's way of seeing others and realising them as characters in his writing. In order to consider what this benefit might be – and how it can be labelled as such – I would like to examine the effect of the writer's self-concept on his tendency to accept conventions for representation, bridge the epistemological divide between self and other and bring certainty and premature closure to the task of characterisation.

2.6.1: THE EFFECT OF THE WRITER'S SELF-CONCEPT ON CHARACTERISATION

The writer works as a self, partly constituted in language and symbolic exchange with others. His concept of self, being dependent in this way on others, is always at stake when he writes or thinks of others, and in ways of which he is not necessarily conscious. In this way, his theory of mind about others, about how they can be represented or understood, inflects his approach to characterisation in that some characters are implicitly identified with aspects of self, and some with

aspects of the self's other. For this reason, a model of how the self is socially constituted can help to sketch what is at stake when a self begins to essentialise the nature of others in fictional writing.

In *The Self Concept*, Victor Gecas refers to the self as: "a reflexive phenomenon which develops in social interaction and is based on the social character of human language" (Gecas 1982:1). Two prevailing theoretical strands in the study of the self-concept dominate 20th century psychology – the social constructionism of James (1950) and Mead (1946) such as this and the cognitivist approach. Broadly, their differences centre on the importance of social interaction to which James and Mead refer: whether identity is something which can exist in isolation from the cultural codes by which it is rendered intelligible. That is, whether identity is bounded from the world (internal, dualistic) or whether it comes into being only through interaction with the world (reflexive, adualistic) and, if so, what is involved in this process (see Gergen 1985; Harre 1979). The relevance of these models to the novelist is this: cognitivism suggests that the writer and his characters are individuated and integrated objects and so the writer, in describing another, is not affected by his need to differentiate himself from, or identify with, what he describes. He can therefore be said to describe *authentically* in that he is capable of penetrating the other's mind and describing its contents. This is part of the supporting set of myths which circulate within modular creative writing discourse:

> Of course you should and must look into your character's head and heart. And some of your insights must be given to your reader, so she can know about the character, sympathise with the character.

(Bickham 1997:15)

The idea that you can look into your character's head and heart, or penetrate them as Frey puts it (Frey 2000:10) is alluring but it could also legitimately be called infantile in the sense that it is a theory of mind the like of which children maintain during developmental stages. In this way of knowing, other people are diaphanous objects who/which contain emotions and thoughts which are clearly visible to the God-author. Dana Brand discusses this problem of omniscience in reference to the role of the flaneur and the detective in fiction:

> The flaneur demonstrates what the reader would like to believe
> but does not, that the urban crowd can be epistemologically and
> imaginatively mastered.

> (Brand 1990: 220)

Epistemological mastery of others is the basic assumption of modular characterisation and is supported by a magical version of the cognitivist view of selfhood. The social interactionism approach champions the view that identity is constructed in encounters and by the continuous exchange of information between self and other – an ongoing co-construction of identity in which roles are assigned, disputed and competed over. The outcome of this approach, and its popularity in non-positivist traditions within the social sciences and humanities, is in exposing the fluidity of self-identity and its anchoring in social life. It has given rise to radical theses of selfness which confront and dismiss folk psychological models about the immanent and durable soul-like self which accompanies an individual through all phases of being. The persistent myth of the eternal self is something which modular discourse advances and, against which a novelist who wishes to reconsider the nature of self-other relations in fiction should work. This can be achieved by bringing a reader into conflict with their own essentialised views about the identity of others drawing attention to what Heidegger calls a projection of being-towards-self onto being-towards-an-Other (Heidegger 1956). The logical extension of this secularisation of selfhood and the questioning of the sovereignty of the rational and immanent ego are hinted at in Daniel Dennett's notion of the self-concept as the outcome of ongoing experimentation with fictive selves (Dennett 1989), Goffman's stages and roles analogy (Goffman 1959) and Gecas's summary of Epstein's theory of the self-concept. These suggest, however, that the fluidity of the self-concept is always frozen during representation, either expressed or internally formed, of self and others:

> Epstein suggests that the self-concept can best be viewed as a
> theory that a person holds about himself as an experiencing,
> functioning being in interaction with the world. He would have
> been accurate if he had conceptualised the self-concept as a
> self-ideology – when it comes to our self-concepts, we are much

less interested in theory testing than in self-affirmation and self-protection.

(Gecas 1982: 4)

Most twentieth century views of the self-concept adhere to the view that the task of the self-concept is the maintenance of a positive sense of identity; the ego sees the world in such a way as to assign the self to categories with positive values within the culture in which the individual is embedded. Coherent *characterisation* of self through action and appearance (the public self which is validated and defined in concert with others) and the need for positive self-esteem override the drives for self-enquiry or hypothesis testing and result in the exclusion or facile resolution of uncertainty within the self-concept and, resultantly, the self's view of others. The self-narrative is not one of enquiry but one of affirmation. The self-concept, thus viewed, is a major force in projecting meaning onto the world and closing off routes to other interpretations. Cognition about other people (characters) plays a major part in these processes. It is also the case that in order to affirm its worth, the self disguises its projections and methods of judgement, and explains away contradictions in its reasoning as properties of the world outside the self. It is these contradictions, which are themselves illuminating and the object of critical enquiry, which modular discourse disposes of in its question for narrative cohesion.

As argued, this rush to closure and certainty in judgement about people obtains in aspects of storytelling. The main tendencies of the self-concept which are to relevant to the writer's task of characterisation could be summarised as follows:

- The novelist-self's denial of its own mutability and the role of contingent factors in the creation and maintenance of the self-concept;

- The will to differentiate the writing self from others – to identify the self positively by comparison with a negative reference group;

- Conceptualisation of others is more influenced by the need for positive self-image than for an understanding of the nature of otherness.

What these traits can result in, for the novelist, is an approach to characterisation which has at its objective the affirmation and maintenance of his authorial self across time and narrative at the expense of an investigation of possible

techniques for the presentation of otherness. In order to maintain a positive and coherent self-image as a writer and social being, the writer may tend to assume a masterful position in relation to others. They also describe how the features of the self-narrative influence ways of incorporating others into a narrative-based theory about the world. How one *needs* to view the self imposes restrictions on how one views others. It provides a way of thinking about how the speaking subject, the novelist or his narrator in this case, fabulates itself out of the material it has to hand (social codes, cultural artefacts, myth, other people) and shows the role of narrative which facilitates this through sustaining the appearance of a coherent identity and, more importantly, how such narratives invariably involve other people from whom the speaking self is differentiated or with whom identified. The novel's characters and imagined reader become instruments with which the narrative centre can make itself and the world cohere in some fixed relation.

In the *The Writing of Fiction*, Theodor Goodman describes what I think of as the novelist's principal responsibility to others, given the unfettered freedom he has for creating experimental selves:

> It is only when, in ignorance or wilfulness, we attempt to clamp the type about some unique individual, that the truth and the reality vanish, leaving nothing but the narrow, the suspect utility of superstition or prejudice. Whatever the determination of the type, some degree of fashioning has entered into it; any shrewd sceptic can prove the manipulation by pointing out the fingerprints of our disregarded mental handling.
>
> (Goodman 1961:118)

According to the model of the self-concept which places the drive-for-coherence at its centre, and the essentialising of other people as a constituent of this, our disregarded mental handling is a prevailing trend. It is what happens when the writer does not intervene or does not know how to recognise his epistemology of otherness as just that: nonexperiments in understanding other subjectivities. If the author does not regard his characters as people (however provisional their peopleness might be), and have some idea that representing people is not a matter of relating what everyone knows, then the novel becomes nothing but a vehicle

for the recapitulation of known things and a vision of the universe as a deterministic experiment involving the conflicting and rationalistic actions of different types of being. Alternative epistemologies of otherness in which the assumptions no longer apply, or are tested, can be developed if the rationalism which quietly occupies the centre of modular discourse is put under stress.

2.7: CONCLUSION

In presenting a model of how readers decode character and, from it form an impression of the character as a coherent self and stable member of particular social categories, it was argued that modular creative writing advice was designed to synchronise with the reader's inferential schemata, and re-enforce their anticipation of character traits through effective design in each of the componential parts of character. Name, function, sociological categories, traits and objective are aligned so as to reflect the essential quality of the character and in turn to allow the reader to feel comfortable in her expectations of peoples actions, attributes and fixed membership of particular classes. Essentialist reasoning which often inflects our attitude to social categories, and which it is the novel's job to challenge, is the unacknowledged presence in this discourse. The manifestation of this model of representing otherness is apparent in injunctions to:

Harmonise all facets of character traits to each other by firstly deciding on the character's membership of ontological, sociological and psychological categories; name, gender, age and behavioural mannerisms can then re-enforce, or only slightly amend the idea that the character is a prototype of these categories.

Explain character in a causal way by the presence of a trait and a threat. A character cannot behave below the threshold of their established capability – that is they are always rational and always function at the limit of that rationality.

I argued that writers need to understand their own writerly and evaluative tendencies in order to understand how their own subjectivity is interpellated within such advice and their consideration of self-other relations aborted. The assuredness of tone with which creative writing discourse proceeds tends to dampen reflectiveness as it explains deviation from its rules as failure (by which it is understood that the only form of failure is commercial failure).

The discovery of opposing and alternative epistemologies of otherness is part of the novels' brief. The next chapter looks at ways of reflecting on the possibility of the self's understanding of otherness to develop a characterisation technique which thwarts the reader's inferential process, not just by making inferences result in slowed-down or imperfect recognition, but by expressing subjectivity in a way in which the elements of recognition are themselves troubled and another more radical epistemology of otherness is promoted. The conventions of modular creative writing discourse insist on re-affirming the familiar and affording the reader maximal orientation with regards to character, genre and the world of the novel. And so the approach which I am seeking will involve estranging the reader from the familiar and producing misrecognition where recognition usually triumphs – the uncanny.

CHAPTER 2 NOTES

1 There are, of course, definitions of character. According to Theodor Goodman, a character is an agent, who per force of this description, carries out some actions in the world of the novel; who does things necessary to enhance the authenticity of the fictive illusion and who embodies certain values which are reflective of the novel's world (Goodman 1961:109). According to Goodman, a lead character often metonymically represents the world of which he is a part, either through his attitude to it or fate in it or, in the case of allegory and historical fiction, as an embodiment of its qualities. Character can thus be a synecdoche, or a subordinate type, of the novelworld.

This formula, and that of David Lodge, are useful and, yet, they ignore a problematic aspect of representing the human in text: the relationship between the character and his world is a dialectical one and depends largely on other features of the novel, such as the narrative events which permit the character to become defined (to emerge as *characterful*) are more reflective of that world – or the insistence on an economic, profluent narrative - than his responses to it. The character lacks choice in this most important of features. In most conventional fiction, characters do not choose the circumstances which enable them to discover and display the type of character they are. Instead, the character's propensity to act in recognisable ways (their traits) are triggered by the situations in which they find themselves (threats and quests).

2 Of course, it is not the task of a critical discipline to issue a univocal opinion on these matters. This absence of consensus is what marks the academic discourse apart from the commercially-oriented one and is arguably its greatest virtue in this regard.

3 In the case of fiction this contextual information would include knowledge about the rules of the genre in which the action takes place.

4 For more information, and titles, about Jack M. Bickham, see http://title3.sde.state.ok.us/literatureanda/jack.htm

5 An important set of question arise from this: who or what is this imaginary reader and what are the writer's obligations to her? Do they exceed the writer's other obligations to himself or his community or to the tradition of the novel (amongst other conceivable 'obligations')? Do these questions even obtain when novel-writing is regarded as a process which, when successfully executed, results only in a consumable object?

6 Marshall's 17 sub-modules are: Character type; Connection to lead; Story Goal; Gender; Age; Appearance; Mannerisms; Distinctive Speech patterns; Personality; Background; Personal life; Private life; Work life; Strength; Weakness; Name. (Marshall 2000: 28-29)

7 This invokes larger debates about the role of the novel as a tool of criticism or opposition within a culture, the possibility of subversive or counter-hegemonic characterisation, and whether these objections are simply satellites circulating around the romantic myth of creativity. I have tried to develop some aspects of this argument in the introduction. I hold only to one view in this matter: that homoglossia, in any discourse, but particularly in on which is concerned with creative behaviour and is so assured in its tone, is unhelpful in that it symbolically annihilates and tends to invalidate approaches which do not share its convictions. Which is often the way with rhetorical systems. The point with this discourse is that it normalises the idea of standard and success in characterisation through an equation with publication and reward. Popularity is not used as a yardstick to measure the validity of a methodology in most discourse strands.

8 It can also be argued that formalist and structuralist narrative schemas (Volosinov, 1931; Propp, 1930; Todorow, 1990) re-enforce this way of approaching characterisation

in which the representation of others is largely pre-determined by the requirements of the co-emergent narrative form.

9 The concept of fiction as a dream is a comment on both its self-labelled illusory nature and on its origins in unconscious creative thinking founded on associations dredged up from the subconscious without the intervention of the author. This is a highly romanticised idea which harks back to antique ideas of the creative muse and would seem to be inconsistent with a model which proposes that a writer should know his own idiom, to quote Eliot, or explicitate why it is that he has chosen to represent aspects of existence in a certain way. However, the analogy still seems to be the best available as it alludes to the central problem of mediating a personal vision to an audience of others: that of inviting these others to see what the author has seen although the author knows that the image is ephemeral or cannot fully grasp the reasons for his enthralment with it. Writing fiction is, in this way, the private investigation of unreal encounters which connive at saying something authentic to others about those aspects of existence which are shared and therefore real.

The Grammar of the Uncanny

3: THE GRAMMAR OF THE UNCANNY

The previous chapter presented the dominant approach to characterisation espoused in creative writing discourse. It was argued that this approach naturalised a rationalist epistemology of self-other relations for the purposes of characterisation and that the vehemence of its advice is at odds with the critical and exploratory function of the novel in such matters. This chapter examines alternatives to the modularised approach to characterisation through an analysis of techniques for achieving uncanny effects and reader hesitation in fiction. In this connection, it presents and discusses the Freudian concept of the uncanny (Jentsch 1906; Freud 1919; Schelling 1936; Todorow 1989; Kearney 2002); the poststructuralist concepts of the sublime and the abject (Lyotard 1995; Kristeva 1982; Heidegger 1997) models of categorical thinking advanced by cognitive science (Lakoff 1990; Rosch 1975; Wittgenstein 1958; Haslam and Rothschild 1999) and research from various areas in psychology and neuroscience into chaotic self-other relations (Ramachandran 2000; Zimbardo 2000; Milgram 1970; Dejode et al. 2000). Its relationship to ontological paradoxes is also explored. It discerns in these concepts a basis for the design of patterns or rules of categorial and linguistic transformation which produce the effects of hesitation and estrangement associated with aspects of the uncanny in literary fiction. It provides examples from the trilogies of Beckett and Auster and *Monsters Worse to Come* and outlines provisional directions for an aesthetic of the uncanny relevant to the novelist's task of characterisation which will be developed in subsequent chapters.

1: INTRODUCTION

> There is no doubt that one sometimes meets with strangers who
> are not entire strangers, through their having played a part in
> certain cerebral reels.

(Beckett 1997 (*Molloy*): 112)

In the previous chapter, I presented the argument that modularised approaches to characterisation in creative writing discourse promote an understanding of the novel as fundamentally concerned with maximising the reader's familiarity, comfort and ability to recognise discreet and different elements within the

rational, fictive world. This can be labelled an orientational aesthetic. It was suggested that it has the effect of reproducing the same type of subjectivities in terms of reader positions and reader identification with characters. Not only is this particular type of prescriptivism and repetition anathema to the subversive or critical functions of the novel, but it serves to validate particular modes of perception and uses of language which, in their singularity of expression, discursive cohesion and systematicity of reproduction, endorse the idea of hegemonic and dominant discourse practices. In this way, it denies space within the discourse for the articulation of alternative views of the self and its many possibilities, particularly in the self's relationship to Others. To summarise: the rational 'modular' method is both flattering to the reader, in that it allows her to feel competent in her decoding strategy for recognising the essential nature of others, and consoling in that it re-enforces her view of the limited, essentialised nature and knowability of others.

These criticisms presuppose the existence of an alternative approach which is unburdened by these problems and which has the potential to enable a writer to arrive at a more 'authentic' approach to the representation of others. The question therefore arises as to what such an alternative might be, what qualities it might possess to distinguish it from the rational-modular and how its claim -- if there is such a claim -- to greater authenticity might be supported. It also provokes the question as to whether belief in such a method, one which 'transcends' the modular approach, is simply the expression of a desire for the novel to be a utopian place of aesthetic innovation, radical dissent and social criticism or alternatively, and perhaps worse, an affirmation of writerly indulgence and irrationalism in which the relativism of some postmodern approaches to literature are adopted wholesale to permit the writer to refuse to engage with the reader's expectations because no particular decoding strategy can ever be affirmed as 'the right one'.

I am proposing an approach to characterisation which has no claim to greater authenticity but has a particular and separate function, its main objective corresponding to the previously declared doctrine that the novel should exalt the wisdom of uncertainty. The first principle of this approach is the production of a controlled uncertainty within the reader's mind about the act of decoding the

character. Such an approach aims to cause hesitancy and to arrest the easy recognition and projected knowledge of others. To begin with, this approach might take a number of forms. It might foreground the relationship between author and character to emphasise or acknowledge the often repressed fact of the latter's provisional and subjective authority. In doing this, it would signal to the reader that the representation of character is tentative and its claims to complete knowledge of this other are open to doubt.[1] We find such an admission in Auster's *Ghosts* in which the detective Blue is paid to carry out surveillance on a man named Black whose actions seem to him to have no discernible meaning:

> The only way for Blue to have a sense of what is happening is to
> be inside Black's mind, to see what he is thinking, and that of
> course is impossible.

<div align="right">(Ghosts :139)</div>

"Of course" it is, but the inability of the narrator – or the detective - to transcend the self-other divide is quite frequently ignored in fictional narratives. Modular approaches advise that the head and heart of the character be exposed at key times to explain to the reader the rationality of the character's behaviour in given situations. Suppressing the awareness that knowledge claims which seek to explain the internal state of another are magical, implausible, totalising and inexplicable, is typically part of a reader's schema for dealing with narrative. The real limitations of intersubjectivity are repressed in favour of the pleasures of the symbolic code. Advertising the inability of a character or narrator to use transcendent reasoning brings this repressed fact back into focus.

An uncanny approach might also use modular techniques for characterisation conversely, or perversely, for the purposes of creating disquieting estrangement for the reader: estrangement firstly from the character and secondly from the process by which the assumed knowledge of others is typically claimed or, in other words, from the process of characterisation. This would take the form of providing copious information about a character which triggers inferential schemata and then disrupting the cohesion of the inferred attributes by announcing that the character belongs to a race, gender or species which is not part of the provided implicature.

It might even reveal its own machinations, á la John Barth in *Lost in the Funhouse* (Barth 1962), and comment on the nature of character-as-construct at the same time as it invites the reader to know and identify with or against that character. The tension between demonstrating the levers which animate the character (or create the impression of the character in the reader's mind) and the desire to reject an epistemology which holds that person and character (object and sign) are properly connected is apparent in this approach. But, for me, it does not have the appeal of the desired function of 'exalting uncertainty' because in foregrounding the character-as-construct, it produces no profound doubt or slippage. There is the exposure of the mechanics of storytelling but, with this ardent framebreaking, no hesitation is likely to arise for the reader about the essential nature of the encountered character. The clear distinction between self and other, and between all other types of others which is the foundation of modular approaches to characterisation, is not troubled by this approach. Although we can be enthralled by the mastery which invites us to empathise with 'someone' whom we are told exists nowhere but on the page and in our mind, we are not left in doubt about their ontic status. It is in this arena that reader uncertainty is most profound.

The same accusation can be leveled at Joseph Heller's 'frame-breaking' in *Good as Gold*:

> Once again Gold found himself preparing to lunch with someone - Spotty Weinrock - and the thought arose that he was spending an awful lot of time in this book eating and talking. There was not much else to be done with him. I was putting him into bed a lot with Andrea and keeping his wife conveniently in the background ... Certainly he would soon meet a schoolteacher with four children with whom he would fall madly in love, and I would shortly hold out to him the tantalising promise of becoming the country's first Jewish Secretary of State, a promise I did not intend to keep.

> (Heller 1983: 321)

David Lodge writes of this passage that "two simple words have a powerful shock effect, because they have been hitherto suppressed in the narrative

discourse in the interests of mimesis: they are 'I' (referring to the novelist himself) and 'book' (referring to the novel)" (Lodge 1990b:43). The shock, however, is one of reorientation and not disorientation: as soon as it breaks frame and tells the reader that there is an intrusion from one ontological plane (reality) into another (fiction), it diminishes its own power for irresolvable uncanny estrangement. By naming the features of the new ontic plane (the writer and the book) it ceases to cause hesitation.[2]

Illustrating the problems of representing otherness in this way is a possibility which depends ultimately on the writer approaching the task of characterisation with the tools of estrangement: of causing the reader to question their familiarity with the characterisation process by methods of which the reader is not conscious. The postmodern and postructuralists concepts of the sublime and the abject (Kant 1973; Žižek 1973; Baudrillard 1983, Kristeva 1982; Butler 1993), with their emphasis on the disruptive potential of the sign within subject-object relations, are useful concepts in this regard. However, the exaltation of uncertainty, as an aesthetic tradition, is most usefully developed with the concept of the uncanny, or *das Unheimlich*: the sensation arising from experiences in which the familiar returns in an unfamiliar guise. In the next sections, I will examine this concept of the uncanny, and the cognate concept of categorial confusion the better to formulate their potential application to novel characterisation.

3.2: THE CONCEPT OF THE UNCANNY

Yes it sometimes happens and will sometimes happen that I forget who I am and strut before my eyes like a stranger.

(Molloy: 42)

The uncanny or *unheimlich* can be defined as an experience of disquieting estrangement from something which has previously been familiar and consoling.[3] In the most dramatic cases the 'something' from which the dissociation occurs is the self – such as a person failing to recognise their own likeness and interpreting the estranged image as the presence of another, as in the above quote from Beckett. The uncanny first came to the province of psychoanalysis through Jentsch's *Zur Psychologie das Unheimlichen* (Jentsch 1906). Jentsch equated the uncanny sensation with the production of intellectual uncertainty or

disorientation about the real nature of encountered objects: a definition which Freud later interrogated within a reading of Hoffmann's *The Sandman* (Hoffman 1817; Freud 1919). For Jentsch, Hoffman's story creates an uncanny reaction for the reader because of the revelation that Olympia, the object of Nathaniel's desire, is a human-engineered automaton, machinic and bereft of human quality – what Marie-Helene Huet calls 'a monster of illegitimate fantasy' (Huet 1983). In this case, the uncanny reaction originates in the disorientation which ensues when the previously familiar and integrated idea of the animate is problematised by the addition of elements which are anathema to it. The divinely authored, natural human body is profanely denaturalised. For Freud, the uncanny reaction to Hoffmann's story centres more on the primal fear of loss which is generated by the tale of the Sandman's plucking eyes from sleeping children, an allegory, he argued, for the castration complex. Freud queries Jentsch's suggestion that the uncanny arises from our doubts about the authenticity of Nathaniel's testimony – since the account inclines towards the rational, and implicates Nathaniel in that rationality, there is no hesitation about who, or which interpretation, to believe:

> There is no question ... of any intellectual uncertainty here: we know that we are not supposed to be looking on at the products of a madman's imagination, behind which we, with the superiority of rational minds, are able to detect the sober truth; and yet this knowledge does not lessen the impression of uncanniness in the least degree. The theory of intellectual uncertainty is thus incapable of explaining that impression.

> (Freud 1906: 333)

Freud posited two origins for the uncanny sensation (1) broad psychosexual and infantile anxieties such as fears of castration and loss of identity-coherence; (2) the return of prerational or primitive thoughts, typical of developmental stages in thinking, such as animism and adualism. Within the ensuing discourse about the uncanny, many other ideas about its qualities have emerged which have expanded these twin concepts. Schelling wrote that "everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained hidden and yet comes to light" (Schelling 1936) which suggests that the uncanny is synonymous with the return of the repressed: that which is occluded from official and public discourses, and from the ego's

projection of ordered reality and its own integrity, reveals itself once more in clandestine, indirect ways and causes the experiencing subject to mistrust his intuition or doubt the authenticity of the nominally real. Freud suggests that at the heart of the semantic field from which the original German term is derived (*unheimlich*=unhomely, unfamiliar) is the kernel of this irresolvable strangeness and also its doubledness because *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, as well as being antonyms are also synonyms in German. And so the return of the thoroughly familiar (self) as the irreducibly strange (other) is due to their essential relatedness, or what Terry Castle calls their embodiment in each other (Castle 2000). This equates the uncanny with other psychoanalytical concepts, particularly that of *jamais vu*: the feeling that an old and familiar object is being perceived for the first time (Findler 1994). Auster's Quinn, in another encounter with his mirrored self, experiences this feeling:

> Now, as he looked at himself, in the shop mirror, he was neither
> shocked nor disappointed. He had no feeling about it at all, for
> the fact was he did not recognise the person there as himself.

(City of Glass:119)

The uncanny has been discussed at length in the context of its manifestation or effect in literary fiction, usually within the genre of the fantastic and macabre, and as a spectre within the philosophy of doubt. Amongst others, the works of Poe (Madden 1993; Wuletich-Brinberg 1988), Hawthorne (Vanon-Alliata 2000; Newlin 1968), Descartes (MacCallam 2003), Kierkegaard (Rumble 1998), Dickens (Schiffmann 2001; Dillon 1996; Racadio 1992; Daleski 1984), Kafka, (Peucker 2001; Harman 2002) and Nabokov (Rowe 1974) have been subjected to particular attention. The accent on 19th century fiction from speculative, gothic and broadly romantic genres is indicative, in some ways, of how academia regards the uncanny: as something not so numinous that it can't be perfunctorily categorised as an attribute of a strict set of sub-genres. This has given rise, it seems, to a particular taxonomy of uncanny fiction in which the appearance of doubles, or doppelgängers, misbehaving mirrors, phantasmic selves, automata and magic transformations in an otherwise non-magical context are regarded as the main stimulants to feelings of existential dread (Royle 2003).

But these are first principles, surface identifiers of the way in which the uncanny is understood to express itself. The grammar of uncanny production and the possibility of reconfiguring the way it is expressed proceeds from interrogating the deep structure of this process: examining the reasons for the manifestations of these objects in the production of the effect. The prevailing feature of 'the double' or split identity hints at the core fascinations of uncanny literature such as psychic disturbance (Dostoevsky's *The Double* 1985(1866)), repressed narcissism (Nabokov's *Despair* 1966)), and incoherent subjectivity (Palahniuk's *Fight Club* 1990)). These types of uncanniness, however, share a broader aetiology in that the projection or apperception of a second self, or a misrecognition of self-as-other, is not limited to exotic and classifiable forms of psychoses but is rather a possibility which is both irresolvably linked to developmental, conceptual thinking and manifests itself in oblique ways in normative reasoning.[4] The strength of the uncanny effect is not linked to our feelings of horror at the state of another who can, after all, easily be classified as mad and therefore non-normative (completely *other*), but at the unrequested return to us, as readers, of a way of thinking and perceiving which has been repressed, abjected by the rational reading self as a primitive, magical or pre-rational mode of thought.

These terms carry pejorative connotations, as though they imply that the uncanny, as a focus for analysis or an aesthetic in itself, is feverishly irrational – a reversion to premodernism or an anti-enlightenment project. The counterargument, offered by Monleon (Monleon 1990), amongst others, is that the uncanny and the fantastic are legitimated objects of analysis precisely because of their ability to usher in and provoke non-dominant readings of texts, and permit the inscription of minority, critical and subversive viewpoints which challenge the dominant symbolic order by demonstrating its contingency and by establishing the symbiotic relationship between the rational and its own Other. The category of 'the rational' is loosely and discursively bounded from the irrational so as to protect its own integrity. As Foucault argues, the irrational is a construct which serves to legitimate scientific mastery of others by counterdefining what is progressive, normative and acceptable (Foucault 1977).

The production of reader disorientation associated with the uncanny stems partly from the revelation that thoughts which were dismissed as irrational are discovered to have equivalent explanatory power as rational inferences in reading. It is in the undecidable area between the two categories that the principles of an uncanny narrative can be found.

3.2.1: RULES OF THE FANTASTIC UNCANNY NARRATIVE

The inter-relatedness of the rational and irrational is remarked on in Todorow's discussion of the 'rules' for the production of the fantastic narrative in which the uncanny is argued to function only when it counterpoints an irrational epistemology with the dominant encoding or rationalist mode of representation (Todorow 1980). Todorow's three rules of the fantastic can be summarised as follows:

(1) The fantastic involves a hesitation between two alternative explanations for a phenomenon, one of which is rational, that is consistent with ideas about how the world works, how the self works, the laws of nature and separateness of the physical and spiritual worlds; the other which is suprarational or irrational in that it requires the reader to concede that their received ideas of the world are mistaken and that, as Paul Auster has written in all of his novels, 'anything is possible'. Neither of these explanations are satisfactory or conclusive in that the narrative, often a first person account, does not force a hermeneutic closure in favour of either account but arrests its speculations within the moment of hesitation.

(2) The identification of the reader with the character who experiences the uncanny sensation must be close to that of the naïve reader: that is the reader's response to the strange event is prefigured and inscribed within that of the protagonist so that the protagonist's hesitation corresponds with, or provokes, the readers;

(3) The reader is placed in a context or narrative frame where the phenomenon which gives rise to the uncanny sensation is not simply part of the established conventions of the genre but which stands apart as inexplicable in the logic of the narrative world in which it is to be found. For example, in futuristic science-fiction, the prospect of artificially intelligent objects does not in itself have the

same uncanny effect as such apparitions would in a contemporary social realist text. The supra-rational must draw attention to itself as unpermitted within the implicit laws of the text's genre.

In *City of Glass*, Paul Auster offers an example of the uncanny when writing of Quinn's vigil at Grand Central Station, waiting for the arrival of Peter Stillman Sr. who he hopes to recognise from an old photograph. He sees an old man fitting the description and decides to pursue him, confident that this is Stillman. But then:

> Directly behind Stillman, heaving into view just inches behind his right shoulder, another man stopped, took a lighter out of his pocket. His face was the exact twin of Stillman's. (Quinn now realised that) whatever choice he made - and he had to make a choice - would be arbitrary, a submission to chance. Uncertainty would haunt him to the end.

<div align="right">(City of Glass: 55-56)</div>

The process of recognition always contains the possibility of misrecognition. This is the fantastic-uncanny in operation within the rational genre of detective fiction. The assumed certainty of recognition and distinction – of being able to differentiate between one person and another – which is the first principle of any investigation of, or encounter with another, is shown to fall within the realm of doubt. Uncertainty is inescapable, just as singularity is unattainable: everything is doubled. It thereby becomes reasonable to doubt everything and the narrator, with his warnings about uncertainty, does not offer us any help in identifying the 'real' Stillman to ourselves. The reader cannot escape from Quinn's uncertainty because we know no more than he does. There is therefore no 'real' Stillman. All that is 'real' is the sense of disorder.

This is another key feature of the uncanny which is also a key feature of characterisation in novels: that of recognition. In the context of creative writing discourse, recognition involves harnessing heuristics for enhancing the memorability of characters which means that they are always-already easily recognised. The modular constraints on character creation result in a branded entity who cannot be unfamiliar because the inferences to which her qualities give rise are designed to complement each other in distinguishing her from all

the other characters in the novel's world. Therefore many of the effects of uncanniness are also always-already lost. Recognition works differently in uncanny approaches to characterisation. The uncanny effect is at the same time a process of recognition and one of misrecognition of some clandestine aspect of self. It is recognition in that it recovers repressed 'knowledge' or 'psychic material' about the self which in turn prepares the experiencer for what Heidegger calls a more authentic way-of-being in the world (Heidegger 1997), one which acknowledges how the self has only come into being through its own ideology or drive-to-coherence. The process of distinction between individuals is not between natural and unique kinds but moves along a vague and fuzzily categorized continuum which always has the potential for causing confusion. Blue, in Auster's *Ghosts*, foreshadows his own identity confusion when he meets his client Black. The narrator tells us that:

> He finds Black's face pleasant enough with nothing to distinguish
> it from a thousand other faces one sees everyday.

(Ghosts: 139)

The uniqueness of the other cannot be discerned and a little bit of disorder begins to appear in Blue's epistemology of otherness. Heidegger's 'authentic living' involves a being-towards-death which accepts the sovereignty of the Real over the symbolic, the prevalence of disorder. The uncanny is misrecognition in that what is brought to light is not part of the well established self-narrative and therefore any attempt to explain it within the parameters of these narratives automatically traduces it and deprives it of its power. This is how the uncanny gains its effect in characterisation: reader 'recognition' proceeds from the effective design of the character but must, perforce, hesitate between recognition and misrecognition of the character if that method of decoding no longer yields the expected result.

3.3: MISRECOGNITION

The uncanny effect in characterisation can perhaps be most clearly illustrated with an extreme example of a 'real life' example in which the properties of distinction between people and coherence of self- and other-identity are less stable. The neurologist VS Ramachandran recounts the case of a 15-year-old boy named DS who suffered a minor head trauma during a car accident

(Ramachandran 1990). He subsequently fell prey to delusions associated with Capgras Syndrome. This is not cited by Ramachandran or other researchers in the field as an instance of the uncanny but bears all the hallmarks of the effect. Because of his minor brain damage – which resulted in no loss of intellectual or motor functions – DS began to believe that his parents were impostors – identical replacements for whom his real parents had been substituted for reasons which he admitted were unknown to him. This 'doubledness', in which the very familiar reappears as strange, is an archetypal feature of the uncanny.

The neurological features of the case are instructive.[5] DS had experienced very minor damage to a part of the limbic system called the amygdala, which is responsible for lending emotional tone and context to communication and information processing. In general terms, memory of faces works in the following way: when we see someone we recognise, as well as visually processing their features and unconsciously comparing them with extant memories of how that person looks and sounds, we unconsciously make an embodied response, that is we physically respond to the person-stimulus and, in fact, our body's temperature rises very slightly (Keane et al. 2002). The precognitive body 'recognises' the person first and the rational conclusion based upon the evidence of perception -- that this a person we know-- follows from that first impulse. When the ability to make that response is weakened, the rational conclusion is aborted, troubled and puts the suffering subject into a position of hesitation between two unlikely but necessary choices as to how what impression to form of the encountered person.

Let us re-imagine the experience of DS as a narrative in which he plays both the role of a character and the implied naïve reader confronting a confusing text in sympathy with the character. His first unconscious response to the change in his way of relating to his parents is to conclude that they are otherworldly fakes, inauthentic parents. They sound, behave and look like his parents. They care for him, love him, communicate with him just as his parents had done. They possess all of the things his parents possessed (all the same identity markers), have the same memories but he cannot accept that they are his parents because his unconscious, embodied perception of them has changed. Something which is

beyond language – precognitive in that it is an emotional response - has overpowered the judgements of his rational side.

Having resigned himself to living with these very caring and sympathetic frauds, he begins to re-examine the logic which has lead him to conclude that they are fake and, in time and because of their kindness and parentlike behaviour, he vacillates between this first interpretation and the only other one which is available to him. This second, equally rational in its own way but increasingly disturbed conclusion is that, if they are his parents, as he wants them to be, then something else is wrong in his way of relating to them. The only explanation he can reach is that *he* is the inauthentic one; he is not himself: he is the *wrong reader*. The real DS – the authentic DS – is living elsewhere and will return home some day to usurp him in their affection. The third interpretation, offered by Ramachandran, that he is suffering from an organic, neurological problem outside of the fabric of his relationship with his parents, is not available to DS as a reader of his own experiences. He can only hesitate between two interpretations, both of which are internally rational but, for the sovereign ego, equally calamitous. He is living in a moment of the fantastic uncanny, alternately doubting the authenticity and essential nature of his self and that of others.

This kind of misrecognition is not just an example of 'identity grotesque' limited to those with physically damaged limbic systems or chronic schizophrenia. Identity displacement of this kind occurs in subjects with no neurological anomalies: as a mode of thinking it is a possibility afforded by the interplay between the ego's rational self-image, and embodied, unconscious responses. The irruption of naturally occurring disharmony between the two arises due to the ongoing conflict between them as ways of being. Misrecognition of self-as-other, or other-as-self, is implied by the existence of the self in the first place and its reliance on others to furnish matter for the distinction between them. Charles Cooley's concept of the looking-glass self – the self that see it's selfness through others – rounds out this interdependence:

> ...the self idea is always a consciousness of the peculiar or differentiated aspect of one's life, because that is the aspect that has to be sustained by purpose and endeavor, and its more aggressive forms tend to attach themselves to whatever one finds

to be at once congenial to one's own tendencies and at variance with those of others with whom one is in mental contact. It is here that they are most needed to serve their function of stimulating characteristic activity, of fostering those personal variations which the general plan of life seems to require.

(Cooley 1902:179)

The self has to be sustained by identifying itself in ways which differentiates it from others. Without others, there is no counterweight, no scales of difference with which to gauge the self's meaning. Psychological research conducted by Milgram (1974) demonstrates how easily the self-concept submits itself to the authority of others with a resultant loss of coherence and sense of autonomy. Zimbardo's study of the effect of arbitrary role assignation on subjects in the Stanford prison experiment produced a similar identity crisis for participants who, disconnected from their habitual roles and relations to others, engaged in aggressive actions which they later claimed did not reveal their true nature, traits and sense of self (Zimbardo 2000). In other words, their behaviour did not truthfully 'signify' them.[6]

The removal of habitual roles and relations with others also induces a crisis in the self-concept. As Blue discovers in Auster's *Ghosts* –as do all of Beckett's narrators – when he finds himself in solitude, he is vulnerable to the return of past thoughts and barely repressed memories which make him feel that he is changing, that the sense of orderliness by which he defined himself is disintegrating: "That's what happens when you've noone to talk to" (*Ghosts*: 151). That's what happens when you've no other to define you.

This is the doubled inscription to which Todorow alludes: because of the strength of the rational self-narrative which denies its dependence on others or any other form of contingency, the feeling of change and incoherence which affects the self without others, and which can produce seemingly irrational and inexplicable behaviour, is both familiar and strange. Character in disorder produces for the reader a familiar recognition because it describes a possibility for all selves, and a misrecognition because the disordered way of thinking, which is an always-already part of the rational self, has been for so long repressed. The extension of this is that it is towards an uncanny self misrecognition that rational thought will

sometimes lead. The determinants of this 'sometimes' effect in the characterisation process are my concern.

3.4: FORMAL PROPERTIES OF THE UNCANNY

So what are the formal properties or conditions of this uncanny misrecognition that they might be applied to fictional characterisation? They can be broadly presented under three headings or effect-types: Hesitation; Blurred distinctions between binary categories and; The return of repressed knowledge.

3.4.1 HESITATION

Both Bleuler and Freud attribute to the uncanny a derealisation (*dereistisch*) effect. This causes the subject or reader to resort to a being-alongside self in an attitude of contemplation about the real nature of objects, unable to explain the sensation of unfamiliarity by using an established inference or cognitive schema (Heidegger 1997). The uncanny phenomena arrests the reader's rational inferences, produces hesitation, and then forces a choice between rational and suprarational explanations for the phenomenon. This is what Todorow calls hesitation before the Real: chaos has been momentarily glimpsed behind the curtain of orderliness (Todorow 1990). So that the hesitation between these choices may continue, the narrative strives to avoid closure. Hesitation in itself arises when a awareness of a slippage between the representation of the object and the object itself becomes presented to consciousness. At this stage, the character experiencing it and the reader who identifies with the character's predicament, has no sense of where their disorientation has arisen from, except that it creates a sense that the representation of a familiar thing bears no relation to the strangeness of reality.

In the case of Auster's Blue, this awareness of slippage comes when he begins to ponder the reoprts that he has filed about the behaviour of the man he is tailing. He has not recorded anything that is untrue and he has been assiduous in his observations. And yet, something which he cannot describe is missing from his report. It does not capture the impression of the man. He is lead to ponder whether his reports have in any way reflect the nature of the other he is watching and whether his text is simply a projection of orderliness onto something which has no necessary order in itself:

As the days go on, Blue realises there is no end to the stories he can tell. For Black is no more than a kind of blankness, a hole in the texture of things and one story can fill this hole as well as any other.

(Ghosts: 144)

In the case of the uncanny, the effect on the experiencing subject is ultimately one of distrust or scepticism about the act of representation, about the ability of the sign to capture or refer fully to the phenomenon which it deigns to signify. This in turn creates the sense that there is something sublime or monstrous which resides outside of the representative possibilities of the symbolic system. Something which is being pointed to but which cannot be named: the monstrous sublime. It is the feeling of unpresentability which prolongs the hesitation. And this feeling of the unpresentable arises from the confusion of mutually exclusive and discreet concepts within the text which is its second feature.

3.4.2: BLURRED DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN THE ANIMATE AND INANIMATE

Jentsch's definition of the uncanny explains it as a basic categorial confusion of two mutually exclusive concepts: living and dead, wilful and automatonic. As long as the reader is allowed to linger between these two interpretations, the technique will create intellectual uncertainty because the concept of the inanimate does not allow for properties common to the animate, such as desire, will and emotion. When two fundamental and opposing concepts are conflated or undifferentiated in this way the whole bedrock of the symbolic system which supports conceptualisation is destabilised, and the differentiation between signs and concepts, which is necessary for rational understanding, is problematised.

Mapping animate qualities on to inanimate objects is a common poetic transformation, typically manifested in anthropomorphism. It is also a trait of human cognitive behaviour from a very early stage in conceptual development. These kinds of projections tend to disappear within what Piaget calls the symbolic operations phase as they are replaced by the constitution of meaningful referential concepts, such as animate and inanimate, during logical operations and re-enforced by socialisation (Piaget 2001). It is the return of this familiar pre-rational understanding of the world, through the revelation of a blurred boundary between two supposedly discreet categories, which produces the uncanny effect.

The various conceptual frameworks in which the uncanny is discussed therefore posit it as something which springs from the failures of conceptual boundaries to hold together in discourse. It is derived from an invocation of the contradictory spaces in which the projection of orderliness which is the job of the superego -- and of narrative and modular characterisation -- has failed to be mapped in proper proportion, creating the impression that the referent is caught within a caesura in langugae. Typically, these contradictory spaces are derived from the binarisms which run through the symbolic system of a culture such as those described in structuralist models of mythical, anthropological, logical and linguistic orderings of meaning in the world: human/inhuman; nature/culture, presence/absence; recognition/misrecognition; known/repressed and so on (Levi Strauss 1958; Cresswell 1985).

Theoretical strands within cyborg theory, and other post-humanist and post-feminist theory, pursue these kinds of transcendences or elisions of binary oppositions as part of a project to escape the fixity of identity under the operations of the oppositional epistemologies. Barbara Kennedy describes Donna Haraway's cyborg manifesto as calling for:

> Cyborg heteroglossia; a breakdown of boundary categorisation and a confusion of boundaries, which is pleasurable liberatory-metaphorically, ideologically and epistemologically.

(Kennedy 2000:286)

The uncanny is similar to this project but has this exception: its concern is not about simply causing confusion about which category an object belongs to, and whether such categories have authentic boundaries, but about such uncertainty as it pertains to representations of the self. Research in cognitive science (Haslam and Rothschild 1990; Stevens 2000; Rehder and Hastie 2001) suggests that people tend to accept the non-essential (fluid) nature of artefacts (non-natural objects), but not that of living things. Living things belong, by virtue of their 'essence', to particular and fixed categories. Artefacts are more easily re-assigned from one category to another without causing an epistemological crisis. Cyborg theory, it seems to me, tends to mistake confusion aroused by non-natural constructs for the liberating demise of essentialist categorisation and reasoning. It is in the production of uncertainty about the essential qualities of

given, natural things (people) that the uncanny, and its more profound powers of destabilising, are to be found. The failure to distinguish between the self and other is the most uncanny of all category failures relevant to characterisation. It is also a 'primitive' fear which aligns it with the third aspect.

3.4.3: ALLUSIONS TO FEAR, TABOO AND THE 'PRE-RATIONAL'

The return of precognitive knowledge, represented by fears and taboos, conflict with the self's rational self-narrative. For example, a phenomenon which reminds us of our origins, our coming-into-being before the self, tends to be excluded from a self-narrative because of the tendency of the ego to narrativise with a mind to maintaining the notions of will, order and coherence at its centre. As with modular approaches to characterisation, for the ego, action must always be preceded by an explicitly signalled intention, even if this rationalisation actually takes place *post facto*. In Freudian terminology, such memories are repressed as they are in conflict with the project of developing an ego which thinks itself sovereign. Reminders of the randomness and corpularity of our physical origins are also presages of a similarly random or meaningless death, the ultimate loss of coherence, and have their corollary in our culture's attitude to other abjected objects: excretions, bodily fluids, spoiled food. Objects which remind us of our role in the ingress and egress of the rest of the world tend to be treated with revulsion.

Mary Douglas argues that taboo subjects and repressed experiences reflect this need to occlude death and origin from the narratives of self in a society (Douglas 1970). The realness of death and decay are typically supplanted by a symbolic discourse about perfect or ideational origination and consoling stories of death. To use Lacanian terminology, the uncanny experience occurs when a sign alludes to the Real, extralinguistic origins or history of the self which has lain under the surface of the shared, symbolic and consoling narrative. This also re-enforces the feature of binary conflation presented above, since what Piaget calls the adualism of early infancy is part of the precognitive history which the symbolic order serves to exclude. Adualism is a cognitive state in which differentiation between self and other, and between different types of otherness, does not occur. This lack of differentiation, is recovered in the uncanny and accounts for the horror of unwanted recognition which is its defining quality.

The concept of repression or absence is therefore central. Other notions of repressed knowledge share this focus with the uncanny. Julia Kristeva described the concept of abjection as a reaction of horror to the presence of that which is both part of us and apart from us at the same time: excrement, food, non-functioning body parts, for example (Kristeva 1982). The presence of these reminders of the physicality of birth and death produce abjection (and indirectly an uncanny reaction) because they resurrect the repressed knowledge of human limitedness within the limitlessness of the world and thereby expose the narratives of birth and death as devices of consolation which act sedulously in place of the immemorable and unimaginable bookends of origin and fate which otherwise could not be authentically framed within the self-narrative.[7]

These embedded conventions which have become part of the self-concept and social narratives about selfhood appear, during the uncanny experience, to be insufficient to capture the anarchic, pre-rational and extra-linguistic reality to which attention has been momentarily drawn. They are the symbolic order which the reader momentarily sees to be concealing Real disorder.

3.5: ONTOLOGICAL CONFUSION AND PARADOX

In the previous chapter I discussed how readers use inferential schema to assign newly-encountered people (and characters) to conventionally established social, psychological and ontological categories. I have argued that the uncanny requires that this attempt at assignation should hesitate between at least two possible categories. It also seems to require that these two categories be of a superordinate variety: that is, involve very fundamental categories such as living and dead, real and unreal, present and absent, true and false. And self and other. The reason that it is between these superordinate classes that the hesitation needs to arise is that the uncanny hesitation must make the reader's choice between a rational interpretation of character nature and behaviour and a non-rational one equivalent. If it indicates that one interpretation is more likely and useful than another, then it fails to induce the necessary doubt about the epistemological framework that the reader is using.

Let us look at the example from Auster quoted earlier:

> Directly behind Stillman, heaving into view just inches behind his
> right shoulder, another man stopped, took a lighter out of his

pocket. His face was the exact twin of Stillman's. (Quinn now realised that) whatever choice he made - and he had to make a choice - would be arbitrary, a submission to chance. Uncertainty would haunt him to the end.

(*City of Glass*: 55-56)

Hesitation arises because there is a choice involved. Here, Todorow's 'rule' that the character should behave like an intradiegetic reader takes form: Quinn's reaction, his confusion, mirrors the readers. He doesn't know what to think of this doubling of Stillmans. As readers we expect, as does he, to find a clue as to which is the authentic one. No such information arises. We are stuck in our hesitancy while Quinn, for whom indecision is not yet an option, arbitrarily follows one of the men for the remainder of the novel. The correctness of his choice is never asserted or denied. Between which two interpretations of this encounter may a reader hesitate and in what sense is this hesitation of the uncanny type?

One reader inference is that the first Stillman is the real Stillman, and the second someone who coincidentally shares his appearance. Or it could be the case that the second is the real Stillman, the first the impostor. Either way, this constitutes a rational inference about the nature of character as it retains the premise of the uniqueness of selfhood – no two people are exactly alike: the self is singular, unmistakably its self. The second available inference is that there are two Stillmans[8], neither of whom is more or less authentic than the other. The implication of this inference is that identity is not something which is unique, it is not bounded or attached singularly to one person but can spread, seep and multiply. A third interpretation is that Quinn is mistaken in his vision or is demented. But, as Freud said of Nathaniel in *The Sandman*, there is no reason to think this of him for he is sufficiently bewildered by the experience for us to accept his rational credentials. We are left between a rational conclusion and an irrational conclusion about the nature of character identity. The narrative does not give the reader sufficient confidence to strongly infer one interpretation over the other.

Cultural and ethical binarisms do not necessarily offer up this rational dilemma, whereas foundational oppositions do. When the narrative refuses to speak too

strongly in favour of either interpretation, it can enact a paradox, which is a crime of disorientation in modular views of characterisation, because the reader is forced to work (to continuously engage in the re-negotiation of categorial assignation which ultimately will be frustrated) to decide which character schema to use. In DS's case, as told by Ramachandran, this splitness in the nature of others is in the choice between deciding upon his own lack of authenticity (which perverts the rational premise of the integrity of the ego) or the inauthenticity of his parents (an equally disturbed conclusion but one which preserves the integrity of the ego).

When the conflation or confusion of two opposing, superordinate categories occurs, the hesitation is more profound. The effect which arises is like that which proceeds from ontological paradoxes. Consider this paradox from Auster's *City of Glass* where Peter Stillman Jr's wife instructs Quinn that:

> You mustn't assume that Peter always tells the truth. On the other
> hand, it would be wrong to think he lies.

(City of Glass 25)

Grice's rule of conversational implicatures suggests that a listener automatically infers that his co-locutor desires and is able to tell the truth (Grice 1968). Stillman's wife advises that this assumption be questioned in his case. The inference is now that falsity, being truth's counterpart, is sometimes his mode of expression or his preferred language function. But, in the next statement, that inference is also thwarted: 'it would be wrong to think that he lies'. And so no straightforward inference is allowed to make sense. The statement is equivalent to: "He is not always X, but it would be wrong to assume that he is not not X". This is an example of the Eubulides paradox ("This statement is false") which works by demonstrating how logical inferences can produce illogical errors. In so far as the effect of such statements are uncanny, it is because they avail of the doubledness of much conceptual thinking wherein "not X" always implies "Y" (i.e. 'not alive' implies 'dead' and 'not self' implies 'other'). When a situation does not present the necessary conditions for membership of either category – and those categories are foundational – then hesitation, and awareness of how inferences have failed, is the fate of the reader. Another paradox - the Smarandache - encapsulates, in a very simple way, this ability for category

assignation to drag the reader into inextricable convolutions in the attempt to affix a character to just one ontological category: *Everyone is dead, even those who aren't.*

This is an example of what Christopher Ricks calls the Irish bull that permeates Beckett's critique of dualism. Beckett writes that "nothing is more real than nothing" (*Malone Dies* 161). Ricks's gloss on this line sums up one of the appeals of the poetic truthfulness of logical impossibilities:

> Nothing can only be as real as nothing, nothing can be neither
> more nor less real than nothing. But not only do you know what
> he means, you sense the chilly comfort of the thought.

> (Ricks 1990:203)

This suggests an additional aspect of the uncanny as revealed through paradox: it makes no logical sense but, somehow and in a way difficult to explain, 'you know what it means'. Applied to characterisation, the paradox offers the possibility for immediately thwarting reader impression formation about a character, as well as introducing a splitness in the epistemological scheme required to decode it. This can work in two ways: by actively providing information about a character through a paradoxical description offered by narrator or another character, or by indirectly characterising the one who issues the paradox. In *City of Glass*, the oppositions of animation, volume and gender are subjected to paradoxical characterisation by the description offered of Victoria Stillman's telephone voice:

> It was at once mechanical and filled with feeling, hardly more
> than a whisper and yet perfectly audible and so even in tone that
> he was unable to tell if it belonged to a man or a woman.

> (*City of Glass*: 7)

Her voice is mechanical and emotional, loud and quiet, male or female. There is no information here except a confusion of opposites and an acknowledgement of how easily identity confusions can arise. Here are two further examples of characterisation through paradox from *Monsters Worse to Come.* In the first example, Kinnegan questions The Duff about the actions of a giant named Devaney of whom he has heard many rumours.

The Duff interrupted with a laugh:

'There's a great many stories told about that man and his deeds.
It's a wise man who listens to them all and disremembers them
instanter. Where the Devaney is concerned the fabric of logic is
double-ravelled and yet is hardly knit at all.'

(Monsters Worse to Come: 144)

Which can be summarised contradictorily as: 'Pay attention to the characteristics
which have been attributed to him and then forget them straightaway. These
attributions have a strong basis in logic and have no logic at all'. The contrary
advice serves to make Devaney enigmatic and also reflect the instability and
ongoing doublings and reversals of his character during the novel (from
automaton to conscious being to amnesiac to truth-seeker back to automaton).
They also characterise The Duff as someone at ease with chaos, opposed to any
order except his own will. The split-mindedness is reflected in his paradoxical
love of control and his inability to exert any, even over inanimate things. The
Duff straddles categories, one foot in each, like a virile eunuch.

Such paradoxes resemble the uncanny in their coalescing of the rational with the
irrational and their frustration of the attempts of inferential schema to assign
characters to particular categories. They are themselves uncanny when this
frustration is applied to superordinate categories which describes a person or
character's ontological status. In the next section, examples of this specific type
of use in the works of Beckett and Auster are offered.

3.6: THE UNCANNY IN BECKETT AND AUSTER

They looked alike, but no more than others do.

(Molloy: 9)

I have already introduced some uncanny aspects in the works of Beckett and
Auster's approaches to characterisation in their respective trilogies. I would like
now to briefly outline where the effect is most strongly focussed in their works
and what particular aspects of uncanniness are presented. Beckett's trilogy is
concerned with the disintegration of the self in isolation from others and the
opposing forces of confabulation which tries, and fails, to keep the self in some
semblance of coherence. The idea of a self is premised on distinction from

others, internal coherence, continuity and self-determination. The uncanny effect presents the counterpoints of these qualities (incoherence, contingency, origin in others) as equal possibilities for the self and for self-other relations. Beckett's work has been extensively studied for its epistemological scepticism, its critique of the rational method, its teleology of endless non-progress, and its view of the self as constituted and distorted through language. Each of these features impact on the uncanny by virtue of the way in which they allow for a reading of the self as something that is vulnerable to change and disintegration: or as a construct which tells itself stories to enable order to prevail over disorder, but which never manages to fully succeed and is suspended within the dialectic.

Auster's trilogy has remarkably similar features. Its epistemological uncertainty is more directly expressed than Beckett's and the expression of identity disintegration more brusque because, while Beckett works outside of genre, Auster picks up on the detective genre (amongst others), with its attendant rational epistemology and narratives of the self pursuing the other, to critique the founding notions of the genre itself, as well as those of narrative in general. The first two novels of Auster's trilogy have third-person lead characters, the last a first-person narrative and so the slow erosion of the self-construct, its relapse into solipsism and crisis, benefits from two perspectives. The most pressing similarity between the trilogies is the correspondence between the detective Moran, in Beckett's *Molloy* and the detectives Quinn and Blue in Auster's *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*. Auster describes Quinn's initial reluctance to forsake rational methods in his attempt to grasp the nature of Stillman's self in the following way:

> It seemed to him that he was looking for a sign ... This meant only one thing: he continued to disbelieve in the arbitrariness of Stillman's actions.

(City of Glass: 69)

But later, because of the perverse and inscrutable nature and irresolvable strangeness of Stillman's actions which do not surrender their meaning or give rise to an impression of the man which can be stabilised and grasped, Quinn realises that his method has failed and his rational detecting self begins to unravel:

> Quinn was nowhere now. He had nothing, he knew nothing, he
> knew that he knew nothing. Not only had he been sent back to
> the beginning, he was now so far before the beginning that it was
> worse than any end he could imagine.

> (*City of Glass*: 104)

Moran's plight, in pursuit of the elusive Molloy – whose name he cannot even grasp – describes the same descent into doubt about the other. Where once he was punctual, decorous and organised ("a solid in the midst of other solids" (*Molloy*: 108)), Moran becomes disordered, disorganised and doubtful as to his purpose:

> It was then the unheard of sight was to be seen of Moran making
> ready to go without knowing where he was going, having
> consulted neither map nor timetable considered neither itinerary
> nor halt, heedless of the weather outlook and with only the
> vaguest notion of the outfit he would need, the time the
> expedition was likely to take, the money he would require and
> even the nature of the work to be done and consequently the
> means to be employed.

> (*Molloy*: 124)

These instances provide examples of the key features of the uncanny in its treatment by Auster and Beckett. Broadly speaking, it has three aspects. In each case the approach to characterisation contradicts the advice offered by modular creative writing discourse, in its formal expression of how expectations about how character behaviour should cohere, and appear clearly purposed and coherent, so as to allow the reader to develop reliable knowledge (epistemological mastery) of characters. These aspects are: the failure of the distinction between the self and the other and of the identification of the other to be maintained; the gradual loss of the self's coherence and continuity; displacement of purpose from self to an unidentified external agency.

3.6.1: THE FAILURE OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE SELF AND THE OTHER AND OF THE IDENTITY OF THE OTHER TO BE MAINTAINED

> People pass too, hard to distinguish from yourself. That is
> discouraging.

<div align="right">(*Molloy*: 9)</div>

Any attempt at person evaluation or characterisation must first establish a bounded space to which character qualities can be attributed. The ability to distinguish between the self and another is prior to any such attributions. Without this distinction, the whole world is interior and every element within it is the same. Such a place is one of nameless and orderless chaos, similar to what Plato called Korah (Kearney 2000). The perceiving subject requires an object of which to speak and, eventually, with or against which to understand itself as an object in other's eyes. If the subject is not aware, or sure, of what is external to it as opposed to internal or attached to it, then there is nothing it can say about the object as it is not recognisable *as an object*. Similarly, the narrator or character who cannot distinguish between himself and other characters cannot pass on information about that character which will enable the reader to construct a useable and coherent impression.

This failure to distinguish between self and others is an extension of the aporia expressed in the Cartesian rationalist method. It is an extension which Beckett, in particular, was keen to pursue (Knowlson 1998). The subject contemplating an object can be argued to have made the object an object in the act of contemplating it. That is: the Other is not found, but made in the self's gaze. Prior to this gaze - and the epistemology which gives it authority - the act of looking at another does not reveal anything about either the perceived or the perceived. Without this epistemology which presumes the ability to epistemologically master the other, the difference between the self and the other can become less distinct. For the reader, the revelation from the central character that he cannot always distinguish himself from the supporting cast of other characters, as Molloy has made, evokes this uncanny failure of distinctive recognition between self and other.

J. Allan Hobson, in writing of the narrative form of dreams, speaks of their disorienting quality in this connection in which the loosening of rational schema and associations can elide the difference between specific others who together constitute the not-self:

> The people in dreams are particularly fluid. Sometimes they don't
> look like the ones they are supposed to be, and sometimes they

> seem like two people, or even a hybrid of two sexes. Sometimes
> characters appear out of nowhere, a woman suddenly becomes a
> man. Very often the identity of the person is uncertain.

<div align="right">(Hobson 1996:87)</div>

In such cognitive states, anyone who is not the self is open to the fate of being consigned only to the most fundamental of ontological classes, that of unspecified other, and in this way can be endlessly substituted for and transformed into *any* other. The authenticity, singularity and durability of personal identity have no claim in the formalism of dreams. The uncanny has the same quality. For Auster's Quinn the search for the unchanging and authentic impression of another, represented in an image, fails because of this conclusion: that when faith in durable identity and identification wavers, one person could just as easily be – or turn into -another.

> The picture told him nothing. It was no more than a picture of a
> man. He studied it for a moment longer and concluded that it
> could just as easily have been anyone.

<div align="right">(*City of Glass*: 31)</div>

Confusing one member of a social category (be it gender, age, race) with another is a specific possibility of the failure of other-identification. Beckett treats all of these failures, most notably the one that gives rise to Oedipal fears of mistaking the mother for a lover. Speaking of his past relationships with women, Molloy writes:

> There are days, like this evening, when my memory confuses
> them and I am tempted to think of them as one and the same old
> hag, flattened and crazed by life. And God forgive me to tell you
> the horrible truth, my mother's image sometimes mingles with
> theirs, which is literally unendurable.

<div align="right">(*Molloy*: 59)</div>

This constitutes the horrible truth that identity, so heavily reliant on outward signs of category membership can degenerate (being weathered, their unique impress is no longer visible), as those signs (face, dress, body) degenerate in their uniqueness, to the point where the once-unique sign, the rigid and unique

designator of Kripkean symbolic logic, now belongs to no-one in particular. The doubledness of things also reflects this fear of indistinction. Beckett's characters pass much time by confusing paired items with each other: knees, bicycle wheels, ideas, selves:

> I forget which wheel it was. As soon as two things are nearly identical I am lost.

> *(Molloy*: 156)

> Wondering … whether it had been the same knee then as the one which had just excruciated me, or the other. And that is a thing I have never been able to determine.

> *(Molloy* :139)

> Perhaps it was the same one back again, ideas are so alike when you get to know them

> *(Malone Dies*: 225)

As Quinn concluded about his attempts to grasp the essence of another: within this alternative epistemology of grievous doubt, you can never be sure who it is you're grasping for. In *Monsters Worse to Come*, this elision of other's differences occurs in the description of Kinnegan and Devaney's respective attempts to understand their encounters with Hoc Danger and his various anagrammatised alter egos. The duplication, or wayward multiplication of Hoc Danger, means that he cannot present a single and coherent impression to any other character, let alone the reader, and cannot meaningfully unmask himself, because there is always another mask underneath. Because he appears boundless, through his ubiquity and protean nature, even when he takes off his disguises he is not graspable:

> Divested of his paint, Devaney still did not know who this man was except that he was the man he had met at the bus station and he was the man driving the bus. A man who called himself Hoc Danger and Doc Hanger.

> *(Monsters Worse to Come*: 40)

3.6.2: THE GRADUAL LOSS OF THE SELF'S COHERENCE AND CONTINUITY

This aspect of doubledness can also affect the self and is associated with the belief that the self is somehow surpassing itself or that its centre 'really' resides somewhere outside the body or outside time. This is known within personal pathology as Cotard's Syndrome or the negation delusion: a belief that elements of the self and others do not exist or are about to cease existing (Cacho 2000). In such a case, the outward markers of identity which are presented as part of the self-as-object do not correspond to its internal state and are cast away from the self-concept, except that they continue to prepare others to form an impression of the self based upon its external features. This dissonance between self-concept and how the self is presented to others enacts the ontological paradox of the self which does not recognise itself, has shed its markers of identification somewhere along the way and does not know how to retrieve them:

> He was alive, and the stubbornness of this fact had little by little
> begun to fascinate him - as if he had managed to outlive himself
> as if he were living a posthumous life... He had long ago stopped
> thinking of himself as real.

> *(City of Glass*: 5, 9)

But the loss of a coherent and continuous self-identity, in the sense that one has ceased to be as one was, is not the most radical outcome of self-doubt. There is always the possibility that one will eventually cease to notice this absence of a self-concept and will continue to be, regardless of this negation.

> Yes, there were times when I forgot not only who I was but that I
> was.

> *(Molloy* :49)

This basic dissonance is perhaps the defining characteristic of the detective Deeds in *Monsters Worse to Come*. His is a heightened sense of self-unreality. He does not have any sense that the presented aspects of his self have anything to do with him. He knows what his role is (detective) and what expectations others have for him on the basis of this role, and yet his self-concept and his other identity markers (he is young, callow, emotional, delusional) do not match up to these expectations. He can only think to mend this sense of incompatibility by changing his outward attributes as a way of easing the dissonance:

Captain Deeds, his muddy hand cupped about his mouth, whispered some urgent words to Inspector Whelms.

'I need a pipe and tobacco, Whelms. I need them. I don't know why I don't have them.'

'You need them now?'

'No, not now. But I need them very soon. I need them so I can be realistic. I want to be realistic. I'm not a realistic police without a pipe and without tobacco.'

(Monsters Worse to Come: 81)

3.6.3: DISPLACEMENT OF PURPOSE FROM SELF TO AN UNIDENTIFIED EXTERNAL AGENCY

The absenting of will might lead to what Beckett called the wisdom that consists of 'the ablation of desire'. If the self is not responsible for its own actions, and holds out no hope of positively affecting its own fate, then the kinds of coherence and *anima* which are assumed to be the lot of fictional characters becomes deeply troubled.[9] If the character has no internal struggle, no reservoir of desires, fears and hopes which drive him onto action which constitutes lends profluence to the narrative, then where does his animation come from?

In forsaking any kind of desire or instinct for survival, self-advancement or goal-oriented behaviour, the last vestige of the self is expunged and the representation of character as coherent, self-determining and rational becomes untenable. If there is no expression of internal will, then the implication is that a character's agency is determined by some authority external or invisible to him. This creates the impression of the character as an automaton but, in the uncanny, this is suggested in only a very oblique way. The author cannot not reveal the hand behind the character's movement as this would lead away from hesitation. This complete absence of intention becomes all the more estranging because of the similar absence of an explanation for the character's movement. No other internal or external centre of will is posited. The character's sense that they are following the order of another, and are disinterestedly watching their own actions, becomes disconcerting and raises questions about the need or compatibility of free will with the deterministc nature of both fictional narratives

and the self-narratives of personal identity. In the case of Molloy it is a voice which issues commands to him:

> Yes, it is rather an ambiguous voice and not always easy to follow, in its reasonings and decrees. But I follow it nonetheless, more or less ... And I feel I shall follow it from this day forth, no matter what it commands. And when it ceases, leaving me in doubt and darkness, I shall wait for it to come back, and do nothing.

(Molloy: 132)

Quinn is a spectator of his own actions, one who observes them with surprise as though he were being remotely controlled by an inscrutable intelligence whose intentions for him are never clear and from whom he eventually expects no explanation:

> It did not occur to him that he was going to show up for his appointment but he found himself doing a good imitation of a man preparing to go out. 'I seem to be going out' he said to himself ... he felt remarkably calm as if everything had already happened to him.

(City of Glass: 12)

Quinn tends to distance himself from his own behaviour at every turn and comes to regard it as a feature which does not represent him or characterise him but as something which has nothing to do with him. The will of others passes through him, although he does not know who or what this other is. This peculiar type of self-self relationship bears similarities to that of the character Devaney in *Monsters Worse to Come*. Devaney can never get accustomed to asserting his own will or even recognising that he possesses such a thing. He, like Quinn, is an observer of his own actions, as though he were a satellite half-gazing at his own affairs or a passenger within a larger self who feels no responsibility for the outcome of the self's journey:

> He had only meant to stop killing, stop being the dispatcher. That decision had entrained other decisions, but he had not made

them. They were not his decisions. He was being wafted along on
a quest not of his own making, describing a circle which someone
else had authored; acting out some foreign body's volition

(Monsters Worse to Come :24)

The repressed fear of derealisation and control loss are what this kind of agency deletion achieves. The relationship of free will and agency to uncanny characterisation is developed more fully in Chpater Five.

3.7: CONCLUSION: OUTLINES FOR UNCANNY CHARACTERISATION

This chapter has examined the concept of the uncanny, and cognate concepts from psychoanalysis, psychology and neuroscience which offer insights into the possibilities of a radically different epistemology of otherness and self-other relations than that presented in modular discourse about characterisation. The uncanny involves two principle features which apply to the writer's characterisation task.

The first feature is the evocation of pre-rational or repressed modes of thought with regards to the nature of self and others which challenge the dominant discourse of rationality. The two rational assumptions which it challenges are as follows:

- That the self and the self-concept are independent of Others. Others are regared as psychologically coherent and their behaviour can be predicted or explained from a knowledge of their traits (their essence) within conventional creative writing discourse. This coherence is manifested in the relationship between all the signifiers or aspects of self-presentation which comprise the characterisation process: name, appearance, body, gender, age, occupation and so on. The argument follows that the self can master an understanding of Others through methodical and transcendental reasoning – can 'look into the head and heart' of the other - and show how these external traits offer a complete and cohesive model for the comprehension of otherness.

- That the self is autonomous, possesses free will and is not subject to influence from any external agency. This also describes the theory of mind which is applied to the understanding of others. Action is the outcome of self-

determination and not contingent, that is, not *without purpose* or beholden to the prompting of some external or unnamed authority.

The uncanny posits the counterthesis to these conventions by making the reader's projected understanding of others fail when it assumes these aspects of self and self-other relations. The 'irrational' forms of self-other relations are made to appear as equally useful inferential schema in the explanation of character essence and action. The self is co-presented in the uncanny as:

- Unstable and analogous to a narrative which strives to impose order where the potential for disorder is always present;

- Tending to disintegrate without others against which it can define itself and is prone to mistake itself for that other;

- Liable to disappear, or become fused, split and confused when clear role assignations are not available.

The second aspect of the uncanny involves the production of uncertainty which causes the reader to hesitate between opposing interpretations about the essential nature of character such that the decision is not subject to closure within the narrative and the character quality under crisis is of an ontological type. In this connection, the use of logical paradoxes which assign a character to two mutually exclusive ontological cagetgories (dead/alive, true/false) is one available strategy. The most forceful blurring of distinctions is between the self and other; in which the social constuction of the self and the integrated naturalised order of the ego, are put under great stress by an exposure of the fluidity of the self, its provenenance in relationships with others and the potential for misrecognition between these two fundamental categories.

The next chapter details how the project of representing these aspects of unstable selfhood and its impact of the understanding of otherness is revealed through characterisation with the treatment of character name as a means for creating and maintaining a bounded space to which character impressions are tied. Through an examination of the logic of the proper name and the philosophy of naming which subtends 'modular' fictional conventions, I will propose guidelines for uncanny onomastics (acts of naming) which are evident in Beckett and Auster and applied in *Monsters Worse to Come*.

CHAPTER THREE NOTES

1 This would satisfy what I have called the writer's need for humility in representing self-other relations. In order for the narrative to take place, it is of course necessary for information about characters to be presented to the reader but the origin of that character information can also be co-presented or even framed within a modal context which implies the narrator's faith or otherwise in the representation. Using epistemic downtoners like 'seems', 'perhaps', and 'maybe' – expressing reservation in judgement – is one example of this. It does not necessarily follow that such an approach to characterisation must endorse the uncanny or solipsistic view of others but it offers the reader the option of considering the narrator's authority and the provenance of their supposed mastery of others.

2 In *Monsters Worse to Come*, the reference to the book which the giant reads in O'Mahessy's Readings also contains a veiled allusion to – a reminder of - the physical book which is in the reader's hands. On page 241, we read that:

> The unshaven bookseller was paying him no heed, was semi-awake, perched behind an antiquated and empty cash register with a copy of Catnip Mirkrat's "The Parsimony of Friedrich" in his damp hands.

> He opened the book at a random spot and fixed his attentions halfway down page 241 et seq.

> (Monsters Worse to Come: 241)

3 'Uncanny' is an approximate but generally accepted translation for the German term "Unheimlich" which literally translated means "unhomely". Freud considered it an acceptable, if slightly deformative translation, in that its use in English corresponded roughly to its original German sense but failed to capture the same semic possibilities which attend the idea of "home" as well as the antonymous-synonymous relationship which exists between *heimlich* and *unheimlich* in German.

4 The fluidity of selfhood and its movement between dependence on others and solipsitic independence is treated extensively in psychological literature. See: Erikson 1959; Epstein 1980. Treatments of borderline personality which exhibits inconstancy and negative self-concepts include: Westen et al. 1984; Perry & Cooper, 1986.

5 The aetiology of the disorder is not very straightforward. Francis Dejode (Dejode et al 2001) record the following list of documented neurological causes of the syndrome:

> In addition to Capgras syndrome, other delusional misidentification syndromes exist, such as Fregoli syndrome, intermetamorphosis and the subjective doubles syndromes. These states constitute a complex group of cognitive right cerebral hemisphere dysfunctions]. The patient refuses to acknowledge a person as being who they say they are, but recognizes most of the physical features of that person]. Illusion of doubles is usually found in psychiatric diseases, particularly in schizophrenia]. However, many authors emphasize that the appearance of Capgras syndrome may correlate with the following: cerebral lesions (head injury and ischaemic cerebrovascular lesions, which are often located in the posterior area of the right hemisphere, where face recognition is performed); electrical disorders on electroencephalography (seizure disorders) with or without clinical manifestations; and metabolic disorders (secondary nephrotic syndrome, diabetes mellitus with dementia).

6 In referring to research in mainstream social psychology I must acknowledge that, in 'real world' examples of the effects of social influence conformism on the self-concept and attendant behaviour, the role of social structures and their relationship to different

types of subjectivity exert different types of effects. The Stanford experiment in particular is concerned with male identity and its tendency to confidently align itself within roles in which power is invested and for which aggression is required. The research on female identity with regards to self-rejection or abnegation has tended to focus on developmental stages in which the socialisation of female identity takes place. Bill Dorris's treatment of the development of Marilyn Monroe's 'perfect self doubt' is such an example. Dorris cites Zanarini et al. (1997), Shapiro et al. (1975) and Westen et al. (1992) in considering the effect of early parental reationships on the development of Monroe's borderline adult personality, negative self-image which produce an uncentred and unstable personality. The uncanny is a concept so completely bound up with ideas of the unpresentable that it is not necessarily concerned with directly acknowledging the different social, developmental and emotional pressures which affect masculine and feminine identity problems. What these differences in etiology suggest, however, is that in each case, and for each type of subjectivity, the specific nature of what is repressed – those primitive fears and pre-rational knowledge – may be very different in content and tone. My treatment of the uncanny extends only to general principles which, depending on each character's case, will manifest itself in different ways.

7 Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive model of how metaphor-based narratives underpin our shared understanding of the origin and destination of the self points out the recurrence of metaphors which reveal an understanding of life-as-a-journey, a movement of stable ego along a neatly punctuated continuum of ideational beginning and meaningful end (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). The uncanny and the abject gain their power through allusion to the unknown and un-narrativised aspects of the pre- and post- self which are elided by such a metaphor.

8 No indication is given in *City of Glass* as to how this doubling might have arisen. By implying, or allowing for the possibility, that cloning is an available technology within the world of the novel, the uncanny effect would be lost as this would offer a rational interpretation for the duplication. As it would if it was implied that Stillman had a twin. This line of inference is not supported by any other information in the narrative and so prolongs the hesitation.

9 This is the same kind of 'trouble' that the participants in Milgram's experiments encountered: having ceded their agency to an authoritative figure from Yale University, the subjects engaged in acts which later caused them great stress, anxiety and what Festinger calls 'cognitive dissonance'. They wanted to disown the acts and reclaim the self-concept in which such actions could never have been carried out by them (Milgram 1970; Festinger 1957).

Names and Naming Strategies

4: NAMES AND NAMING STRATEGIES

The previous chapter presented the concept of the uncanny and examined how its features of estrangement could be applied to the creation of techniques of characterisation. It suggested that reader hesitation, confusion about a character's ontology and the invocation of repressed knowledge about self-other relations were central to this.

This chapter discusses an integral aspect of the process of misrecognition: the referential functions of names and the possibilities which exist for their creation. I argue that modular creative writing discourse (Card 2003; Bickham 1997; Edelstein 1999; Marshall 2002; Frey 1995 for example) implicitly relies upon a model of correspondence between language and reality, such as that espoused in analytical and empiricist views of language (Russell 1903; Currie 1982), in its rules for generating character names. The analytical approach to names and name functions is presented in detail to foreground the staple philosophical basis or set of assumptions which inform the modular approach and folk psychological concept of names – that a name uniquely refers to, connotes the qualities, and is an internal attribute of the character. Turning to poststructuralist notions of the proper name, in the writings of Derrida (1962) and Wittgenstein (1958), I offer a series of opposing rules for naming characters, and treating the onomastics (the act of naming) which occurs within the narrative, in a way designed to elicit an uncanny reaction by demonstrating the contingency of their provenance and their potential for disconnecting from the things they would denote. Example of different approaches to the design of character names are drawn from classic texts Beckett and Auster, and contemporary *naïve* fiction, in which the application of modular creative writing rules can be most easily discerned. The effect of these considerations on my naming strategies and treatment of naming in *Monsters Worse to Come* is then discussed.

4.1: INTRODUCTION

In designing a name for characters, a writer has two principal considerations: (1) the possibilities for naming which are permitted by the system of language and the conventions of fiction; and (2) the function of the name - whether it is used simply to allude to a character's presence or whether it serves to connote or describe the character's attributes. In fact, there can be no such thing as a purely

referential name: a name without connotation or instance, or what Yagisawa calls a 'vacuous or negative existential name' (Yagisawa 1984). Regardless of authorial intention, names connote character qualities at their first invocation – even if it is simply to provide an implicature about the character's gender, class or ethnicity. When this descriptive or connotative aspect of the name is acknowledged, a secondary set of questions presents itself: how is description achieved and what is the name intended to describe or connote (the characters' physical appearance, temperament or narrative function, similarity to other characters or people, for example).

Mary Seeman suggests that there are four psychological elements involved in adults' choice of names for their children[1]: denotative, connotative, magical and commemorative (Seeman 1976). I will argue that, with regard to fictional names, the 'magical' element infuses the naming process through both the referential and descriptive functions and that the 'commemorative' aspect has its own equivalent in fiction ('allegorical' or 'transferent') which can be subsumed under the broad banners of description and connotation.

Within literary criticism, the discussion of names has tended to concentrate on their descriptive and allegorical function with particular emphasis on the intertextual play which is often the focus of proper name use. For example, in his analysis of Mr. Knott in Samuel Beckett's *Watt*, John Calder offer the following hypothesis:

> Mr. Knott is quite possibly God, and it is not difficult to
> think of God as being a knot that mankind has always
> tried to untie or may be untieable.

(Calder 1998:28)

This is an example of the critic's search for an origin, intention or descriptive function to the name, or an analytical method in which the given name makes absolute descriptive sense and corresponds to the character's perceived narrative function and relationship to other characters. In many cases, the polysemic potential of created character names seems to provoke speculative assessments of what the name *says* about the character. These assertions about what a name 'means' often end in judgements which have no way to ultimately authenticate

themselves and, by failing to formally consider the other functions of naming, often overlook important aspects of what is at stake in the writer's choice and treatment of names within the novel. Creative writing discourse foregrounds the importance of reader-orientation and places almost exclusive emphasis on the referential function of names. Because it constitutes and announces the character, the referential function of the names is the aspect which is most closely linked to the uncanny effect.

4.2: REFERENCE AND READER-ORIENTATION

> Use a different first initial for all your more important characters' first and last names. Readers get confused when there's an Adam and an Alec, a Mrs Wilson and a Mrs Webster. To keep track, write out the alphabet and write down the names you decide upon.

<div align="right">(Marshall 2000:27)</div>

In order to avoid possible confusions about who or what is the subject of the narrative at any given time, the writer needs to focalize on recognisable characters and objects, signalling their presence and relevance through the use of their name (Gennette 1980). Thus naming is a precondition of speaking about the world, particularly a world in which characters are the main concern. This is how what Saul Kripke calls the 'necessity of naming' impacts upon the novelist's activities (Kripke 1982). The names that a novelist uses to signal the presence of one character or another have more than a referential functional -- and that function is by no means simple -- but this aspect of it is primary. The central role of orientation and recognition in the rational-modular design of character was discussed in Chapter Two in which it was argued that creative writing discourse relies upon and naturalises a complex of epistemological assumptions about the elements of character. In the case of the referential function of naming, these assumptions are closely bound to the causal theory of names espoused in the discourse of analytical philosophy.

The existence of proper names is, in the first place, predicated on the possibilities for designation which the system of language provides. There are two very different theoretical schools which attempt to describe the nature of these

possibilities: the analytical school which I will discuss presently, and the poststructuralist approach which is treated later on in the chapter.

The analytical school, of which the causal theory of reference or the anti-descriptivist approach (Kripke 1972; Putnam 1975), is representative, and with roots in the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle (Russell 1903; Frege (Beaney 1997); and Carnap 1943), argues that a name becomes attached to its referent (its existential quantifier) in an "original baptism" and consolidated through reference-preserving causal links. As such, this approach denies the necessity of the descriptive aspect of naming, as advanced by Searle and Donnellan, in which it is argued that the name *means* its object because it has the observable properties of that object (Searle 1983; Donnellan 1970). In anti-descriptivism, individual human perception and experience of the object does not affect the name's use and therefore does not affect its meaning.

The causal theory model, as with others from analytical philosophy, acknowledges the role of repeated use and communicative convention in affirming the name, but tends to ignore the fact that names are not rigidly but only socially and conventionally affixed to their referents and are therefore subject to change. As Slavoj Žižek points out, anti-descriptivism fails to see the logical extension of its own conclusion which is that the mark of the proper name is just a 'positivisation of a void' and is utterly contingent (Žižek 1989:90). The Kripkean approach accepts the relationship between the name (signifier) and its bearer (signified) as possessing no internal logic of its own but maintains that this link is nonetheless necessary and stable. That is: it produces no *surplus* which could result in the additional signification of anything else that is not its object. This 'absolute necessity' of names is to allow speakers to refer to other speakers and other objects and thereby enable communication through common reference points.[2]

In the novelist's case, the causal theory model suggests that, for referential purposes at least, one name for a character is as good, authentic or referential as any other, as long as it applies uniquely and serves to differentiate one character from another. The 'original baptism' of the object has its mirror in the writer's decision about which name to apply to a character. What causal theory does not describe are the 'rules' governing the initial production of names, the grammar or

ideology of these *baptismal* rites or how one can acknowledge or reveal the instability in sign-referent relations through the design or treatment of names. This is one aspect of the theory which is most roundly criticised: that it gives no consideration to the diachronic quality of name use and change, nor does it consider the role of power in the initial affixation of name to the object, particularly where alternative external and internal names for the same object, person or concept are in competition. (Ziff 1977; Schalkwyk 2002).

In modular approaches to characterisation, the name is similarly vaunted as a trustworthy, eternal and unique identifier, a signifier which is designed to disguise its non-natural, arbitrary relationship to the one it names. This conception of the name is expedient and aspirational. It ignores the pressing logic of the constitution of the name which is that the name does not refer to an already existing object but actually constructs the object as an object – it reifies it by naming it. It is adopted within modular discourse because it allows for the validation of conventions by disguising their contingent origins and it sweeps aside the contradictory and discrepant potential for a character or object's meaning which precedes, or operates outside, the act of naming. David Lodge writes that when an author decides to change a character's name halfway through a novel, or explains the origins of the character name in the writer's considerations, then the game of realism is truly up (Lodge 1992:37). The name, once given, is fixed and in turn fixes the range of meanings which can attend the object which has been named. It is in this creed that the prescriptive logics of analytical philosophy and creative writing instruction coincide.

As a result of its exclusive focus on the referential function of names, causal theory requires that a proper name designates a thing by a consistent and unique appellation – Kripke's "rigid designation". In order for the name to be useful it must not refer to nor connote other objects. This requirement of unique sign-referent relations, in the case of characters, carries an implication of the broader ontological uniqueness of the character itself. Narrative structure has an equal requirement for character uniqueness/differentiation in that the roles which narrative logics prescribe are premised on conflicts and oppositions -- sum *differences* -- between characters which are inscribed firstly by surface

identifiers, of which the name is the beginning (Todorow 1970; Shklovsky 1991).

This avoidance of character identity confusion through the preservation of name/sign uniqueness or singularity is a staple metaphysic of creative writing discourse. In many ways, modular approaches to creative writing and analytical approaches to language have a very similar project: the maintenance of crisply defined boundaries around characters/objects so that conventions can evolve which enable the reader to fully recognise, 'know' or 'care about' a character or object on first and subsequent sightings. The fiction editor Sol Stein advertises to this need for instant recognition of, and crisp distinction between, characters in name choice when he discusses the uses of 'already known' characters in fiction:

> The characters in (plot-driven) books come across as stereotypes with names. If they are not alive, why should I care if their well-being is threatened? Let's look at proof that characters come first:
>
> "Harry jumped off Brooklyn bridge"
>
> The typical reaction is "So what?" Who's Harry? Suppose we add just one word, a second name of someone you may remember, a popular singer and film star. With the addition of a second name, does your reaction to the sentence change?
>
> "Harry Belafonte jumped off Brooklyn Bridge."
>
> Suddenly the sentence means something. If you remember the singer Harry Belafonte, you can visualise the character. With no characterisation beyond a name, because its someone we know about, we begin to care.

(Stein 1995:50)

Rational-modular creative writing discourse, on the topic of character, insists upon minimal detail resulting in maximum recognition. Recognition is strengthened by the presentation of the already familiar. In this case, there is no characterisation beyond the simple act of reference. All that is 'known' or 'familiar' is the name: the character is characterised by predicate reference. He is

someone the reader already knows, an object of familiarity. It is a feature of modular approaches to acquaint the reader with the character, and their type, as quickly as possible and without ambiguity. Referencing an already existing familiar 'character' is simply a hyper-application of this. And it is the crispness of the 'already known name' which serves this function.

The connotative potential of names, mediated through similarity to other signs, can upset its effectiveness as a reference marker. This is because naming conventions are implicitly based on the Saussurean model of language (Saussure 1916). That is to say, a character's name is useful or useable if it is sufficiently different, as a phonic and graphic sign, from the other names in the novel and the pool of known names outside the novel. Sufficient difference between names is concentrated on initial letters, phonemes and syllabic stress. And so names such as 'Marcus' and 'Marco' do not tend to co-appear in novels, because not only do they have similar graphical and phonological properties, but they can also refer to individuals from the same gender class. Identity confusion occurs when insufficient difference (at a phonological, graphical, semantic and social level) is posited between character identifiers. And identity confusion -- the radical positing of similarities between characters or the exposure of the conventions upon which naming depends -- is censured in creative writing because of its potentially disorienting and non-referential effect. As Oscar Scott Card writes:

> No two characters in the same story can have their key
> name (the one most commonly referred to) start with the
> same letter or the same sound. In a work of fiction, it
> causes readers endless confusion to have two characters
> whose names begin with the same letter or sound. So
> besides all the other concerns, you have to make sure
> your main characters have names that are easily
> distinguished.

(Card 2003:46)

This rule has become an explicit part of the novel craft and relies heavily upon a philosophy of language which is concerned with reference and recall to the exclusion of other language functions. It represents the characters of a novel as a set of tokens whose sign, function and appearance must at all times remain

mutually exclusive. The same objective to avoid name interference features in advertising research in which it is advised to name products using words without common association, so as to avoid triggering recall of rival brands:

> Brand names composed of low frequency words stimulate distinctive encoding, which may eliminate or reverse the former pattern of interference effects.

<div align="right">(Meyers-Levy 1999: 206)</div>

Noticing the confluence of interests between advertising and modular creative writing, we can call this rule 'the maximisation of sign difference' between character names for the avoidance of 'brand' interference.

Some examples from the characters lists of classic fiction illustrate this point. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (Stoker 1897), the following characters appear:

> Arthur Holmwood, aka Lord Godawmer; Dr. John Seward; Dracula; Jonathan Harker; Lucy Westenra; Mina Murray; Mrs. Westenra; Peter Hawkins; Professor Abraham Van Helsing; Quincey Morris; Renfield.

In terms of the phonetic and graphic space which they mark out for themselves, these characters are given ample differentiation. There is no repetition of initial sounds and no repetition of phonemes in key positions (that is, there are no rhymes). The only difficulty presented is the recurrence of 'h' at the beginning of the surnames. The following graph depicts a lexicometric analysis of these names. This is done by converting the names into numerical arguments which can be mapped to indicate the spatial difference between the names. [3] The order of the names is unimportant, what is important is the distance between them.

Lexicometrical Analysis of Difference between Character Names in *Dracula*
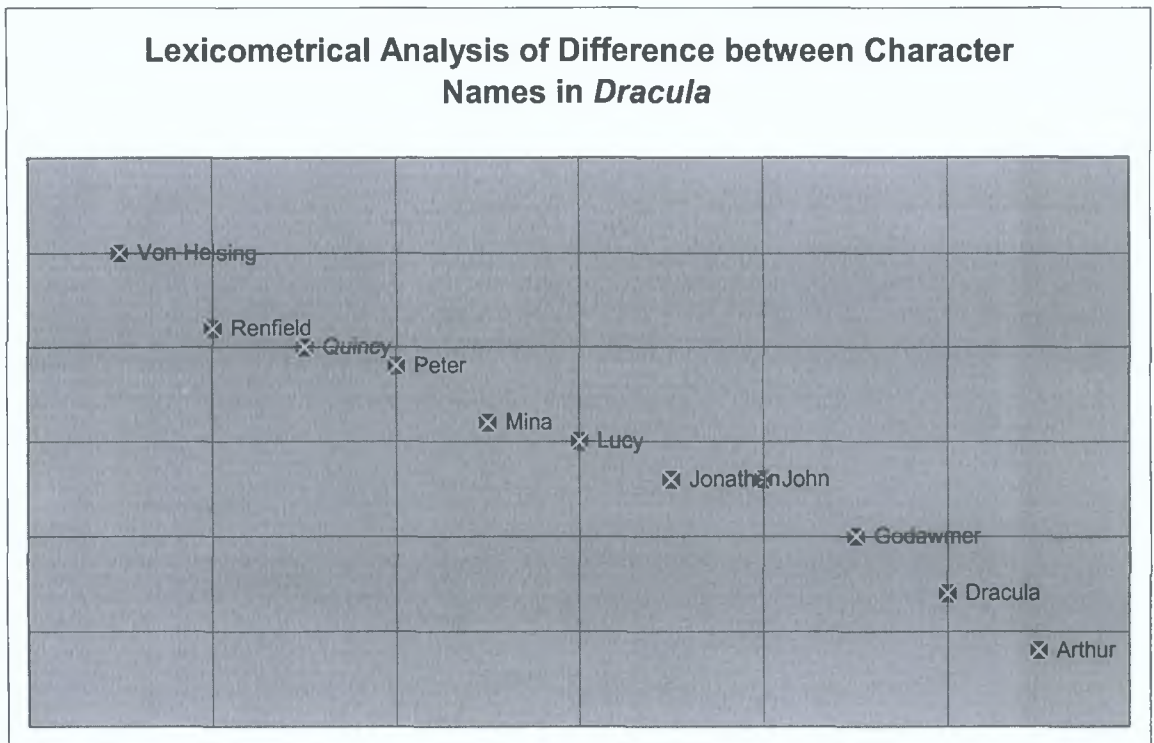
**Table 1: A plot of the metric difference between the character names of Stoker's Dracula**

This set of characters obeys the rule of maximal sign differentiation which is a product of a particular ethic of contemporary creative writing discourse in which information and the way in which it is structured are viewed as primary, if not the only, concerns. Stoker wrote in the gothic tradition with which the uncanny is most closely associated. But it is Beckett, his fellow Dubliner, whose naming strategies are more consonant with the epistemological commitment which the uncanny implies.

The cast of referred-to and presented characters in Beckett's trilogy demonstrates none of these differentiating concerns and flaunts the rule to an absurd extent by having eight characters whose names begin with 'M', three with 'J', three with 'L' and so on. The outcome of this failure to distinguish between identity signs is to highlight the fact that confusion between two characters on the basis of their names is a possibility which is allowed by the system of naming:

Big Lambert; Edmund; Father Ambrose; Gaber; Jackson; Jacques; Johnson; Lady Pedal; Lemuel; Lousse; MacMann; Mahood; Malone; Martha; Mercier; Molloy; Moran; Murphy; Nicholson; Pat; Ruth; Sapo; Watt; Wilson; Youdi.
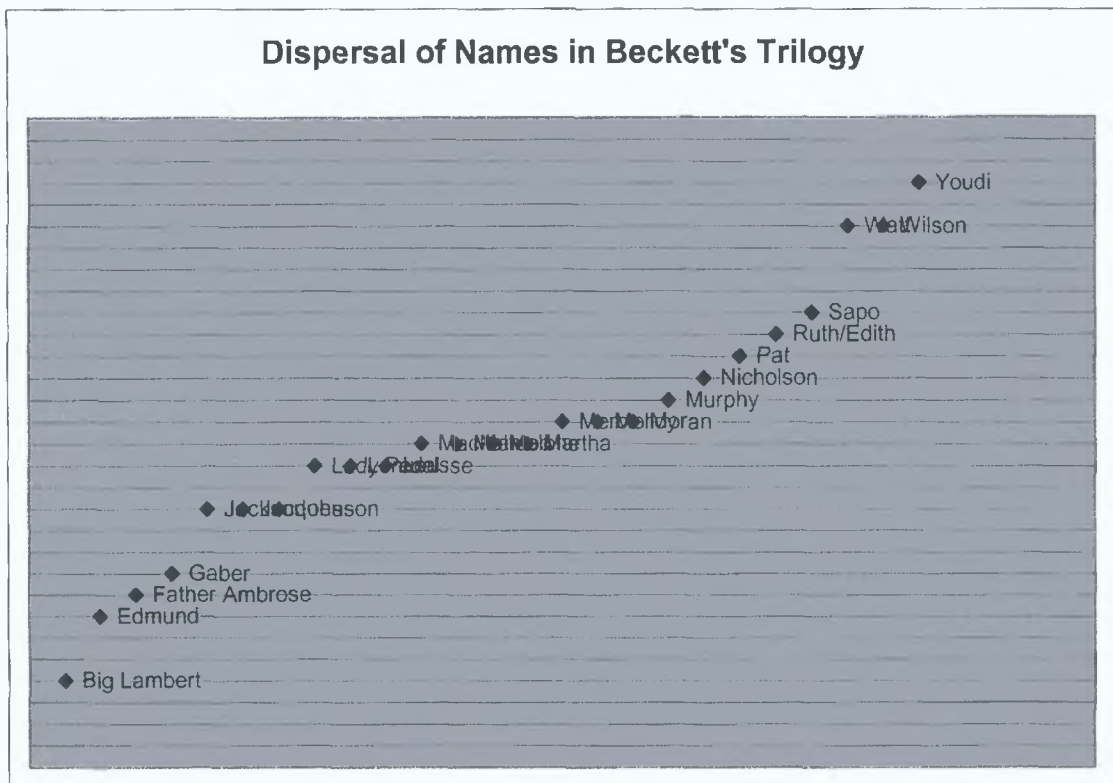
Table 2: A plot of the lexicometrical dispersal the character names of Beckett's Trilogy

The imbrication of names (particularly those beginning with 'Ma-' and 'Mo-') in the chart gives an indication of the difficulty a reader experiences in trying to distinguish one character from another. As an analogy, it points to the confusion which a reader faces in trying to create a separate semantic memory or character space for each of the characters without running the risk of brand name 'interference'.

In the rule about starting character names with different letters cited by Orson Scott Card, the term 'distinguishing' implies the objective of character inter-differentiation. A writer who adheres to this rule chooses names for their referential or orientative function at the expense of other possibilities. In so doing he reveals nothing of the rules which govern the name's creation, nor the possibility for change or confusion which runs through each act of naming. And finally, the partial echo between two signs, which is part of the grammar of the uncanny, is lost when greater difference between signs is pursued in this methodical way.

For the most part, research in this area of name recognition and distinction from the reader's perspective, has been conducted within the sphere of experimental

psychology and marketing. Its chief application is to the 'science' of brand names and in this it has the very same objective as name design in modular creative writing: to enhance the memorability and familiarity of the named products. Keller et al. (1998) define a successful brand name as one which is memorable and allows for further information processing about the product at a later date. There is a strong correlation between name memorability and low frequency of previously low general usage of the word or word parts (Meyers-Levy 1989). Berg and Lippman suggest that humour positively affects recall of the relationship between brand name and product type. (Berg and Lippmann 2001). Memorability can be enhanced by use of initial plosives (/p/ /k/ /t/), irregular spelling, semantic appositeness, paronomasia (punning), (Lowry et al. 2003), words rich in visual imagery (Bellezza 2002) and repetition or re-enforcement (Leong et al. 1996).

What we find in modular creative writing discourse, with its emphasis in economic encoding of character as a familiar known entity, is an endorsement of these heuristics for name recognition or, more precisely, a suggestion that the choice of names for the characters should always be engineered so that they instantly announce their natural differences from each other and anchor themselves within the reader's mind as *instantly recognisable entities* in the familiar environment of the novel. The name is the character's brand and the onomastic function is to provide such names as enable a reader to identify with and recognise the values of each brand as it appears in the novel.

Within naïve fiction[4], one finds the same rules being used. For example, a novella by Michael Vance, entitled *'Undertow'*, illustrates the prohibition on similar naming. It features eight characters whose names, lexicometrically, are highly differentiated. The effect of modular discourse on naming strategies in amateur fiction is not necessarily proven by this feature but the prohibition on ambiguous naming is observable throughout the field:

Dispersion of Character Names in Undertow

Winston
Gaines

Steve

Martha

David Tripp

Jeff Brooks

Gene Vincent

Dan Sterling
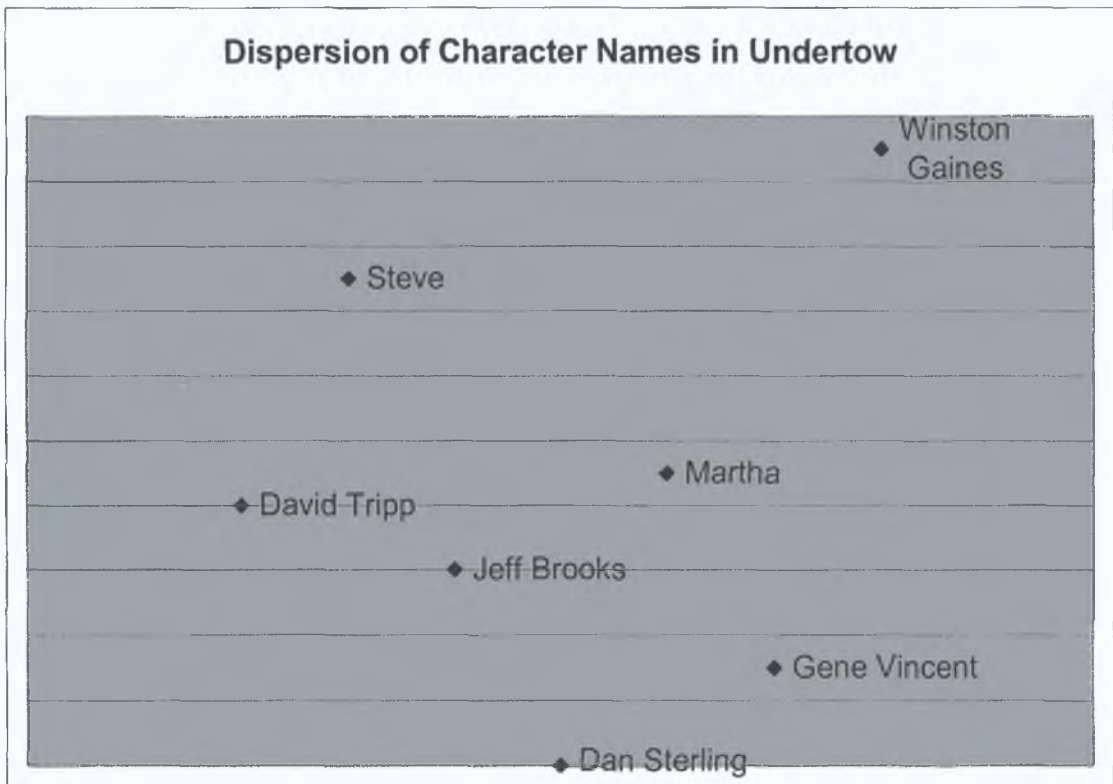
4.3: RATIONAL-MODULAR RULES FOR REFERENTIAL NAMING

In attempting to synopsise what I regard as the most commonly advocated approaches to names in creative writing discourse, I have used the word 'rules'. This is, of course, a highly loaded term. I use it because of its application within computational linguistics and descriptions of local grammars to refer to persistent and typical forms of language use within a domain. Creative writing advice, although heterogenous in many respects, can be said to comprise a set of implicit and explicit rules in so far as it expresses a coherent set of criteria by which a work is evaluated. The discourse coheres on a set of particular value judgements about what is allowed and what is prohibited. There is a close kinship between modular creative writing rules and analytical theories of language function in their insistence, for different reasons, upon the referential function of names. In these approaches, names must refer to crisply defined entities and must therefore be crisply defined or differentiated themselves. From this premise, and the advice offered by creative writing instructors (Frey, Bickham, Lukeman, Marshall et al.), a series of 'rules' or description of modular referential naming practices can be advanced:

1. A unique name must be applied to each character and may only refer to that character. The character name is sacred. Pronouns may share the referential load but only where there is no doubt as to whom they denote.

2. Initial letters and phonemes for character names must also be distinct to prevent character misrecognition or identity confusion;

3. The unique name should be 'brandable', that is: its referential potential cannot already have been exhausted. Referential exhaustion can be said to occur when a name is already, and popularly, associated solely with an existing fictional character (Huckleberry, Atticus) unless one is attempting to co-opt an existing brand name into the fiction for the purposes of economy or irony. Similarly, very popular names (Jack, Sarah, Tom[5]) offer less differentiation as few are untouched by a reader's 'private' knowledge of people with the same name. Of course, this naming strategy can work conversely, where popular names are deliberately chosen to connote the character's 'everyman' qualities;

4. The character's name must be unambiguously iterated and re-iterated as an aid to recognition. This works as an economic form of closure over character identity: all of the contradictions, ellipses and absences in the character's profile can be stabilised, at least momentarily, by the invocation of the single name;

5. In fiction, but not in referential theories of language, the name must carry, or be able to carry, non-referential (connotative or descriptive) meaning;

6. The name must resemble other names orthographically and constitutively: that is, it must bear similarities to the name prototype. This notionally prototypical name is culture- and genre-dependent but salient features include length, initial capitalisation, pronouncability (what the language allows in terms of phonemes or letter combinations) and exclusion rules, for example whether or not numbers and punctuation can be a valid part of a name. [6]

These rules are increasingly part of an explicit methodology for generating character names in novel writing. In other cases, the rules are more implicit but equally pervasive. They rely upon the logic of referential models of language and

share the same tendency to view names as signs whose relationship to referents should be stabilised and rigorously differentiated from others. This is anathema to the uncanny effect and to revealing the precarious nature of the sign-referent relationship to the reader. By reducing the phonological and graphic difference between names, and weakening the application of the rule of unique assignation, referential naming can achieve an ordered but disorienting, uncanny effect.

4.4: REFERENCE & 'FRUSTRATED NOMINATION'

Analytical philosophy accepts non-transcendence in the relationship between sign and referent. The contingency of this relationship is more evident, and more persuasively exposited, however, in other approaches to names, particularly of theorists whose approach is usually labelled post-structuralist. In Saussurean structuralist linguistics, the relationship of the name and the thing-named is simply one of convention and the name's persistence (or success) is a product of its iterative use, referential usefulness and, ultimately, historical contingency. In the previous section, I considered how this process of maximised difference, through graphological, and phonological markers, is usually deployed in the naming of fictional characters. Now I will consider a more radical, poststructural extension of the Saussurean model which disputes the causal theory approach, and, in particular, its idea that reference is the primary function of *proper names* and its requirements that names have a uniqueness and a relationship to their referents which is not mediated solely by systemic differences between signs. In radical *poststructuralism*, the single sign does not efficiently refer to a single object or concept but is a polysemous indice which can partially invoke many such objects through phonic, graphic and symbolic parallels. It is in the consideration of some of these aspects of poststructuralist approaches to the proper names, that the possibilities for an uncanny approach to the referential aspect of naming can be discerned.

Names are possible only because they are part of a system, being the system of language. Rules for naming are therefore derived from the rules which govern the production of all linguistic terms. After Saussure, the idea that names correspond to reality, in that they identify already existing entities in the world of phenomena, has been largely dismissed. However, causal theory, as with earlier correspondence theories of language (Russell, Frege; ops cit.) still persists with a

partial and contradictory metaphysics of the relationship between sign and referent by downplaying the importance of "difference" to the system. That is, analytical philosophy requires, in tacit ways, that representation has some non-arbitrary relationship to the thing it describes and that this thing, being somehow prior to the representation, is what can be called reality. This is revealed most obviously in the argument that the name is constant and uniquely assigned to its referent, which formula serves to eternalise and naturalise that relationship, despite the admission that this relationship is historically determined, arbitrary and subject therefore to change. Jacques Derrida has responded to this by insisting upon the primacy of the sign and arguing that the nature of its correspondence to anything except other signs within the system is illusory.

> From the moment that the sign appears, that is to say from the very beginning, there is no chance of encountering anywhere the purity of "reality", "unicity", "singularity".

(Derrida 1976:91)

What appears at first to be a simple attack on transcendent views of language is, in fact, more an attack on the concept of the necessary uniqueness of signs and names. This observation impacts upon the task of naming a character by stressing that the sign-name and the referent-character do not relate to each other except through the use of differential sounds, marks and other linguistic conventions which separate them from other characters in the universe of named things. The name is not necessarily 'unique' nor rigid. In fact, the claims for uniqueness and rigidity are more reflective of a wish that things be so ordered, rather than a description of an actual state-of-affairs. In this assertion, the poststructuralist approach is more cognitively realistic, in its modelling of how people make sense of signs and assign them to memory, than the analytical philosophy school. The assignation of meaning based upon sign differences must take into account the homonymic effect of signs with similar appearance and structure but different referents. As we will see, phomemes (sounds) and morphemes (word elements) play a large role in how we assign meaning to novel compounds such as fictional names. These elements, phonemes and morphemes, do not in themselves refer to anything, because they are not actually words, but impart meaning through their

ability to connote compounds of words through alliteration, rhyme and other parallels.

This idea, that the sign has some polysemous potential and can allude to objects to which it is not *supposed* to refer, has no acceptance or treatment in analytical circles. On the other hand, the hardline poststructuralist contingency view of names presents limitless possibilities for naming strategies to the novelist many of which, from a descriptive point of view, border on the meaningless: a name such as '%6gH--#' would meet most of the rules previously described for effective referentiation but fails to carry any obvious potential descriptive quality (as well as presenting extreme difficulties with regards to pronunciation). In the world of most fiction, as in the causal theory of proper names, these possibilities are circumscribed and limited owing to the persistence of what might be called the orientational usefulness of sign singularity and natural sign-referent correspondence, as well as the secondary stipulation, discussed later, that names always have a functional descriptive quality. If we are to look at the other possibilities for designing names, we should first ask what happens when these rules are broken and the difference between character names is elided.

4.5: BECKETT'S STRATEGIES OF ELISION AND ENTROPY

> And this name that I sought, I feel sure that it began with a B or a P, but in spite of this clue, or perhaps because of its falsity, the other letters continued to escape me ...and even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate.

> (*Molloy* :31)

In Samuel Beckett's drama and novels, and in the trilogy in particular, character differentiation is challenged on the levels of phonology, orthography as well as that of social category. 'Molloy' is pursued by 'Moran' in the first of the trilogy of novels; in the second 'Malone' appears. Both these characters succeed 'Murphy' and 'Mercier' in the Beckett canon (and cite them as twins or ghosts) and are joined by 'Martha' , 'MacMann' and 'Mahood' within the trilogy. Even these similarities multiply under inspection. Moran, the detective who is set the task of finding the wandering Molloy, elides the tiny difference between the

names of Molloy and Malone further by looking into and doubting the former's name.

> Of these two names, Molloy, or Mellose, the second seemed to me perhaps to be more correct. But barely. What I heard, in my soul, I suppose, where the acoustics are so bad, was a first syllable, Mol, very clear, followed almost at once by a second, very thick, as though gobbled by the first, which might have been oy as it might have been ose, or one, or even oc.

(Molloy 112)

In these thoughts are mirrored the reasons for Oscar Scott Card's injunctions against similar naming: the first syllable is what matters most to the reader, in that it should be clear and distinct and, for referential purposes at least, followed by a second syllable which is largely irrelevant. Of the four permutations which Moran considers, one names Molloy, another names Malone, a third invokes Moloch, and the fourth, Mellose or Mollose, is his favourite and seems to intone 'mollusc' or 'morose' or both. In the trilogy, what John Calder calls the aporetics of Beckett are often tightly focussed on the name and *its uncomplicated claims* to truth (Calder 1995:26). The name, particularly the self-referring pronoun, is to be mistrusted, forgotten, as it is the tool with which language, which too cannot be trusted, gains its power and in which the speaker thinks he is inventing and speaking freely but is instead re-hashing his 'stale old self-deluding pensum' (*Molloy* 32). For Beckett, the original tragedy of being born is mirrored in the tragedy of the delusion that language has the ability to capture the nature of that first tragedy: a delusion in which a "belief in names" is the first step. The empty comfort that names provide is to be undercut by achieving a distance from them. Names, as with other features of distinction and uniqueness, are mocked or forgotten, ignored or occluded in Beckett's works.

Most of Beckett's characters succeed in forgetting the names of others and, at times of grace, themselves. Jack MacGowran commented that Beckett had a fascination with names that begin with the letter M, which fascination sometimes extended to his use of W (for Watt or Winnie or Willie), and noted that one was the orthographic inversion of the other (Gussow 2001). The reasons for this

don't concern me here, and Beckett's consciousness of it is similarly outside my brief, but the mirroring or doubling effect it achieves – this repeated use of M and its mirror W, hints at another potential strategy for uncanny naming, which Beckett seems to comment upon obliquely in *Company*.

> Till feeling the need for company again he tells himself to
> call the hearer M at least. For readier reference. Himself
> some other character. W. Devising it all himself included
> for company.

> (Beckett 1988)

The author, thinking himself to have 'discovered' the already existing character must, like Adam in the Garden of Eden, grant him a name and since the name means nothing in any transcendent way (its is not, after all, God's name for the character), any name will do so long as it allows the speaker to refer to it. But since, finally, the name does not even refer to anything unique anyway -- since these characters each spring from the same contriving source -- it does not need to uniquely identify anyone or distinguish one from the other. And so the same name, or one almost identical, will do for all things. "For readier reference" would seem to imply that Beckett took a referential view of names and doubted only their capacity for descriptive meaning but the proliferation of Ms and Ws in his work undermines even this faith in names and reference. There is a further cause for speculating on the erosive referential potential of using M and W so frequently. Orthographically they are the same mark transposed through 180 degrees and therefore mirrored. In English these are the initial letters which define gender (man, woman) and part of Beckett's sceptical or uncanny characterisation also involves eliding the difference between the sexes. In *speaking of his* experiences of love, Molloy speculates on the true nature of his only experience of it with Ruth or Edith, (naturally, he cannot remember her name with confidence):

> Perhaps she too was a man. Yet another of them... Don't
> be tormenting yourself, Molloy, man or woman, what does
> it matter?

> (*Molloy* 56-7)

Malone shares this aporia or indifference to differential markers. In describing the stories he will tell, he writes as follows:

> Perhaps I shall put the man and the woman in the same story, there is so little difference between a man and a woman, between mine I mean.

(*Malone Dies*: 181)

In Monsters Worse to Come, Albie Bawn shares this wisdom of indifference with Kinnegan, when the latter corrects him for alleging that The Duff is his mother:

> Mother or father – what's the difference? They're equally culpable.

(*Monster Worse to Come*: 189)

The fundamental markers of identity: name, face, gender, clothes and body are all ablated until little or nothing remains in the narrative mind, and subsequently the readers, to distinguish one person from another. Doubt and hesitation are the defining features of Beckett's narrator's characterisation.

With all of these strategies of elision and indifference, Beckett's naming strategy moves towards a dismantling of the edifice upon which the possibility of significant – by which I mean differential -- naming is based. The names are increasingly similar and the characters – or what is known of them – are elided too, into each other or into silence, as though to highlight their spurious claims to uniqueness and natural difference. At times, Beckett seems to playing very subtle jokes with the concept of name as unique reference. For example, the detective Jacques Moran, the most distinct of the trilogy's characters, in mentioning his son, cautions that "His name is Jacques, like mine. This cannot lead to confusion." (*Molloy*: 92). The boy's name is very rarely used in the novel and would not lead to confusion if it wasn't for the ominous nature of this warning.

The deliquescence of the name is an obvious technique for sublime non-closure, uncanny effect or as a complement to the representation of communication entropy and aporia which have been noted in Beckett's work (Sikorska, 1994; Stevenson, 1997). In the third part of the trilogy, *The Unnameable*, the narrator

who refuses to, or cannot, name himself tries to places himself outside of the beckoning of the representation system and seems to avoid fixing his subjectivity by precluding the possibility of interpellation. But, perversely, and due to the logic and relentless necessity of names, he (in)advertently has a name created for him through the simple act of refusing to do so: that is, the narrator has a name defined by his decision not to reveal his name. It is 'The Unnameable'. The attempts of the unnameable to draw attention to the inescapable subjectivity which language always imposes – and within which the proper name plays a substantial part -- is a subject on which Beckett wrote in private correspondence to Axel Kaun:

> As we cannot eliminate language all at one, we should at
> least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its
> falling into disprepute. To bore one hole after another in it,
> until what lurks behind it - be it something or nothing -
> begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for
> a writer today.

<div align="right">(cited in Calder 1998 :17)</div>

The metalinguistic conceit of refusing to play the language game of nomination does not succeed for The Unnameable because metalanguage is subject to the same inexorable logic of the proper name as first order language. To paraphrase Kant on the sublime (Kant 1962), any concept which can be presented to the senses will acquire a name even if that name only functions to refer to the indescribability and sublimity of the concept. Avoiding referentiality but retaining sensibility for a character is not possible. Once the character is presented he becomes a named entity, whether the writer wishes or knows how to christen him or not. Sense always proceeds contingently from reference, and reference, or its appearance, is ubiquitous.

Sidney Feshbach, in comparing the naming strategies of Joyce and Beckett, argued that Joyce was primarily concerned with adding complexity to names, burdening them with allegorical, connotative information and increasing their referential and allusive power ('Fionn Earwicker', 'Jarl von Hoother', 'Comestipple Sacksoun'), whereas Beckett's strategy was to subtract, to

minimise the information which could be presented in the label with the inevitable result of trying to scour all value and function from the name:

> Whereas Joyce risked supersaturating the names and therefore the substance of fictional identity until they passed beyond a magnitude that readers could comprehend, Beckett risked reducing the names and therefore the substance of fictional identity until they contracted to a magnitude that readers could not comprehend.

> (Feshbach 1995:615)

To forsake the referential or orientational aspect of naming, by unmasking its rules as Beckett does, is not necessarily to give way to apophasis and the impossibility of communicating through naming – despite Feshbach's allegation, it is difficult to see how it can be ascertained whether readers *comprehend* the name 'Clov' any more or less than they comprehend "a dustman nocknamed Sevenchurches" (From *Finnegans Wake* (Joyce 1946)) – except that the communication is not centred on the named characters but on the means by which their names have no necessary relationship to them, do not obviously describe them and only barely refer to them. Beckett's naming strategy is, on one level, a performative acknowledgement of the role of sign difference in the creation of proper names. It seems indifferent, apathetic or even openly hostile to the game of phonic play. By failing to replace one system of conventions, hinged on maximised differences in the sign articulating the differences in the nature of those the signs refer to, with another such system, Beckett's strategy paves the way for a reading of character relationships based upon the shared bareness of referential existence and because the characters remain undescribed, left in their endogenous and private coherence, by their names. These intuitions of faint similarities occur when what Lacan calls the pre-symbolic Real – the preverbal, non-referential sign -- is encountered where the symbolic -- the coherent and conventional sign -- is expected and is usually sovereign (Lacan 1955). That is, the symbolic marker of difference fails to cleave solely to its referent and, in hinting at other referents, other characters, or none at all incuding the self,

reveals the horror of contingency upon which symbolic conventions are based. This, in essence, is one aspect of the production of the uncanny.

When the referential function of naming is ignored, when reference fails to refer to a single unchanging and unique thing, what results is a confusion about which character is being referred to and what the character is supposed to embody. One could say that this confusion or hesitation is due to the fact that the name has failed to provide a rigidly designated symbolic space to which the character's attributes and actions can later be unambiguously assigned. One can look at this kind of indifferentiation as at an example of fuzzy sets of properties whose ambiguous difference is further complicated by the near uselessness of their labels.

In such a case the prospect of identification, of affirmation of who the character *is,* becomes problematic, as though consistent, distinct and meaningful names are part of a contract between the writer and his reader which, once broken, cause the reader to hesitate before, and fail to recognise, the character in their uniqueness. In the absence of a sufficiently differentiated name, an epistemological queasiness ensues because none of the signposts in the text offer a simple route back to perceiving the character as a unique, differentiated, autonomous and coherent subject. To fail to differentiate between names is, it would seem, to render the name meaningless as a referrer, the character de-individuated. The name points at nothing singular and sensible. The uneasy reaction we might have to such an *under*named character, or characters, is similar to what Kristeva calls the horror of the abject: a glimpse at a pre-cognitive, pre-social undifferentiated identity (Kristeva 1982).

This play against differences between signs is just one method of transgressing the dominant rules of naming in creative writing. Non-differential or frustrated naming is possible because language is a system without a centre or a transcendent authority to which names and their meaning can ultimately be referred. This idea of deferred meaning, of signs which do not provide a link to an underlying reality but merely to other signs, can also be used to inform a treatment of the onomastics (name use) within the narrative, as in Paul Auster's *City of Glass.*

4.6: AUSTER'S NAMES AND ECHOES OF NAMES

City of Glass has as one of its themes the polysemy, function of, and endless echo between names. A brief synopsis of the narrative will help to foreshadow this treatment. Daniel Quinn, a lonely man approaching middle age, lives an uncluttered, unattached life, writing detective stories in his New York apartment. One night his telephone rings and a man's voice asks to speak to Paul Auster of the Paul Auster Detective Agency. Quinn tells him he is mistaken and hangs up. He begins to regret being so quick to dismiss the query and vows to play along if the man should ever call again. Some nights later, he does and Quinn, 'without knowing why', claims to be Paul Auster and so begins his involvement with the case.

The caller is Peter Stillman, a disturbed adult who, as a child, was the subject of a language experiment at the hands of his father, also Peter Stillman, who deprived him of contact with humanity and with 'human language', hoping to discern in the child's naturally developed communication the original, pre-Babel language. Stillman Jr is concerned that his father, recently released from an institution, is intent on killing him and hires Auster/Quinn to find him and follow him. Quinn accepts and follows the man he thinks is Stillman Sr for days, weeks, months until he doesn't know how long he has been on the trail, nor whether he knows or can know anything about the case, the people involved and, eventually, himself. Along the way, he tracks down the real Paul Auster and enjoys a conversation with him which exacerbates his confusion about the case: Auster is not a detective either. He is a writer.

A number of features of the narrative underline its concern with language and with the function of names. The notion of a pre-Babel, 'pure' language in which things and names are conjoined and naturalised (or divinised) is the concern of Peter Stillman Sr. Nominal frustration, or non-unique referral, is brought into focus through two name-related strategies within the narrative. The first is the partial identification of the central character Daniel Quinn with the character Paul Auster's son Daniel (who draws attention to it by announcing "Everybody's Daniel!" (*City of Glass*: 89)). Quinn's initials are also echoed in the name of Don Quixote, the authorship of which novel he discusses with the Auster character and whose defiance of rationality his adventures resemble. A further conflation

or confusion of name function occurs when Quinn attempts to decipher the origins of the pseudonym 'Henry Dark' which Stillman Sr. has used. This antagonist, if he can be called that, bears the same name as his son. The latter remarks upon this:

> Strange, isn't it, that two people can have the same name? I do not think that he is me. We are *both* Peter Stillman. But Peter Stillman is not my real name. So perhaps I am not Peter Stillman after all.
>
> (*City of Glass*: 18)

Stillman Jr's attitude to names is the most ambivalent, because of his troubled relationship with language. He frequently dissociates himself from his name, adopting a contextually bound one, switching names with his addressee and following the logic of such switches to their (il)logical conclusions:

> 'I am Peter Stillman. I say this of my own free will. Yes. That is not my real name... My real name is Mr Sad. What is your name, Mr Auster? Perhaps you are the real Mr Sad, and I am noone.'
>
> (*City of Glass*: 15-17)

The irony being that 'Auster' isn't even Auster but Quinn. Stillman also plays with the decomposition of names, and the irrational force of their playful recomposition:

> She says the father talked about God. That is a funny word to me. When you put it backwards, it spells dog and a dog is not much like God. Is it?
>
> (*City of Glass*, p 20)

The forlorness of Quinn's pursuit of absolute proof in the case of the Stillmans is multiply ironic for he has no sure reason to suspect that a crime has taken place or will take place; no way of knowing where it might transpire and is even unsure if he is pursuing the right man. Quinn writes detective fiction under the pseudonym 'William Wilson' (an allusion to the character of the same name in Poe's uncanny story about doubles (Poe 1840)), identifies strongly with the direct, macho behaviour of his main fictional creation 'Max Work' and answers

capriciously to the name 'Paul Auster' in receipt of a telephone call. Given these moves away from his authentically given name, a treble mediation, it is no surprise that eventually his own sense of authenticity becomes corrupted. Deprived, through playful and frustrated experience, of any faith in the authenticity of the name, he glimpses a revelation of his own inauthenticity, and can not recover a sense of the self which was tied to that name.

Marc Chenetier has written about the "assumed" arguments which run through Auster's trilogy and which are often the only provision of detail (in terms of character names and location) in its first two books. The narrator of *Ghosts*, the second novel of the trilogy, says of the location of the action:

> The address is unimportant. But let's say Brooklyn
> Heights for the sake of argument.

(*Ghosts*: 9)

As Chenetier points out, the argument is, in one way, one of referential necessity, since the actions must take place somewhere to distinguish them from actions which have taken place in other places (Chenetier 1995). Within the narrative, the name of the location does not actually provide any referential information of any kind since there are no other places against which the label 'Brooklyn Heights' acts as a deictic marker. The statement of location, as with the use of names, simply acknowledges the prescribed logic that places have names to distinguish them from other places. This is also reflected in the choice of names for the characters in *Ghosts*. They are all named after colours: Black, Blue, White, Brown. This use of an inventory of colours as an inter-differentiating mark suggests a strategy of using a rigorously classified set of labels, possessing natural differences, to mark the differences between character types. It has the apparent virtue of affirming the authenticity of the name, as tools of reference, through the implied comparison with the scientifically, culturally and cognitively differentiated medium of colour. But the colours of the spectrum are not irreducibly different in this fashion: the spectrum is a continuum in which white constitutes all colours, black their absence and colour admixtures are greatly possible and nearly infinite in number.

As Quinn observes when he has eventually absolved himself of his affinity with order, stability and method:

"A white wall becomes a yellow wall becomes a grey wall,
he said to himself. Changes and then more changes still."

(*City of Ghosts*: 104)

Auster's use of names appears to differ from Beckett's in their heavily ironic and allegorical connotations – Auster is the playful postmodernist to Beckett's playless existentialist – but both call the idea of the name as strict designator into question by exposing its historicity, birth in the potential of a symbolic system, and inescapable relationship to other names. These are techniques which frustarate the logic of the proper name. Techniques of frustrated nomination exemplify the possibility for avoiding strict designation which the system of language based on differnce provides. To the aspirational and prescriptive logic of analytical philosophy, itself adopted by creative writing discourse, it counters that names do not always refer unambiguously to a singular something. What I have called the uncanny effect results from a radical exposure to the return of once familiar things now forgotten; unhomely reminders of the chaotic real through fissures in the symbolic order. In the investigation of the referential function of names, this amounts to an exposure of the name's contingency, its occasional failure to refer to anything presentable to the senses or singular in its nature. Beckett and Auster demonstrate this aesthetic through the strategies of phonic indifference, recycling and doubling of names, and distantiation of characters from their names. The sublime, the uncanny and the nameless are not interchangeable concepts: but the frustration of the logic of the referring name helps to allude to the presence of the familiar but ineffable extra-linguistic, by pointing out the failure of the sign to cling rigorously to the one thing it is supposed to denote.

4.7: A GRAMMAR OF UNCANNY REFERENTIAL NAMING

The production of an uncanny effect relies upon confronting conventions in which the symbolic order of identity is naturalised with one result being the demonstration of the contingency and undependability of identity markers. Uncertainty results when the writer does not follow these conventions in such a way as to enable reader's inferences about character essence to function. With regards to the name, this has the result of drawing the reader's attention away from the task of character profiling and causing them to hesitate, noticing some

incoherence between the non-differentiating function of the name and its effect on making the character seem less distinct from others.

To this end, the rules for producing an uncanny effect are founded on inverting modular naming techniques for referential purposes in so far as they describe reader's expectations about the function and nature of character names in a novel. These transformations are outlined ideas of how these conventions can be frustrated to produce a hesitation and misrecognition effect:

4.7.1: CONTINGENCY OF NAMES

Drawing attention to the contingency of names through the treatment of character names exposes the name's non-essential relationship to the bearer. Research from cognitive and developmental psychology suggests that children have a tendency to regard the name not as a label attached to an object but as an essential attribute of the object (Rosenblum and Pinker 1983). By historicising the baptism of the character, this tendency to view the linkage between name and bearer as natural or divinely authored as transcendent is destablilised

This can be achieved by having a character adopt a new name, or series of names, during the narrative, without allowing the reader to infer that these are conveniences necessary for the plot in the form of temporary disguises. In *Malone Dies*, Beckett's narrator performs this act of abrupt re-naming with Saposcat:

> For Sapo – no, I can't call him that anymore, and I even
> wonder how I was able to stomach such a name till now.

> (*Malone Dies*: 229)

Alternatively, the character's name, it's provenance, connotation and significance, when made the subject of discussion within the narrative becomes similarly de-naturalised, as though the unconscious process of characterisation which is supposed to attend the name loses its power once its mechanics are exposed. Auster does this with Quinn in *City of Ghosts*: When Quinn meets Peter Stillman Sr and reveals his name, the latter replies:

> Quinn. Hmm. Yes. Very interesting. Quinn. A most
> resonant word. Rhymes with twin, does it not?.. And sin,
> too, if I'm not mistaken .. and also in .. and inn ..I see
> many possibilities for this Quinn, this .. quintessence ... of

> quiddity. Quick, for example. And quill. And quirk.
> Rhymes with grin...

<div align="right">(City of Glass: 74)</div>

And so on. The phonic and alliterative connotations and the name's 'surplus' meaning are unveiled in a scattergun deconstruction of the name which leave it connoting everything and, as a consequence, nothing much that is singular or related to other aspects of Quinn's character. The name does not cohere him, nor uniquely refer to him, but points in a many different partial directions at once.

In *Monsters Worse to Come*, the opportunity to allude to the origins of names, their contingent provenance in capricious decisions as opposed to a rational method for describing and identifying the person or character to which they refer, arises with the character of Captain Deeds. Those names which seem to be the most naturally descriptive and referential are also those which are most profitably subjected to an historical account of their origins. Captain Deeds' narrative role, and identity, would seem to be perfectly summarised in his name – authority and action. And yet he distrusts his own authority and is aversed to action, preferring to sleep. The confounding of the role begins with the declaration that his name is not a title but a product of the absurd alignment of his parent's tastes and prejudices.[7]

> 'Captain' was not a rank within the Elfin Police - there
> were no ranks - but was the young man's Christian name;
> his father being keen on titles and his mother being a fan
> of science-fiction programmes and an avid consumer of
> popular fish-stick products.

<div align="right">(Monsters: 89-90)</div>

The origins of the name in whim and the inscrutable motivations of the one who has the authority to name, is more explicitly highlighted when the giant, formerly known as Devaney, meets with the doctor in Monto and is offered the name 'Petey'.

> The giant shrugged his shoulders. It made no difference
> to him. He supposed he needed a name. He knew

> nothing about Peteys; he knew nothing about himself.
>
> There was equivalence there.

(Monsters, p57)

In fact, his name is changed twice in arbitrary ways which fail to graft. That is he is baptised but there is noone around to continue the chain or *referral* which Kripke argues is necessary for the functioning of the name and, so, he loses his name and becomes unbeckonable:

> And so Devaney, the giant, who was now called Petey but had noone to call him that, had stayed in the apartment, for months or maybe years, suffering no inspiration to do anything else. Devaney, the giant, who was now not called Devaney, nor Petey, nor anything else, did not eat, did not suffer on this account, did not sleep, ditto. He felt no different with each passing day of eventlessness. He could not feel different, having no memory of feelings to compare new feelings with, and being under no obligation to look for any.

(*Monsters Worse to Come*: 125)

Having no name, he becomes deprived of feelings evoking the prerational 'magical' view of language which Wittgenstein (1950) discerned in discourse about names: which carries the uncanny implication that changing the name changes the nature of its bearer.

4.7.2: FRUSTRATED NOMINATION

To use the technique of 'frustrated nomination' is to suggest a sublime affinity between characters by erasing or reducing the phonc and graphic difference between their names. This is the effect of Moran's discourse on the real name of 'Molloy' (Mellose, Molone, Moloch etc.), in which, under doubt and analysis, he produces four new names, which invoke other characters or potential characters. The rule of unique assignation which supports rational differentiation of others is broken here, or fractured by the similarity of referring signs. Using the same initial phoneme (sound) for character names achieves this kind of interference, but other phonic techniques can have the same effect. For example, Malone lists off the names of a few former acquaintances …

> Johnson, Wilson, Nicholson and Watson, all whoresons.

> (*Malone Dies*: 218)

… in which it is the last syllable or morpheme which unites them. Frustrated nomination also refers to the Kantian subline in that it presents to the senses a concept which seems sensible but which cannot be known owing to its magnitude: it is unimaginable because it hasn't been specified by name. In *Monsters Worse to Come* this strategy of non-referring allusion is used to characterise the most enigmatic of characters

> 'Does the thing you're looking for have a less complicated name?'

> 'It does', said Hoc Danger. 'It has the simplest name. But its name is not to be trusted.'

> He may have been speaking the truth but Devaney could not tell for the young man did not name it.

> (*Monsters Worse to Come*: 22)

This is also the case with the related aspect of namelessness. Being without name appear to be a way of avoiding a fixed subjectivity:

> 'My name is Kinnegan', said Kinnegan (to his cow). 'You on the other hand, have no name and cannot be called upon to act by anyone, regardless of the circumstances, pressing or otherwise.'

> (*Monsters Worse to Come*: 73)

The function of this exchange, which is one of a series of disconnected monologues which Kinnegan delivers to his cow, is to raise the spectre of namelessness in the novel. Kinnegan's speech suggests that the unchristened cow can escape a fixed subjectivity and interpellation by virtue of remaining nameless: a utopian and liberationist sentiment which runs through his thinking. He misrecognises the nature of namelessness, however, and cannot see the logic of the proper name: in lieu of a given name, he takes to referring to his cow as

Thing thereby fixing its subjectivity to his own. He is conscious of the dangers of being named, intimating that is his own name that will cause him to be plucked from the womb in which he has slept all of his life:

> 'No-one has yet chosen to call upon me but if anyone decided that I was worth a go they would know where to start. That is, by using my name.'

<div align="right">

(*Monsters Worse to Come*: 73)

</div>

It is also possible to defer the giving of a name, in which case the 'meaning' of the character is left in doubt. I have written a short story based on this premise which seeks to exploit the inferences that are drawn from names and ontological information given about character by offering two possibilities as to what the character is and giving only information which is consistent with both interpretations. This story, *Names for the Children*, is in Appendix B.

4.7.3: MULTIPLICATION OF NAMES

Multiplication of names occurs when names, and parts of names, appear and re-appear to denote different characters and thereby interfere with the process of unique assignation. Other interference features such as rhyme and anagrammatisation can also be used to this end. The objective with this technique is to encourage mirecognition or non-differentiation between characters by failing to clearly articulate sufficient or any difference in their nomination. The most direct way of achieving this, which both Beckett and Auster use, is to apply the same name to two characters (fathers and sons, in these cases). Or, as Nabokov and Poe have done, to double the name for a unique character – Hermann Hermann, Humbert Humbert and, more cryptically, William Wilson (Nabokov 1956; Nabokov 1955; Poe 1976). Raymond Queneau's attempts at reader defamiliarisation involved using the same names to denote different characters, or using multiple names for one character (Campbell-Sposito 1988). In such cases there is not so much an uncanny echo between names, as a deafening roar.

Nabokov's use of anamorphism (partial punning) of character names in *Bend Sinister* was designed, he said, to create a "wayside murmur" between character names to insinuate their generic homogeneity under the eye of the beholding

state (Nabokov 1962; Boyd 1988). That logic again: name elided is identity elided.

In *Monsters Worse to Come*, the excessive signification of names was funnelled through the character whose identity I was most keen to make unstable. The character introduced as Hoc Danger reveals himself, or re-christens himself, Doc Hanger. Devaney, the only one apprised of this, can make no sense of this, particularly since the man seems also to wear disguises. Later on, and in very brief 'wayside murmurs', mention is made of the authors Chad Grone, Don Greach and Rod Change. These are all anagrams of Hoc Danger. The latter three are not physically presented in the novel and so there is no other information to tie to the character name which might indicate that the character has previously been met. Hoc Danger and Doc Hanger re-surface throughout the novel, each time looking radically different, as though in permanent flux between one form of self-presentation and another. This is done to provide information for two distinctly different interpretations:

1) That they are in fact the same character who passes under different arrangements of the same name and who disguise themselves;

2) That they are different characters who sometimes share the same name.

The idea is not to force a reader into choosing one of these options but to engineer the story so that both are necessary for the reader to make sense of what is going on. Since they are mutually exclusive ideas, this causes hesitation and misrecognition with regards to the idea of the unicity and coherence of the name and the stability of the character they are referring to. Similarly, the anagrams of their names which re-surface in another conetxt (Chad Grone, Don Greach and Rod Change) are all authors. That is, have the same functional role, and so, to the reader attentive to the wayside murmur, these offscreen characters have unspoken similarities and the same question can be asked of them: are they the same person and is that person the same as Hoc Danger/Doc Hanger? The echoing play between names can be used to even greater levels of disorientation and sublime allusion: another anagram of the name 'Hoc Danger' is used in the novel ('grand echo'). Hoc Danger says to Devaney, on the train to Elfin:

> 'But you will notice me many times when you come to read your own biography. My name will sound a grand echo in your head'
>
> *(Monsters Worse to Come*: 266)

And the co-occurrence of the words 'Doctor' and 'hanger', and the implied association between them, also provokes a readerly suspicion about the identity of the giant's benevolent doctor which the narrative is ordinarily expected to confirm:

> 'I have no hangers', he said. 'What would a doctor want hangers for?'
>
> *(Monsters Worse to Come*: 130)

By maintaining silence over whether or not this doctor is the same Doc Hanger who told Devaney a 'backwards secret', the reader is left to their own inferential devices which, because of the fugitive nature of identity attributes involved, may be insufficient to deliver a consoling resposnse one way or the other.

4.8: CONCLUSION

This chapter treated the various referential functions of names and the epistemological assumptions which support their use as markers of coherent identity. It was suggested that creative writing discourse has, on the surface, very little to say about how a writer should select names for characters except to advise that the names coheres with the rest of the character's social class memberships and signifiers (be realistic) and should differentiate one character from another at graphic and phonic levels. The relative silence over the issue in the discourse might partly be explained by the fact that people already have a sensitivity to how names characterise people, as folk theories of naming show, and that this is assumed background knowledge which can be transferred to the naming task. I suggested that analytical philosophy has explanations of name functions which support such notions by insisting on the unique and rigid designation which a name effects in its ability to enable the distinction of one person from another. Since the uncanny prospers when such a distinction becomes confused, one strategy for creating a misrecognition effect is to narrow the sign difference between characters.

The strategies of uncanny referential naming were presented as:

- Drawing attention to the contingency of the name through the treatment of character names (onomastics) and their origins and changes;
- Using the technique of 'frustrated nomination' to allude to the sublime and evoke an uncanny reaction;
- Multiplying names by referring to different characters with the same names or creating echoes between characters by using anamorphism, rhyme and alliteration (multiplication of name elements) to suggest a shared identity between the same-named characters.

The next chapter looks at the issue of character behaviour and action and how it is the most popularly used strategy in the definition of character in that it harnesses reader inferences for understanding and emotional identification of character. It looks at the issues of free will and character transformation and how they are cohered to suggest that rational, goal-oriented behaviour is the only possible schema to bring to character behavioural psychology. An alternative approach which involves counterposing character lack of desire, splitness and epistemological security is proposed to produce the uncanny effect.

CHAPTER FOUR NOTES

1 Mary Seeman's model is devised for parents choosing names for children, or adults pursuing legal name changes. I think it is valid to extend its application to fictional names as an initial explanatory model.

2 One offshoot of causal theory is Austin's idea of language as a system which is not structured simply for description or declaration of truth, but also as a means of allowing for language performance, or what Searle calls speech-acts, in which use of the name has different meanings or uses depending upon the context of the utterance, the one who speaks it and other para- and meta-linguistic factors. (Austin 1962; Searle 1969). But, even in such a model, what can be considered the "meaning" of the name does not change, but remains stable despite the multitude of ways in which people make 'sense' of the use of the name. This idea of stable links between signs and referents is central to analytical approaches to names, just as it is the bedrock of modular apprroaches to creative writing.

3 This table represents the lexical similarity or difference between character names in spatial terms. It is achieved by converting the lexical strings of the names to numerical arguments using a computer microprogram, and plotting the differences graphically. The phonological difference can be arrived at differently, for examples by using phoneme groups which are similarly sounded (/p/,/b/) and plotting the spatial differences between the names.

4 I am using the term "naïve" to refer to self-described writers who are unpublished but aspire to publication. This material was taken from publicly viewable material posted on the website of Zoetrope (http://www.zoetrope.com) which acts as a workshop for working writers. The sample taken from the website were discovered on the novella section, and is listed in the bibliography.

5 These are the most popular names in the United Kingdom for the years 1998-2003, used here for the purposes of illustration.

6 The last two rules are, to a large extent, subject to genre sub-rules. For example, non-realist genres such as science fiction tend to stretch the rule on name typicality by, for example, adding in phonemes which do not occur very frequently in the universe of proper names within the English language. Letters which are used infrequently in the English language such as Z, V and X are typically used to connote the exotic and otherly qualities of the characters concerned (such as Zargon, Voldemort, Stomoxys). Frequently, the science fiction genre also uses what MacLean calls exotic punctuation and layout typography (MacLean 1997) to underscore the otherness of the events and characters being related. The Character Naming Software designed by DF Creations uses some of these implicit orthographic and phonemic rules, or patterns, in its development of genre-themed names. See http://www.dfcreations.com

7 Joseph Heller's Major Major Major Major is an unconscious forebear of Captain Deeds (Heller 1962).

Character Behaviour
&
Free Will

5: CHARACTER BEHAVIOUR AND FREE WILL

This chapter discusses the role of action and behaviour in the characterisation process. Within modular discourse, action is typically regarded as the means by which characters are most efficiently differentiated from each other, and through which they become assigned to narrative functional roles (hero, antagonist, *confidante*, love rival, object of desire etc. (Edelstein 2000)). Equally, behaviour indicates and confirms the character's membership of sociological and psychological categories (gender, race, age, occupation, kinship (Fiske & Neuberg 1990)) and, by relating it to underlying psychological traits, allows for characters to appear as coherent, rational and integrated subjects. Action is always understood as originating from within the character as an expression of desire, will and intentionality.

Novelists are advised to re-enforce reader heuristics for decoding the meaning of character action with explicit description of the supporting motivation for such actions. I argue that the epistemology of otherness – the interrogation of which is one of the novel's functions – with regards to behaviour can also be approached from a perspective in which repressed fears of automatism and unbounded identity are revived to create an uncanny effect. The uncanny approach to characterisation through action and behaviour uses techniques of external agency, non-transformation, sublime obstacles and epistemological uncertainty (Hume 1992; Kant 1973; Wittgenstein 1954). These features are presented in the respective trilogies of Beckett and Auster and their application in *Monsters Worse to Come* is explored.

5.1: INTRODUCTION – SOCIAL COGNITION ABOUT THE BEHAVIOUR OF OTHERS

> Most literary effects, particularly in narrative prose, depend on the fact that readers will try to relate what the text tells them to a level of ordinary human concerns, the actions and reaction of characters constructed in accordance with models of integrity and coherence.

> (Culler 1975: 142-43)

> If the end of the story does not have a cause-and-effect relationship with what came before, it is not a dramatic story.

(Frey 1997: 55)

In Chapter Two I outlined a model for conceiving how a character impression is formed by a reader on the basis of information provided within the text. In summary, this suggested that readers use recognition heuristics to infer the character's membership of various social, psychological and ontological categories. The presented attributes of the character, such as age, gender, appearance, name, occupation, use of language and behavioural traits provide cues for these inferential schema to operate. Subsequently, the reader engages in assigning the character to a position within the fluid hierarchy of the chief category of which they are a member. This is negotiated through the inclusion of episodic information about character behaviour related later within the text. It was suggested that the reader adjusts their impression of the character to accommodate this new information. One possibility for evoking an uncanny response to character might therefore lie in arresting the smooth operation of the reader's inference mechanism by providing contradictory cues about group membership or social roles. This would constitute a thwarting of the decoding process which looks for affirmation of the familiar prototype to which the character's nominals (detective, father, mother, criminal) point, by revealing that the character has none of the prototype's attributes and instead occupies the fuzzy hinterland between two mutually exclusive categories - detective/criminal, mother/father, for example.[1]

Understanding the prototype, and the types of qualities which a character is inferred to inherit simply by belonging to a particular group, enables us to prefigure ways in which expectations and assumptions arise in a reader's mind about the likely behaviour and traits of the character they have encountered.[2] While inference frustration has a large role in its production, the uncanny arises from a very different epistemological base. It requires that the epistemological framework – the schemata, inference rules and categorial thinking – which enables readers to make quick and economic impressions of character must itself be called into question by the greater usefulness of other, repressed, forms of epistemology.

Profound reader hesitation in decoding a character is produced, for example, by her inability to assign a character to one of two mutually exclusive and

superordinate categories on the basis of their observed behaviour (present / absent; alive / dead). But this kind of hesitation rests upon an understanding of behaviour as something which stems from the character and which is not subject to other forces or constraints. That is, the inference which enables judgement about character assumes that the character is the intentional author of their own actions. This is a central assumption within some theories of psychological intentionality (Searle 1983) in which evaluation of other people proceeds from first assuming their awareness of their actions and knowledge of the meaning of those actions to others. At its heart, it must make the assumption that one chooses to act meaningfully at all times and, by having choice, is not therefore subject to constraints, interference and limitations in one's behaviour. As David Hume reasoned, it is necessary for the preservation of any system of ethics or ground for judgement about people to assume that they are responsible for their own behaviour. In that one assumes that other people exercise free will, one makes them responsible for their own actions and one reasons that they are aware of how those actions will be decoded by others forming an impression of them (Hume 1739(1992)). The idea of free will supports all of the judgements one can pass on others. In its absence, or its mitigation, one is helpless to judge conclusively the intention behind another's actions. But this is not the case with fictional narratives in which the reader's knowledge of the contrived nature of character's actions – their Real provenance in the author/narrator's will – is repressed in favour of the pleasure of the fictive dream, and its production of illusory order.

Part of the supporting fabric of creating character impressions involves mapping this human quality of free will onto characters and making them responsible for their behaviour. The alternative – the suggestion that they occupy an otherworldly, quasi-determinist universe – is what is systematically repressed in the narrative discourse. This is because it destabilises the sovereignty of the ego. The production of fear which attends the return of the repressed counterassumption, that the ego is not in charge, defines the uncanny. As well as thriving in producing a hesitation response from readers, the grammar of the uncanny is such that one of the interpretations which the reader is forced to consider must be one which falls outside the domain of rationalism and which

thereby undermines the validity of the epistemological framework and common wisdom from within which such a judgment operates. This impacts on the idea of the character's free determination of their own action because a character's implied lack of free will can cause the reader to recognise the spectre of automatism, determinism or external agency in their experience.

So how does this relate to techniques of characterization through action?

The uncanny is less concerned with the revelation of character essence through action which marks traditional discussion of characterisation techniques, and more with the metaphysical aspect of action and its bearing on character. Specifically, this involves the relationship (of intentionality, will, desire and control) of the character to his actions and whether he and the reader may confidently assume that the character intends and produces that behaviour. That is: whether the character's actions have arisen directly from the attempt of his will to assert itself with regards to a clearly signalled objective, or whether the possibility must be entertained that nothing sensible exists in the text, or our rational experiential schemata, which can account for the character's responsive action. The provenance and purpose of character action (as an expression of internal or external will) stands as a major area for exploring the possibility of uncanny techniques because it touches upon the three concepts most central to that aesthetic: the fear of automatism, the fear of incoherent subjectivity and identity diffusion. The treatment of these concepts will also result in the production of readerly hesitation between two interpretations of character behaviour in which the narrative fails to offer information which could result in closure in favour of a rational epistemology of otherness.

Before discussing these concepts, it is useful to look at the specific conventions which are advocated in modular writing guides with regards to action, so as to see more clearly how what it excludes from its discussion (its own irrational Other) is what provides the best basis for devising uncanny methods.

5.2: MODULAR APPROACHES TO CHARACTERISATION AND ACTION

> Good fiction characters are fighters. They know what they want,
> they encounter trouble and they struggle…The character will not
> give up. He's determined; he's going to try again and again. He's

going to fight to maintain control of his life - and determine his own destiny.

<div align="right">(Bickham 1997: 22-24)</div>

For there seem to be two ways of behaving in the presence of wishes, the active and the contemplative, and though they both give the same result it was the latter I preferred, a matter of temperament I suppose.

<div align="right">(*Molloy*: 53)</div>

Modular discourse insists that character is under strict obligation to act in a way which brings her objective closer to realisation: she must operate 'maximally and rationally' (Frey 1987) and the reasoning behind her action must be made clear to the reader. Action proceeds from desire, or at the very least, from the expression of will, and these should be uncomplicated, well-signalled and reflect self-determination. For these reasons, will cannot express itself in the decision not to act or to accede to confusion or the will of others. Nor can it be absent, according to these rules. This is to presume a number of things about the ontology of character and the universe within which it operates. It suggests that the character always knows what she wants; is familiar with the objective and the impediments in her way, and the means to overcome them, and has, or will find, the will and resources to supplement her knowledge of what action is required. At the centre of this universe of behavioural logic and moral law is the doctrine that these qualities – the knowledge of how to act and the desire *to* act - will deliver a result, either by allowing the character to achieve her objective or by disproving what Frey calls the character's 'premise': the proposition that her behaviour and actions are suited to achieving her desire (Frey 1987). Character hesitation, goal insecurity, disinterest, solecism and chronic uncertainty about the identity of the self or those people or forces which are aiding or frustrating her quest are features which have no place in such a schema. James Frey states that:

Homo fictus always operates to his maximum capacity, and it is never within a dramatic character's maximum capacity, when faced with a problem or a challenge, to do nothing.

<div align="center">135</div>

(Frey 1987: 24)

Not only is a character incapable of doing nothing, but she always does something to the best of her ability. What is produced by the rules of rational-modular discourse is a character with coherent subjectivity functioning in an ordered and knowable universe, always questing and moving towards attainment of the quest within a familiar teleology. The contemplative, stoic or indifferent response of character to threat, or the absence of desire or awareness of a threat, is not permitted. Evan Marshall lists those values which he regards as worthy explanations for a character's motivation to act: duty, honour, love and justice being the most important (Marshall 2000: 18). These are affirmative concepts, traditional and, in his treatment of them, ideologically stagnant. There is no room for doubt or dialectic in their midden. Beckett's 'active and contemplative' responses, although they are presented as equally useless as reactions to desire in *Molloy*, are completely different species - one obligatory, the other unusable - within the view of modular approaches.

The epistemological issues which uncanny treatments raise about characterisation require a reconsideration of what action, and inaction, each reveal about character and our understanding of the meaning of other people's behaviour. The reliance of modular theories on an assumption of the sovereignty of free will in dictating action, individual certitude about what it is *that one wants*, and the strictly causal relationship between actions and outcomes that it implies, aborts such an exploration. This is partly because character action, which is what lends profluence to the narrative and the plot in that it makes things happen, is put to service in such a way to encourage the reader to always understand the character as a particular and rational archetypal agent. The character's actions, in the face of a specified problem, are what mark her out as a different type to other types.

> Characterize through an action ... we individualise by seeing characters doing things and saying things, not by the author telling us about them.

(Stein 2000: 51)

Meaningful action is action which places the character within a salient cultural frame of reference. A character about whom nothing else is known, except that he is climbing a high mountain in a blizzard, for example, is at least placed into an implicature from which the reader can draw inferences about his traits, nature and desires (adventurous, brave, foolhardy etc.). A character sitting in a room watching television, in contrast, seem too quotidian to be any particular type of person, and since the economic rationality of modular advice is to ensure specificity and uniqueness of character – assignation of type – the latter is not a character sufficiently defined through their actions at that point. Other actions, prompted by narrative developments are required for the television-watching-character to be branded with particular traits.[3]

A lot of human behaviour is not meaningful in this sense - it does not differentiate one person from another. There is no popular character type in the literature described as "food-eater" since the point of action, with regards to characterisation, is to lend the appearance of uniqueness. The fiction editor Sol Stein pre-empts criticism of this myth of uniqueness upon which creative writing discourse is based and at the same time tries to justify the flawed representationalism of much novel fiction when he comments pithily that:

> People who are exactly like other people probably don't exist.

> (Stein 2000: 61)

The key words here are the adverbs 'probably' and 'exactly'. It is highly 'probable' that each person is genetically distinct from all others, for example, and yet, when considered side by side with all other living and nonliving creatures, people have more commonalities than differences – and our perceptions of them move between uniformity or association and difference or dissociation. It is partly the commitment to individualism which represses the adualist way of thinking. Stein advances a thesis about the naturalness of differences between people which fiction openly amplifies between characters so as to make them more 'lifelike', consoling for the reader in their uniqueness and recognisable as different brands. And there is the word 'probably' which, although it acts here as a rhetorical downtoner to prevent claims of totalising logic, also reveals the kind of hesitant deliberation about the exact nature of the difference of other people from the self and each other: a hesitation which is not

recommended for fiction. This hesitation acknowledges, in faint outline, the legitimacy of the Beckettesque question: what can I finally know about the difference between me and others, and others and other others? How can I repress the feeling that I cannot rely on my ability to differentiate one from the other? To which a supplementary question might be asked by the writer: how can I show something of the way in which my understanding of myself has its provenance in others and that, because of this doubled relationship, can cause me to misrecognise something of the other in the self?

These uncanny hesitations disappear in Stein's subsequent comments, as he skirts around the question of doubt to address the apparent nature of those differences. The process is simplified once more: the writer simply sees what the character does next and describes it, to quote John Gardner, and looks into the character's heart and head to see the reasons for it, to quote Jack Bickham. This is necessary because, when a character acts, "readers must be able to understand why your character does what he does" (Gardner 1999; Bickham 1997: 19).

Victoria Schmidt classifies standard fictional types partly by their agentive quality (The Mystic, The Warrior, The Nurturer for example (Schmidt 2002)) and outlines a model of understanding these mythic types by referring to their tendency to act in highly specified and pre-determined ways when confronted by particular threats or in pursuit of particular goals. For example, the Nurturer is driven to help people and, if a needful person is not available, the Nurturer will act to acquire one – through seduction, entreaty or kidnapping. This formulates the behavioural law that action proceeds from trait, and trait itself is a formulation of a core desire or need. It is therefore the business of plot to present the character with the specific threats and goals which excite these action traits so as to reveal or confirm their presence to the reader. The novelist John Gardner writes that:

> Plot exists so the character can discover for himself (and in the
> process reveal to the reader) what he, the character, is really like:
> plot forces the character to choice and action, transforms him
> from a static construct to a lifelike human being making choices
> and paying for them or reaping the rewards.

(Gardiner 1999: 52)

"Really like", "lifelike": action is presented as an alembic which, literally, animates the character who otherwise would be stillborn; would be too authentically and statically human to be of interest. This is a peculiar feature of the discourse about characterisation – the more authentic the character is and the greater his similarity to real-life people, the less 'real' he will appear to the reader. It is what Christopher Ricks calls the contradictory presence of the language of death in life (Ricks 1991: 76): the soulless one is the more *anima*ted one. Another doubled entity. A writer developing a character for whose actions the narrative offers no simple, single motivation, and in doing this acknowledging the partial and tentative nature of any explanation for those actions, runs counter to this ethic of transparently motivated action. In the face of threat, for example, the character must be seen to make the choice to fight or flee and not, as Marshall and Stein separately put it, to dither and act like a 'wimp', because readers are not interested in 'wimps' (ops. cit.). This accusation of wimpishness is based on a particular, and highly limited, idea of what a rational response to threat might be which itself rests on the issue of ontological security and self-determination. The possibility of a character making no response to a present threat, or a response which follows an interior and oblique logic, or to fail to pursue a well-signalled objective without explanation, is annulled within the discourse because it does not conform to reader's expectations of rational reaction. Just as importantly, within modular discourse, it does not drive the plot forward.

Stasis of narrative and character, inaction or non-disclosure of the motivation for character action conspire to create confusion in the reader's mind. The twin fears of confusion and stasis in all their forms is endemic in modular discourse:

> Characters in the midst of static conflict, Egri points out, stop developing. The shy character remains shy, the brave characters remains brave, the weak remain weak, the strong stay strong. Nothing bores a reader as much as static conflict except no conflict at all.

> (Frey 1997: 40)

Which suggests that the most pressing reason to agitate a character into action is to prevent the reader from losing interest. In one way, this seems like rowelling a

caged lion to rage just to frighten young children. If we were to ask the strange-seeming and naïve question "why not leave the character in peace and solitude?" we would be in danger of straying away from the essence of fiction which, we are told is about conflicting movement, desire and force, and yet, it seems to me, that to counter the relentlessness of this approach which exalts the movement of plot above the consideration or interrogation of character and the possibility of its representation, this is a notion worth considering. The character whose actions are playful and cryptic, in the sense that they seem only to take place because something has to take place – one has, after all, to do *something* - and are not directed at any discernible end, comes to seem, in this light, like a courageous refusal to submit to the demands of narrative and socially signalled coherence. But within modular narratives, action and ensuing change must happen and for change to happen, the character must 'recite their pensum' and perform their narrative chores so that lessons may be finally be learned.

This change-through-action is also, of course, to allow for the emergence of conflict between characters competing with opposing desires. A warning is often given to aspiring novelists to amplify the difficulties which a character must surmount in achieving her goal – Marshall suggests that "it should appear practically impossible for the lead (character) to achieve her objective" (Marshall 2000: 19). A wealthy character is not stretched, nor the reader engaged, by the objective of her paying rent or buying food, since she can easily achieve this. A character in this position behaving as though in a crisis would, according to Marshall, confuse a reader as there would be no objective correlative to her stressed behaviour. And yet, the heuristics which people use for understanding the behaviour of 'real' others can often result in such confusions, fail to correspond to expectations produced by rational schema, in that they fail to explain satisfactorily why other people behave as they do when no obvious source of threat or attraction or presented trait is around.[4]

The key concepts of characterisation-through-action of modular approaches to creative writing centre on the following precepts:

- Rational behaviour proceeds from character traits and desires and these behaviours are provoked by the necessity of movement and change to the telling of stories;

- Character transformation occurs through action and such actions are an expression of the character's conscious will;

- Obstacles and antagonists will emerge which produce certain specific actions which correspond to and re-enforce the traits which have been attributed to the character;

- The character has an unassailable epistemological certainty and ontological security about all of these matters.

The inverse of these things - the absence of character desire, the character who cannot act or for whom everything which is not the self is necessarily an obstacle which cannot be overcome, the character who does not know why it is he does what he does and who senses the contingency or absurdity of his actions – are the first, broad features of the uncanny, and are also staple features in the work of Beckett and Auster, in that they deprive the character of his recognisable *characterness*, and so return him to the fold of the contradictorily lifelike yet unreal subjects who cannot easily engage and disengage from conflict and cannot conceive what kinds of actions might deliver closure to them and their difficulties. And of course, for the uncanny, there is a question mark to be hung above the head of the narrative consciousness which, with the unaccountable ability to explain the force of will and desire which produce these actions, has the task of cementing character desire to character act and affirming their rational nexus.

These features cohere on an epistemological level to reaffirm the coherence of the character, the integrity and rationality of their actions, and the sovereignty of the ego in the ownership of these actions. As with other aspects of modular advice, it excludes any opposing possibilities, using the argument that the reader will disengage if these familiar conventions are not employed. The rationalist assumptions of modular discourse affect the different aspects of narrative upon which character impinges. I will look at the ways in which the uncanny reaction can be effected by calling this dominant epistemology into question through proposing an alternative possibility.

5.3: UNCANNY ASPECTS OF CHARACTER BEHAVIOUR

> The more powerful the lens of the microscope observing the self,
> the more the self and its uniqueness elude us; beneath the great
> Joycean lens that breaks the soul down into atoms, we are all
> alike. But if the self and its uniqueness cannot be grasped in
> man's interior life, then where and how can we grasp it? The
> quest for the self has always ended, and always will end, in a
> paradoxical dissatisfaction. I don't say defeat. For the novel
> cannot breach the limits of its own possibilities, and bringing
> those limits to light is already an immense discovery, an
> immense triumph of cognition.

(Kundera 2000: 25)

For Kundera, individuation for the self proceeds directly from action but ultimately the self's quest for, and claims to, uniqueness fall apart and, like doubt, will tend to multiply under analysis where the self and other come to seem more and more alike. The pure route to a self-other distinction, which is assumed in everyday discourse about the self, proves illusory. The demonstration of this – its bringing to light – is a function of the novel which involves the uncanny. As with other aspects of self-grasping that is the process of characterisation, this is achieved through interrogating those conventions which allow the self to think of itself as discreet, fixed and autonomous. These conventions are the basis of modular characterisation – which grasps the self by first removing the thorns - manifested in the sovereignty of conscious will with regards to action, subjective coherence and differentiation from others, and epistemological and ontological security which are assumed and re-enforced by its representation techniques. The uncanny – the re-visiting of denied knowledge in the form of recognition and misrecognition – can be approached by devising methods to sunder the easeful coherence of desire-action relations in the presentation of character behaviour.

Chatman discusses the indeterminacy of character impressions which arise when the character exhibits an inconsistent multiplicity of behavioural traits (Chatman 1978). A perfectly formed modular character only performs actions which are consistent with pre-established traits – a detective may disregard legal conventions to exercise his duty but cannot ignore his epistemological conventions and begin to doubt the plausibility of his methods – because the character's first task is to be coherent and to allow for productive inferences to be

drawn, by the reader, based on a shared model of human nature and the behaviour of generic types. Indeterminacy (the failure of the reader's heuristics to predict or explain character behaviour) in character actions hints at the character's incoherence, their potential for cryptic changefulness and irrationality, and, more tellingly, their possible lack of autonomy. These are the province of the uncanny effect: when apprehensions of automatism, loss of coherence, the return of pre-rational ways of thinking, such as adualism – now represented as chronic doubt – return to mind.

5.3.1: FOUR PROPERTIES OF UNCANNY BEHAVIOUR

There seem to be four ways in which the uncanny impacts upon characterisation-through-action by causing a hesitation in the reader's processing about what the provenance and significance of the character's behaviour is. These correspond to rules of frustration directed against the rational conventions typically employed in characterisation through action:

1) Action arising without any indication of will or desire on the part of the actor. Better, in fact, if there is a suggestion of the contrary: that the character is behaving against their will without any sensible force present to explain their actions to them. This is a nod to automatism – the idea that they are puppets acting on the command of some external agency - which itself hints at a fear of control loss, of the ego's disintegration or, at least, the vulnerability of the self's coherence when it has become socialised (merged with the selves of others) and is engaged in action. The agency, in fact, does not have to be external, it only requires that the narrative does not describe it as a rational, homuncular decision. For instance, Auster's Quinn walks out of his apartment "simply going wherever his legs happened to take him" (*City of Ghosts*:3). His legs lead him and legs are not normally the seat of reason in characterising conventions.

2) Action which does not stem from nor is attributable to an established psychological or sociological trait, but is instead only accountable by thinking of it as the expression of an irrational fear or desire which remains unarticulated within the narrative and unknown to the character. Typically, Freudian complexes, and developmental phases in which perceptual and personal reasoning follow different and dreamlike paths provide instances of this. The reading heuristic which extrapolates anticipated action from observed traits in a

character should hesitate when presented with one of what Culpeper calls an "unfaithful range of characteristics" (Culpeper: 41). Since the action (pursuing and observing a suspect, in the case of a detective such as Beckett's *Moran* or Auster's *Quinn*, for example) is expected to correlate to some aspect of the detective's cluster of traits (curiousity, a belief in the empirical method), the emergence of actions which intimate disinterest in or doubt about the plausibility of the objective, on the part of the detective, and which are not accounted for by narrative developments, will tend to produce hesitation in the reader owing to the failure of the "trait produces action" heuristic. The detective who cannot detect is a creature of lack because, once he ceases behaving in the prescribed way, we cannot claim to know anything about him and must doubt what we thought to be the centre of his self and our way of perceiving it. In other words, our understanding of his categorical membership needs to be refreshed but what rational schema can one use to deal with a detective who refuses to detect and about whom one knows almost nothing else?

3) Should the action arc of one character mirror that of another without them being aware of each other, the effect which arises will be the *impression of doubledness* or of unbounded identity. This duplication, it seems to me, will have two senses: that the narrative functional roles have been over-produced, and instead of their being one character with detective traits and the detective method, there are two, working towards the same objective, unbeknownst to each other, as though functional clones of each other. If we apply this to the world outside the text and return briefly to the Capgras patient of Chapter 3, experiencing the duplication of roles is like being presented with two mothers. One knows that the Mother role is conventionally singular and so must make a decision between the two 'candidates' (the present one or the absent one, in DS's case). The other sense of doubledness in this case is the more primitive one: that they are in fact the same person - because they are doing the same things for the same purpose - and are simply labelled with different names or immured in different bodies. In either case, the assumptive logic of schemata, inference and known things is waylaid and there is an added effect of undecidability which persists for as long as the narrative does not try to indicate which interpretation is more rational.

4) Inaction in the presence of threat would seem to evoke an uncanny effect if it is not rationalised within the narrative and it seems inconsistent with the stimulus which the character has encountered and which would seem to require him to act in a certain way. Character inaction produces non-profluence in the narrative and it is the reader's expectation that the narrative moves towards a denouement, through certain understood narrative codes, producing a solution – and not a dissolution – of the character's problem. The character's refusal to respond to the accepted stimulus which should produce the required action produces hesitation in that it brings us to doubt the stimulus-response account of human, or character, behaviour. In such cases, the character fails to cleave easily to his agentive role: his actions bear no relation to the objective which we know him to have and, in fact, suggest that he has no desire to intervene in his own fate or, as Bickham puts it, has no desire to fight to determine his fate. This is a thanatological feature, a death instinct, which is usually denied to fiction characters.

Placing narrative process above character rights always fixes the human-in-text within a limited behavioural range and a fixed epistemology. High modernism and postmodernism, in freeing the character from these labours does not solve the epistemological issue but, at least acknowledges the limitations of the approach. The uncanny works well to display those limitations. With regards to character action, the formalist and humanist approaches are most different in their vision of the provenance and teleology of action and quest. I will now look at how these features, and others, occur in the works of Beckett and Auster to see how the uncanny principle can work in fiction and to further explore the issue of a different teleology in which neither character nor narrative indicate any sure knowledge of what all this action leads towards. The main areas which have potential for creating an uncanny effect with regards to character behaviour are:

- Change and Transformation;

- Free Will and Behaviour;

- Sublime Obstacles;

- Epistemological Uncertainty.

In the following sections I look at these features separately, examining each by looking at the precepts of the modular approach and the alternative techniques of

the uncanny ectypes which Beckett and Auster provide. For each of these components of characterisation-through-action, I discuss some of the related 'decisions' made in the composition of *Monsters Worse to Come*.

5.4: CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION

Aristotle's concept of the peripatetic narrative in which characters suffer reversals of fortune which leave them at an endstate which diametrically opposes their starting position is heavily influential in modular characterisation (Aristotle 1961). Character transformation tends to follows a trajectory of self-discovery which is itself mapped out by the development of the story. For Propp, narrative is characterised by a description of a state, a change of this initial state (the introduction of disequilibrium) of which the focus of the change is on the main character (Propp 1968). In the process of the journey or quest which the narrative describes and which the action punctuates, the character typically loses, then re-acquires something in order to restore equilibrium. The interval between the loss and the restoration is the period of the character's action from which a lesson can be adduced. Frey summarises the Aristotlean peripatetic reversal thus: "The length of a drama should be such that the hero passes by a series of probable or necessary stages from misfortune to happiness or from happiness to misfortune" (Frey 1987: 75).

This rule, because it is not explicitly presented to the reader, is a cryptic metatext for the universe of actions within the narrative in that it suggests that the lesson drawn from journeys and progressions of a lead character within the narrative should be salutary and co-incide with the end transformation of that character. Frey calls this lesson the novel's premise, and cites James Foster Harris in his description of the relationship of the premise to the narrative as "a solved illustration in moral arithmetic" (Frey 1987: 50). That is: the novel establishes or proves the truth of a particular moral lesson. In the same way, the character acts in such a way as to prove or disprove his or her own individual premise. The premise of Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*, for example, is described by Frey as "great love leads to death". His actions are said to 'prove' it in that Humbert dies having worked through his doomed romantic obsession with Lolita. On the surface, this idea of premises seems reductive and inane[5] but it describes an important point in modular approaches – that the character's actions, proceeding

from his desire, will result in a change in his state which imparts a conclusive moral lesson because it corresponds with the resolution of the narrative and the return of normative order to the world of the story.

And so the character's journey knits their actions together and the stories closure is the end of that journey upon which the writer has caused the character to embark. The character must return to an unconflicted state, whether by the high road of some kind of victory or the *via dolorosa* of loss. Movement, change, transformation: these are the features which define character action within modular discourse. It cautions against stasis of any kind, and at every turn, because of its non-profluent nature. Frey cautions:

> Do not think of your characters as fixed. To have a vibrant,
> vigorous, gripping novel, the characters must change as a result
> of conflict. The character premise is a description of that change.

(Frey 1987: 93)

In order to get the character to that resolution and the proof or disavoval of the lesson, the writer must consistently deprive them of closure and of stasis until most of the narrative has passed. Once entrained, the conflict cannot relent until the story is told. This is the leeside of Freitag's triangle in which a series of rising conflicts reach a crisis point at which they are resolved and the denouement ensues, relating the nature of the metamorphosis which the lead characters have experienced.

When this connection of will to action is successfully exposited then, according to such advice, the reader can engage in pre-empting the character's actions and can pass what Frey calls the "would-she-really-do-that"? test. If a character behaves in a way that does not conform to the expectations which the cues about their type have encouraged the reader to develop, then the fictive dream fails, the character has changed too suddenly and a fissure, a misrecognition, develops between the reader's internal model of the character and this changeful being who now appears in the novel. As previously mentioned, these kinds of cues are sociological, behavioural, occupational and they must, through the common language of prototypical thinking enable accurate prediction of other attributes, including available actions:

> "In short fiction, characters and their backgrounds are almost always much more consistent than real people in real life".

<div align="right">(Bickham 1997: 19)</div>

The rational-modular assumptions about the relationship between character action leading towards transformation are as follows:

- Character action results in the transformation of the character, the re-establishment of the norms which existed prior to the appearance of conflict and the establishment of a moral premise which comments on their means of attaining the objective;

- Character behaviour within this teleology must be placed within an epistemological framework which accounts for their behaviour in rational terms (suitable response to stimuli of threat or entreaty) and which represses the fact of the narrative's demand of action from them.

- The character must continuously encounter barely surmountable difficulties and obstacles before reaching the point of closure and transformation.

These rules define the expression of the epistemological framework for understanding otherness with regards to the transformative powers of narrative with which the discourse works. It is their overturning, thwarting and exposure that the route to the uncanny lies. The works of Samuel Beckett and Paul Auster offer counter-strategies, in which radically different notions of the relationship between character to the narrative's demand for action and meaningful behaviour are to be found.

5.4.1: BECKETT AND TRANSFORMATION

> Many fictional journeys either educate the hero (*Tom Jones*) or test an education already received (*The Odyssey*). Neither form is relevant to *Molloy* except insofar as both provide the reader with expectations that *Molloy*'s narratives will thwart.

<div align="right">(O'Hara 1972)</div>

Discussing Schopenhauer's influence on Beckett on the topic of human will and its consequences, John Calder summarised Beckett's attitude as follows: "To be the first mover in anything is to carry a curse, which is why inaction is always

preferred to action" (Calder 2001: 25). Inaction, and the preference for it, runs through Beckett's first-person character-narrators. Molloy confesses that he has "always loved doing nothing" (*Molloy*: 93). And yet this love is complicated because he has a presentiment that regardless of his love for doing nothing, there is always *something* being done to him. Molloy inhabits his room, does not yearn for escape from it, but awaits release, not believing it will come and doing nothing to obtain it. He waits and tells the story of his quest to return to his mother, despite his inability to tell stories, and despite the abject failure of his quest.

Change, like narrative profluence, seems inexorable. In the case of Beckett's characters, it is the change of decomposition, a process not arising from will but one which expresses a teleology – a narrative arc towards decrepitude. In *Molloy*, change, being the expression of character transformation through action, is not the outcome of the character's will alloyed to an objective (it is not *his* action), but something that happens to him and in spite of him. The result is that transformation, such as it is, is not something by which he comes to know himself, but rather the means to his dissolution of self and whatever it is he thinks he knows. This would seem then to offer a structure, albeit a perverse one, which resembles the conventional narrative: a narrative of decomposition leading to the full stop of death which, in line with the form of the peripatetic narrative, describes a perfect reversal of the character's state. But even this lesson or transformation is not guaranteed. The failure of the ultimate change to arrive, of the transformation to have a final form or meaning, is a permanent feature of Beckett's narratives:

> Change was like a kind of clawing towards a light, a countenance
> I could not name, that I had once known and long denied.

<div align="right">

(*Malone Dies*: 149)

</div>

Beckett's characters seem to share his reasoning that while not living is preferable to living, never to have been born is the better than both (Ricks 1991:17). Since this cannot be achieved – because being, like story, has already begun – one must go on telling the story without ever knowing when and where the story will stop or what sense it might make to one who has perceived it. Because of this attitude, death is not a denouement within the trilogy. It doesn't

arrive for any of the narrators, or, if it does, they fail to notice the difference. The fear of change, because it is a voyage into an unknown, repeatedly surfaces in the trilogy and, from one angle, seems to operate as a narrator's commentary on the absurdity of the character's journey in fictional narratives.

> I used not to know where I was going, but I knew I would arrive, I knew there would be an end to the long blind road. What half-truths, my God.

> (*Malone Dies*: 182)

There is no end in sight to hard road, or, perhaps, only half of one. Then why do these characters continue? What compels them to continue without any prospect of ending or achieving the quest that they only half-know? Why does the narrator carry on relating his inability to attest to anything or telling stories that cannot end? Because as life goes on, irrespective of will, narrative goes on even if there should be nothing to relate and its characters do not want to participate in it. In the logic of modular creative writing, narrative can do nothing else but go on hurtling towards its restoration of balance or, if it attempts to fail in this duty, it fails to be narrative. To look at it through the formalist view: the structure and its need of roles and conflicts and closures drives the characters on to fill in the paradigmatic slots.

For the narrative to go on, the character must continue to invest in action, in striving to achieve his goals, whether he knows what they are or not. Stasis, or what Beckett called the "wisdom that consists of the ablation of desire", is not an easy possibility for characters (Beckett 1936). John Calder says that it is the tragedy of this kind of *on*-ness that is at the centre of Beckett's trilogy: the endlessness which always appears as something final succeeding other frustrated promises of closure giving rise to the character's impulsion onwards with a sham teleology, without belief in any meaningful final state or goal-achievement (Calder 2001: 28). The presence of *on* marks the insistence that the subject must always go on, though it wishes for nothing more than to cease, to be restful and, in fact, wishes it had never been set onwards in the first instance. Hence the seemingly contradictory final words of the unnameable – "I can't go on, I must go on, I'll go on" (*The Unnameable*: 406) - although it is impossible and

undesirable I will do it, having no alternative. The story demands it. Non-closure under duress.

Beckett endorsed the philosophy of Geulincx, repeated in Molloy, that the only desire of value was "the desire and ambition to become nothing, to desire nothing, expect nothing and be nothing" (Cited in Calder 2001: 8). Of course, one cannot desire to be nothing and desire to have no desire at the same time. But it is this kind of thwarting of logic, desire and will that explains the emphasis on stasis and the impossibility of a final resting place for Beckett's characters. For narrative an absence of ending is equally calamitous. Without a teleology, a belief that all this matters and that a denouement will soon be reached, the progress of the characters through their rising and falling conflicts, seems to have less appeal. If one considers the notion of transformation through reversal with regards to Moran, Molloy's pursuer, we can see the perverse implications of applying this logic of the profound reversal in a story which has no epistemological foundations:

At the narrative's commencement, Moran, recording the events relating to his pursuit of Molloy in his diary, notes:

> It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows.

<div align="right">(Molloy: 92)</div>

At the conclusion of his account, he writes:

> Then I went back to the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain
> is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining.

<div align="right">(Molloy: 176)</div>

The beginning and the end, normally the site for the restoration of the familiar are given this strange quality of reversal: we are back at the beginning (familiar) but what we were told at the beginning is now denied and so the scene returns as strange. The scene has been properly reversed but with the implication that the either the beginning or the end, or both, are a sham which are used simply to service the needs of narrative form. The familiar returned as strange causing epistemological uncertainty: the outline of the uncanny.

5.4.2: TRANSFORMATION IN AUSTER

> The form trusts too much in transcendent reason. Part of the strong appeal of detective fiction, critics have suggested, is that readers can identify with the detective and achieve interpretive victory alongside him, or closely on his heels. Recent anti-detective fiction denies this satisfaction and instead portrays the detective's frustrated pursuit of authorial knowledge. William Spanos, in "The Detective and the Boundary" describes the anti-detective story (and its psychoanalytical analogue) as "the paradigmatic archetype of the postmodern literary imagination; its purpose is "to evoke the impulse to 'detect' ... in order to violently frustrate by refusing to solve the crime".

> (Sorapure 1995: 71)

By placing his narratives at least nominally within the detective genre Auster signals the appropriateness of the detective reading schema to the reader. This carries with it implications as to what form the detective's transformation will take. Typically in the genre this involves a movement from ignorance to knowledge – an assumption of authorial knowledge about the identities and activities of the other agents in the novel. The knowledge, although it comprises the search for someone else's identity (the identity of the criminal in conventional detective fiction) is often read as the detective's inadvertent search for self. Chenetier describes Quinn's behaviour in *City of Glass* as:

> Watching, stalking, turning into a voyeur, everything becomes an attempt at discovering one's identity by default.

> (Chenetier: 38)

This is a useful synopsis of the fate of Quinn, Blue and Fanshawe in each of the novellas. The narrator of *Ghosts*, by way of a hypothetical simile, tells us as much:

> For in spying out at Black across the street, it is as though Blue were looking into a mirror, and instead of merely watching another, he finds that he is also watching himself.

> (*Ghosts*: 144)

Quinn's status as a detective *in City of Glass* should only be provisionally accepted by the attentive reader, since he begins the novel by becoming someone else: "the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not" (: 3). In what looks like a reversal transformation, he concludes the novel by becoming no-one and being nowhere. His application of the rational method of detecting is premised, like modular creative writing discourse, on the assumption that he can inhabit another by properly surveilling them. The 'real' Auster tells him that "Noone can watch a person for 24-hours a day. It's impossible. You'd have to be inside his skin". To which Quinn replies: "That's just the trouble. I thought I was" (:90). He assumed the possibility of transcendent reason and held that it would help him to master the other he was pursuing. But it has not and his investment in it, once collapsed, collapses him too. Because his objective is to observe another and, in effect to be a supernarrator, he is waylaid by the mysterious behaviour of Stillman which admits of no coherent impression and which, if it is motivated by some *will* or desire on Stillman's part is "so oblique, so fiendish in its circumlocutions, that he did not want to accept it."(:71). Failing to accept the irrational interpretation open to him, he stays suspended in a moment of chronic uncertainty.[6]

Transformation occurs. Quinn begins to change but his change is only brought about by the operations of the outside world in response to his behaviour. Its inscrutability, its unwillingness to lay its mysteries bare in the presence of enquiry, crashes in on him. The change that it brings in him, which should be the lesson which the narrative imparts – its judgement on character premise - has no meaning for him:

> He had been one thing and now he was another. It was neither
> better nor worse. It was different, that was all.

(City of Glass: 120)

Quinn reaches a terminus, ending up like one of Beckett's heroes in a strange apartment, being fed by an invisible hand and keeping a journal of his thoughts against the eventuality of forgetting. He wishes to be in a place where the confusion of others is no longer present. In that he does not recognise himself as himself, has forsaken his name, no longer knows anything, except that he wishes to disappear:

> To be inside that music, to be drawn into the circle of its
> repetitions: perhaps that is a place where one could finally
> disappear.

(*City of Glass*: 109)

And so finally, Quinn disappears or, at least, that is the information provided by the rigorous narrator who, in the sentiments of Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, will not record that which is not definitely known: "Information is scarce and he (the author) has preferred to pass over in silence what could not definitely be confirmed" (:113)[7]. Quinn is gone – his uncanny objective "achieved" through a complete transformation – he has disappeared from the perceiving eye of the narrator. This would mark a kind of restoration of balance – a reversal of sorts, except that Quinn re-surfaces (or does he?), in the third novel of the trilogy: *The Locked Room*. This phantasm is another application of the uncanny – this second detective Quinn bears little resemblance to the first, it seems. But in fact, we know nothing about the second Quinn except that he is named Quinn and is a detective. The expectation that the narrator will intercede and assure or dismiss the implied comparison – to affirm that they are the same or admit the coincidence - is not satisfied. The reader cannot know if Quinn has disappeared or become re-integrated or what kind of transformation has really befallen him. It is in the thwarting of the transformation – the studious avoidance of closure – that uncanny narrative arcs relieve the character from the constraints of the consoling metamorphosis.

5.4.3: TRANSFORMATION IN MONSTERS WORSE TO COME

The character's transformation is distinct, salutary and observable when they rectify the loss which Propp's disequilibrium has visited upon them, or when, in failing to do so, they acquire something, usually painful knowledge, about the nature of the world they inhabit. In *Monsters Worse to Come*, this schema of 'vindication or education' is thwarted for all of the characters but for different reasons in each case. Treatments of transformation are unlikely to be uncanny purely by themselves as the uncanny relies upon the presence of other features. But because the effect relies very heavily on prolonging hesitation – encouraging the reader to unsuccessfully overcogitate about the ontological nature of the

characters in the narrative - the transformation or reversal cannot be complete. It must remain *undecidable* at some level.

There are a number of ways in which incompleteness can be achieved. If we look at the conventions for reversals, we see that they must allow for an inference about the continuity of the character beyond the end of the narrative and are likely to imply that the character's endstate does not change in the future. An endstate suggests character coherence, satisfaction, closure. An effect aimed at hesitation before recognition must have the qualities of indeterminacy and refuse to comment on the nature and success of the transformation.

This applies to all of the characters in *Monsters Worse to Come*. It is particularly marked in the case of Devaney who, at the beginning of the narrative, appears to be without any recognisable human interior life. His external features present no emotion. He receives instructions and hopes one day to give them himself:

> He had been instructed to kill the butcher. His attitude to the task had no remark in his appearance. His eyes remitted nothing in the shade, no features present there, as though the character of them had been smudged away by inkstained thumbs.

(Monsters Worse to Come: 2)

At the novel's end, having undergone various trials in search of his fugitive identity – he has no name, no past, no occupation, no self-concept, no others who care to pass sufficient time with him to enable him to recover any semblance of a self – *he is restored to this absence of conscience.* His interior life is quelled and he is left an uncontemplative prisoner in his own body:

> The giant staring at his feet, perhaps wondering how he could not order them to move from that spot, but happy enough not to have to think about where he might go if he could instruct them.

(Monsters Worse to Come: 275)

Devaney's trajectory is like a double reversal – he begins without conscience or integrated self-consciousness, gains it, loses it, gains it again, loses it again. He does not escape from the ensign of his character but is returned to his beginning state without any lesson. And since he is at no stage the author of his own actions, he cannot even be inferred to have learned from, or have been

responsible, for anything that has happened to him. The absence of free will – or its problematisation – is the aspect of the uncanny that this non-transformation rests upon. This is the subject of the next section.

5.5: FREE WILL AND AGENCY

Character behaviour must, within conventional narrative, be viewed as the outward extension of inner character will. Real characters are active, self-knowing and self-determining:

> Interesting characters are almost always characters who are active - risk takers - highly motivated toward a goal. Many a story has been wrecked at the outset because the writer chose to write about the wrong kind of person - a character of the type we sometimes call the wimp. How do you build a character who will not be a wimp? In the first place, you determine to do so. He is committed. Attainment of his goal is necessary for his happiness.

> (Bickham 1997: 22)

There is an irony in that the stimulus-response model of behaviourism (he sees it; he wants it) which underpins this notion of rational, self-determining character is so often accused of placing a facile determinism at the heart of human behaviour. There is the double-inscription of will in that the writer himself must be as determined (and self-determining) as his character in his approach to characterisation. The philosophical approach to free will which is called compatibilism, holds that freedom is the dependence of action upon will (Watson 1987). Actions which arise without an origin in the desire of the actor are deterministic. Modular discourse does not discuss this as a consideration of character identity. The character's fight for control with external forces may be the basis of a narrative, but their inability or unrelatedness to their own actions is not tolerable. One cannot attain one's goal through action if one has no way of exercising one's will. So, one can reasonably say that all characters from within the modular view are, by default, free agents. Where a character is constrained in her actions, this constraint will signal the obstacle against which she will fight or, in less dramatic narratives, it will at least be called to the reader's attention to provide a framework within which the character's behaviour can be understood as rational.

Richard Double's interprets free choice as having three necessary conditions:

1) One is able to choose otherwise;

2) One can exercise control over what one's choices will be;

3) These choices are rational.

(Double 1991)

The uncanny fear of automatism can be promoted by causing the second of these criteria to be unproductive as an assumption – intimating loss of control which implies loss of free will, but without accounting for that absence within an authoritative framework which acknowledges it as absent. That is, the reader must not be confident in the assumption that the apparent absence of self-determined action is accounted for by something which could be posited as rational within the narrative such as hypnosis or a temporary disorder which heightens the character's suggestibility, which would only serve to normalise the effect and re-integrate it within the rational reading schema.

The first of Double's criterion can be problematised within a treatment of the sublime obstacle: the absence of meaningful choice in the face of the death and disorder. The third criterion – that the choices available to the actor are equally rational – is what is troubled by the thanatological impulses in the uncanny which often causes a character to use the language of free will, agency and self-determination to explain the attraction of oblivion. Since oblivion is not an maximal-rational choice for an agent who has no signalled problems except that she is alive, the implication follows that the "obstacle" which prevents the character from achieving her goal is life. The preservation of self does not admit this into the fold of rational choices because it mocks the very idea of agency.

5.5.1: BECKETT AND AGENCY

Discussing this aspect of Beckett's philosophy and characterisation in such a short space doesn't do his treatment of agency any justice but I am not undertaking an extensive audit of his themes but looking for ways in which he uses unconventional approaches to characterisation which create uncanny effects.

Moran, in pursuit of Molloy, being a detective, is a rational operative. His immediate goal is clear, the obstacles consistent with those of other pursuit

narratives (distance, absence of information, difficult and unknown terrain). But questions can be asked about his agency in the matter. He has been requested to undertake this task by Gaber, on behalf of the obscure Youdi, and has no option but to accede. And yet, Moran can justify the actions to himself. His choice to accede to the command is rational in that it is, after all, his job to do such things. His agency becomes suspect, however, when he treats the purpose of the quest:

> The longer I took to find Molloy, the greater my chances of remembering what I was to do with him.

> *(Molloy* :138)

This is a character who falls into the trap of filling a narrative-functional role but, upon reflecting upon its purpose, realises that he has no knowledge of it. It can hardly be a choice premised on rational ends if the ends are not in sight. At least, they are not in the character's sight, they may abide elsewhere. The analogy with fictional characters is clear: they are set forth on action not of their own making but have no space to reflect on the ultimate purpose of the acts. Only the narrative consciousness knows that. For this reason, identity, so strongly correlated to behaviour and to the rationality of that behaviour, is itself something which seems to reside elsewhere. Moran's effort to fill his role, with its inequality of knowledge, power and will leads him to another dubious 'choice':

> I have been a man long enough, I shall not try anymore.

> *(Molloy :176)*

The idea that one "tries" to be what one cannot help but be is a peculiar piece of wisdom: it mocks the idea of free will by using the language of agency to describe the one thing over which one has no control: one's coming into being. Choice does not exist in this domain nor is effort requested: life commences through the action of others. This parodying of agency is also applied to the task of Beckett's narrators who, in imposing themselves on the story material which comes to mind, occasionally halt to wonder about the provenance of the story and whether their conscious striving to produce something external to them is all a trick which the mind plays on itself to convince the ego that it has achieved some control and mastery of its materials:

> I wonder if I am not talking yet again about myself. Shall I be
> incapable, to the end, of lying an any other subject … soon I shall
> not know where Sapo comes from, nor what he hopes.

<div align="right">(Malone Dies :189)</div>

These reversals of the criteria of free will are indicative of Beckett's tendency to use the language of rationality to encourage empathy and identification with sentiments which are otherwise irrational in themselves. These stop short of dismissing agency in favour of determinism because that would be to offer the consolation of secure knowledge. This commingling of two opposed philosophical concepts is less oblique in Auster in which more traditional fears of agency-loss are evident.

5.5.2: AUSTER AND AGENCY

> Little by little, Quinn began to feel cut off from his original
> intentions, and he wondered now if he had not embarked on a
> meaningless project.

<div align="right">(City of Glass: 60)</div>

In Chapter Three I discussed the presence of automatism in the character of Quinn. This approach is one of two characterisation strategies in Auster which are related to the exaltation of uncertainty about what degree of control characters exerts over their own behaviour. These are:

- The attribution of agency to an unspecified elsewhere (often expressed in the character's sense that they are separated from their own intentions);
- A derealisation of self and the loss of ontological security.

The three main characters in each of the novels each undergo both of these operations. With Quinn, the sense of automatism is most urgent. Even his most basic actions are accompanied by a sense of dissociation from self in which, rather than finding his centre of identity through actions, he loses himself with every step:

> Each time he took a walk, he felt as though he were leaving
> himself behind this brought him a salutary emptiness within.

<div align="right">(City of Glass :4)</div>

The clearest expression of automatism is to be found the direct comparison of a character with a puppet or a doll. Peter Stillman Jr. is presented variously as a marionette and a puppet, one who is not conventionally dyspraxic but thoroughly derealised: he has no control over his body or his mind and only aspires to become real:

> It was like watching a marionette trying to work without strings. "I know that I am still the puppet boy. That cannot be helped. No, no. Anymore. But sometimes I think I will at last grow up and become real." (*City of Glass*: 15-22).

But, since the narrative offers the history of Stillman as an explanation for his strange behaviour, his dislocation, the uncanny effect is less pronounced in his case. It is with Quinn, and Blue in Ghosts, that the re-centring of agency is most effective:

> But the days pass an d still he does not call. This, too, is troubling him, for he cannot remember a time in his life when he has been so reluctant to do a thing he so clearly wants to do. I'm changing, he says to himself. Little by little, I'm no longer the same
>
> (*Ghosts*: 145)

Neither Quinn nor Blue nor the narrator of The Locked Room are men in control of their behaviour. Perversely, their actions are carried out in pursuit of the reclamation of agency. They wish their behaviour to be meaningful and intentional, but this can only come about if they are re-united with 'themselves'. But once the innocence of the symbolic self is lost in contemplation of Real selflessness, it is very difficult ever to re-capture it.[8]

5.5.3: AGENCY IN MONSTERS WORSE TO COME

In *Monsters Worse to Come*, the issue of free will, and whether any of the characters exhibit any such thing, is centred on use of the words 'instruction' and 'decision'. An understanding of free will is such that character actions are simply assumed to emerge as a result of autonomous choice, not as a result of some unspoken edict or alternative sovereignty. People do not give instructions to themselves, because that makes choice seem like an act of communication between two aspects of the self – a commander and a servant which model

implies the splitness of subjectivity and is therefore prohibited within modular approaches. At the outset, this idea was established by using the term 'instruction' to describe how Devaney was motivated into action.

These strategies fall into two complimentary strategies which hint at the following qualities of character: a lack of agency and a sense of unreality. In this light, it is said of Devaney that:

> He had only been instructed to dispatch the butcher, not to remain dry, not to please himself, and so he stayed where he was ... *sentiments resounded in his head*. They did not sound like his words either but he found himself agreeing with them.

<div align="right">(Monsters Worse to Come: 1,7)</div>

The transformation is almost the same as the switch from active to passive voice. This is jarring when the action being referred to is regarded as so inimical to coherent selfhood as to make no sense if one uses rational assumptions to build an impression of character.

The derealisation of self and other has been pointed out already with regards to the character of Captain Deeds. His partner, Whelms, is prone to chronic doubt about the nature of otherness and is forever entertaining doubts where doubt does not ordinarily apply. This extends even to the authentic agency of others:

> Through the window he could see the outline of the orphan, sitting alone in a highback chair, staring into space, as though awaiting instruction or, Whelms thought and, in thinking, disturbed himself, waiting for his true self to come home so that he might move from that spot.

Kinnegan, as though aware of Whelms apperception of him, succumbs to this way of thinking about himself and confides to Albie Bawn his Capgras-like dissonance:

> I have a me that is me. I sometimes feel though, that I am not me. That there is a me elsewhere and that I am just holding his place until he returns. The real me knows what is going on and I am shaming him with my actions. I am a false me. When the real me returns, what will I do?

(*Monsters Worse to Come*: 219)

The most important in aspect of characterising in this way is to repress any indication of an agentive role for any named entity within the novel: the confusion about agency and authenticity which the characters undergo does not find its resolution in the acts of intentions of a masterful other (despite the possibility that The Duff is the external agent for all their actions) but alludes to an agent that is absent and about whom little is known or can be said. This sublime allusion is necessary for the avoidance of closure and the re-introduction of irrational means to the decoding of character.

5.6: SUBLIME OBSTACLES

> Conflict is the collision of the character's desires with resistance - from nature, from other characters, from the spirit world, from outer space, from another dimension, from within themselves, from anywhere.

(Frey 1987: 30)

Obstacles and antagonists are expected to be as clearly visible, rational and resourceful as the protagonists whose objectives they thwart. James Frey advises that:

> Good opposition requires that the antagonist counter each of the protagonists attempts to solve his problems with as much force and cunning as the protagonist exhibits.

(Frey 1987: 32)

When Frey says that opposition can come from anywhere, he also means that its nature and provenance must also be signalled to the reader and character: they must know what they are dealing with. This suggests that the obstacle should have particular qualities which enables the use of rational inferences in the process of understanding character:

1: The obstacle must be presented to the senses. That is, it must be named and capable of being distinguished from others. Conventional threats and aides in a narrative are those who have the potential for assisting or preventing the chief character. Their relationship to the central character, in this matter of assistance or resistance must eventually be coded for the reader to infer.

2: There must be equivalence in the force exercised by the two opposing agents. An obvious *imbalance* of capability does not encourage reader anticipation about the outcome of the quest. This rule also re-enforces the rational basis of narrative conflict: it is not rational to attempt to defeat an invincible opponent.

If these rules express the rational aspect of how the obstacle must be designed so that the rational side of character can be made manifest, it is with the appearance of unidentified, sublime and overwhelming obstacles that the uncanny appears.

5.6.1: SUBLIME OBSTACLES IN BECKETT

For the outer world opposed my succeeding too.

(Molloy:87)

The first rule, that of presentability, requires that each potential obstacle is recognisable, nameable and can easily be identified so that its nature as an obstacle will be recognised when it is introduced. In Beckett this becomes problematic because, in most cases, the obstacle is ubiquitous and is outside of the character's realm of control. That obstacle is the fact of being. Everything constitutes an obstacle which prevents the character from his goal of inexistence. "Things" – all objects which also exist – are similarly benighted and benighting:

The inertia of things is enough to drive one literally insane.

(*Molloy*: 120)

Identification of the obstacle is premised on being able to distinguish between it and non-obstacles. This requires its treatment in the narrative, its presentation to the reader's senses in such a way as to allow them to infer the nature of the obstacle and therefore the qualities of the character who wishes to overcome them. Moran, who perversely refuses to engage in anything which would mark his report as literature, is equally reticent about relating information about the impediments which he met on his journey:

I shall not tell of the obstacles we had to surmount, the fiends we had to circumvent, the misdemeanours of my son, the disintegrations of the father.

(*Molloy*: 158)

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And so reveals nothing about them or about himself in the telling. Being possessed of no specific identity, these obstacles seem to surround the characters. When everything in the character's universe is similar in its failure to provide assistance then the equivalence of forces which constitutes the second rule is also broken. Resistance is everywhere and by preceding the character into being it is implied that the obstacle is like the god of Whiteheadian theology: outside time, outside space, beyond recall and irreducible (Whitehead 1957). Of course, the obstacle is sublime in the second sense of Kant's definition: its order of magnitude suggests an infinite size and duration which cannot be presented to the senses. Not alone can the character not overcome it (which makes every choice to act against it an irrational one) but he cannot even imagine its nature (Kant 1973).

In Auster the obstacle is rooted more firmly in the epistemology of self-other relations. Each of his characters wish to apply rational methods to the complete understanding or mastery of a specific other. Armed with faith in these methods, their attempts are thwarted by the nature of otherness. As Fanshawe tells the narrator at the end of *The Locked Room*:

> You can't possibly know what's true or not true. You'll never know.

<div align="right">(The Locked Room: 312)</div>

And so the uncanny obstacle for character is one against which its character is always defined as behaving irrationally and which has the following characteristics:

1: The obstacle has an order of magnitude and ubiquity which seems to pervade everything that is not the character: for Beckett it is the fact of existence and everything which is co-existent, for Auster it is Others whose behaviour correspond to nothing sensible which the self can apprehend.

2: The obstacle is, for these reasons, unidentifiable or at least should remain unidentified (unnamed) within the narrative.

3: The obstacle has force vastly superior to that of the character and which he can never overcome and can never know with confidence its identity. As a result, his

behaviour is always better understood within a framework which permits an irrational connection between behaviour and desire.

5.6.2: SUBLIME OBSTACLES AND MONSTERS WORSE TO COME

These three features of the sublime obstacle form the basis of some features of characterisation in *Monsters Worse to Come*. The irrational view of confronting the obstacle (of resisting resistance) which is outside time is expressed in the last chapter of the novel by Hoc Danger:

> [Them dogs] would fight to escape their captivity except that they have become inured to it, you see. They would bite through the ropes if they thought it would do them any good. But what good is there in biting through one rope only to find that you've really been harnessed to the flat earth by another, invisible set of chains all this time? One chain succeeds another. The world knows that the tie that seems to bind you is only the first of an infinity of its kind.
>
> (*Monsters Worse to Come*: 255)

If one chain succeeds another – if each thing and process is only the an ensign of a fate which cannot be escaped – then fighting 'maximally and rationally' against an obstacle in order to determine your fate is itself irrational. This possibility – for it is one mode of being amongst others – is expressed so as to offer a counterpoint to the relentlessness with which Hoc Danger and The Duff each engages in aggrandisement.

The Duff, in one of many contradictory excurses of the role of will in the universe, states his intentions (and intentionality) in his first meeting with Kinnegan:

> 'I'm awful fond of decisions. Can't get enough of them. I have to make a decision every few minutes or I get very tense. As the man said 'whosoever relinquishes his fate to the common destiny of creatures will subside back once more into the primal mud without a scream but he who claims his own fate will by that arrogation alone' … you know the rest.'
>
> (*Monsters Worse to Come*: 75)

And yet, this exertion of will has no discernible focus. It reflects only a will-to-power which uses any available means which might lead to an end which has no name. The Duff's history of extending his will into the outside world shows that he has no intention, or desire, beyond the exercising of a will-to-power which is always irrational in its failure to match means to ends:

> These and more had been his projects of the past, progress the theme, experiments of a kind in which he had sought to prove something to himself and to his compatriots. Something which he could hardly describe. This list of his failed missions, pressing itself upon his field of vision, nestled with his other disappointments, including this last one with Devaney, and their recital to him seemed like some litany of woe.

> *(Monsters Worse to Come*: 45)

He cannot describe what it is that will be proven or achieved by this exercise of power. It has no teleology of its own except the continuation and extension of his realm of sovereignty, self-perpetuation as an end in itself, which is what Nietzsche called the only application of will[9]. The uncanny effect relies on not specifically identifying the obstacle which prevents the success of will in this endeavour. It must remain elusive and abstract. Dehistoricising the obstacle or the reasons for failure can help to achieve this. The Duff, confiding to his automaton McAnnix, admits of some awareness of his inability to deal with adversity and suggests a glimmer of contradictory awareness that he is the obstacle standing in his own way and, being such, is something from which he can never escape:

> I sometimes feel that the long, long past which I have behind me contains more than I can recall. I have done some things that I cannot immediately summon up and cannot reflect upon. But, and I'm sure you would agree Mister McAnnix, that is not a sin and if a man can acknowledge his very few blindspots then he is a man with a great degree of self-awareness

> *(Monsters*: 131)

The Duff appears to be both the object of his own will and the impediment to its achievement. Extending the range of his influence will always also extend the

range of his failings. The uncanniness comes from this doubledness of self (as will and negation) and from the splitness which it posits at the centre of human endeavour.

5.7: EPISTEMOLOGICAL UNCERTAINTY

Characters who have 'simple' doubts about themselves can be said to be of a conventional kind when those doubts are posited as part of the obstacle which they must overcome to effect their transformation or reversal: a mountaineer who does not know if he has the courage and skill to master the summit is such an example. In the case of such characters, doubt or scepticism act as pebbles in the machine of the rational method which the narrative must crush en route to a clear confirmation or rejection of the authenticity of the fact under dispute. That is, the mountaineer will come to know if he has the ability to match his will by testing himself. This systematic treatment of doubt is part of an Enlightenment ideal which endorses the inevitable success of the application of method and the observation of experience to the resolution of doubt. To endorse this view of character behaviour, we must accept that facts or states-of-affairs exist, and are prior to human consciousness, and that human beings are capable of discovering and understanding them.

Doubt, in the uncanny, has very different features and does not permit this evidence-based erasure. Uncertainty moves into the province of the uncanny when it is directed not at the authenticity of particular facts but at the very possibility of facts. This primitive scepticism does not aid the rational empirical method but imposes a distance between the subject and the world of information about others and objects which are not the self. It wonders if facts are not discovered but made (sees the Real behind the symbolic) and, being a creature of hesitation, it never gets past wondering.

The modular or conventional character "knows what he wants" and exhorts himself to attain it. The uncanny character may come to reject any confidence that he can know anything of the kind and may, as a result, never try to attain it, may never possess an achievable objective in the first place. This uncertainty about the possibility of knowledge is observable on the micro-level, where characters preclude themselves from making anything that looks like an assertive declaration or description, no matter how trivial its bearing might seem. When

the character type is heavily bound up in roles which require rational/empirical and epistemological security (detectives and scientists, for example), the crisis of its removal disables them as actors and causes the readers decoding of them to falter.

The expression of the uncanny, by involving the return of repressed 'knowledge' which causes profound hesitation, is clearly signalled by the expression of radical doubt of this kind. The specific type of doubt which holds most claims to being uncanny is that which cannot forsake doubt as the primary force in all reflections about the self and other. In such cases, the impossibility of absolute knowledge about things outside the self and the necessity of claiming to know implied by the very fact of representing that reality, embody a splitness between the irrational and rational which produces both a hesitation and an uncertainty about how such a contradiction could ever be resolved.

5.7.1: EPISTEMOLOGICAL UNCERTAINTY IN BECKETT

> Of myself I could never tell, any more than live or tell of others.

> (*Malone Dies*: 196)

> It is best to adopt the simplest explanation, even if its not simple, even
> if it does not explain very much.

> (*Malone Dies*: 183)

Doubt is usually signalled in a discourse system by the inclusion of hedging markers such as 'perhaps' and 'maybe'. The rational limitations imposed on doubt preclude these hedges being applied to aspects of existence which are fundamental: Cartesian introspectionism holds sway and one cannot doubt that *one is*, as long as one has the ability to doubt. I have already touched upon particular epistemologies in which this fundamental doubt is active (such as Fregoli's syndrome), where the self can doubt its own existence or where, accustomed to playing a diverse range of roles to accommodate others, it is left without a bearing when those others are not present. Secondary aspects of being can also be subjected to doubt. Within narrative, and with regards to characterisation, there are usually certain doubts which must be suspended before anything can be related. The narrator must have and encourage faith in his ability

to describe states of affairs accurately. Beckett's trilogy furnishes examples of what happens when this faith is lost:

> But perhaps there were several hens, all grey and so alike in other respects that Sapo's eye, avid of resemblances, could not tell between them… And yet that is a thing that will never be known.

(Malone Dies: 203-4)

Malone, as a character-narrator, is in a specialised position with regards to uncertainty, in that as well as harbouring doubts about his own existence, he also has doubts about the premise of storytelling as it relates to aspects of the world outside himself. In his case, the recording eye of the narrator keep blinking, asking itself if what it sees in its imagination can really be related. Of course, in Beckett, it both *cannot* be related and *must* be related. This impossible obligation results in the whole texture of reporting being riddled with hesitation over what seem like the most trivial details. Molloy shares this "aporia pure and simple" with regards to description of encountered phenomena:

> A little dog followed him, a Pomeranian I think, but I don't think so… Yes it was an orange Pomeranian, the less I think about it the more certain I am. And yet.

(Molloy: 12)

"The less I think about it, the more certain I am": one can only be sure by suspending all rationality.

Bishop Berkeley's influence over Beckett's unconsolable scepticism is considerable (Berkeley 2001). The latter's idealism, in its radical dismissal of the idea that empirical or commonsense vindication of widely held and simple truths can ever fully convince against scepticism which seeks no ground, influences Beckett's treatment of the possibility of knowledge, or the potential for irresolvable doubt, in his characters' interactions with the world of objects. The infinite regression of rational proof against radical scepticism like this, wherein facts are proven by their synchrony with other facts which ultimately rely assumptions and a priori truths – or what The Unnameable calls "affirmations and negations invalidated as soon as uttered" (: 293) - leaves the authority of

knowledge in obscure hands. When the writer begins to describe the actions of a character whose behaviour, observed within the imaginative process, are integral to a revelation of the character's essence, the presence of groundless doubt – where Wittgenstein might say it is less reasonable to doubt than to accept the representation – can reveal the fragility of the assumptions upon which attend extensions of character into the outside world. The process of characterisation ties character behaviour to other character signifiers to lend it an ordered coherence but when the character cannot act, because he cannot first accept the existence or qualities of the outside world upon which he is expected to act, then character behaviour is limited to behaviours of doubt and hesitation. There is no external trait with which to create a picture of the coherent other, just the incoherent trauma and grotesque humour of groundlessness. In such cases the repressed "knowledge" which the uncanny approach unearths is that of pre-modern solipsism.

5.7.2: EPISTEMOLOGICAL UNCERTAINTY IN AUSTER

> I understand now that each fact is nullified by the next fact, that each thought engenders an equal and opposite thought. Impossible to say anything without reservation: he was good, or he was bad. All of them are true.

> (Auster 1990: 67)

> The implication was that human nature could be understood ... but after struggling to take in all these surface effects, Quinn felt no closer to Stillman than when he first started following him.

> (*City of Glass*: 67)

In Auster, enquiring into facts results in the endless task of corroboration or Derridean difference which seeks and fails to ground the simplest of observations. This failure to find ground affects characters at a basic level: they lose their potential to infer the significance of others behaviour and their own external behaviour becomes muted: they act only for themselves, acting only on the interior. This provides few conventional cues for the reader to create a coherent character impression. It also creates vision of a character whose predicament is

troubling and whose fate is sad. If the character can infer no meaning from his own behaviour and that of others, then he is lost and beyond communication.

Auster's approach to self-other epistemology has been described as nihilistic and pre-modern in that offers no hope for the self to re-connect with meaning (either for the character self or for the reader self who has identified with him). In response Dennis Brone has said that Auster's purpose is moral in its instruction: the character must lose themselves in order to know and possess themselves (Barone 1990: 20). This has the uncanny aspect in its doubledness and contradiction: one must first admit to knowing nothing before one can know anything.

5.7.3: EPISTEMOLOGICAL UNCERTAINTY IN MONSTERS WORSE TO COME

> 'Witnesses', said Whelms, 'are not the best arbitrators of what has and has not happened. They carry no weight in judicial circles. Proof,' he continued, 'that holy grail of the police, is a ghost. Nothing can be proven beyond reasonable doubt anymore. It's not that doubt has changed, it's just that the limits of reason have been extended. Reason is elastic nowadays. You can doubt anything, reasonably, if you have a mind to'.

(Monster Worse to Come: 84)

The character most defined by epistemological scepticism in *Monsters Worse to Come* is Inspector Whelms. His chronic doubt leads to hesitation and surface inaction. Whelms's scepticism is revealed thorugh open proclamations and access to his interior logic. This raises the question about what a character who is unable to act because of chronic doubt can do that signifies aspects of self to the reader. The rationalisation of doubt as the reason for inaction can result in the character being categorised and will present hesitation. This is a strong possibility. The compensation, from the view of the uncanny, is that this can only be done if the reader acknowledges the rational explanation given for the irrantional, incoherent behaviour which is manifested by the character.

Many cultural commentators have pointed out that the splitness of subjectivity and the removal of traditional identity markers far from liberating an individual serve to leave them stranded and incapable of reforging connection with anything

outside the self. In the case of Whelms, who has difficulty convincing himself that anything he does can be of any consequence to the point where he doubts the fact of his own existence, the resolution of this lostness in the novel seems perfectly Aristotlean and yet perverse. Whelms has been doctored by The Duff and is wandering around with only half of his face (a split sign), when he encounters a sewing machine which bears the other half:

> He got down on his knees and with his one eye traced the outline of his jaw on this machine, seeing himself as another would, marvelling at the displacement. And marvelling to at this new and inviolable form of proof of the fact of his own existence. He could see himself and he could see himself seeing himself.
>
> 'The totality of being' he said 'has made itself known. Through the eye of the beholder beholding the eye of himself, known now as the subject and the object!'. He held the remnants of his face in his hands and delivered himself finally of all the colossal doubts that he had harboured.
>
> 'Not only that', said the young boy who stood in attendance 'but it comes equipped with an Olfa rotary cutter.'

<div align="right">

(*Monsters Worse to Come*: 250)

</div>

This closure seems to be a parody of affirmation of the re-integrated subject as it suggests that the only way one can rid oneself finally of existential doubt is to meet ones (near) double along the way and to see what others see. That is: in order to feel coherent and integrated, one must first be split in two.

5.8: CONCLUSION

This chapter looked firstly at methods for integrating character behaviour into a coherent impression of character essence. These methods are part of the conventional rational discourse about characterisation in the novel and are premised on a model of well-integrated, rational selfhood in which the will to act is uncomplicated and is provoked by the proximity of threat or desire. Characters are said to act maximally and rationally to secure their objectives in such a way as to reveal the motivation for their action to the reader. The intention was to re-examine the epistemological assumptions which allow for character behaviour to signify other sociological and psychological aspects of character. In treating the

approaches of modular creative writing, it was hoped to uncover a method of devising general techniques which might engender a hesitation in the reader's decoding of character behaviour along these lines. This attempt at disorientation had four points of focus: transformations, agency, obstacles and doubt.

Firstly, it examined the teleology of transformation involved in the standard Aristotlean reversal in which character development is seen as the process of progressive change in the narrative from one state of being to an opposing one. The presence of the determining influence of narrative logic is part of the reader's repressed knowledge which can be recovered in an uncanny treatment of this aspect of characterisation. This 'knowledge' returns when the character remains static or unchanging, either through an inability to achieve her objective or by failing to become aware of it in the first place. While a treatment of the character arc in itself does not create an uncanny effect. This end is aided by underdetermining the character's final state by failing to allow a sense of closure to be drawn over the reader's impression of the character.

The second issue is that of agency. Agency is the singlemost important aspect of the uncanny in treating character behaviour. Jentsch's notion that the blurring of the automatonic with the animate produces intellectual (and emotional) uncertainty can be used to furnish descriptions of character behaviour in which the character exhibits a sense of dissociation from the action she is undertaking. Many aspects of documented non-normative behaviour and identity problems bear all of the features of this uncanny phenomenon in that they describe a process of derealisation or dissonance – the person cannot locate the relationship of the self to its physical and mental behaviour. The use of hypothetical similes tends to mark this approach to characterisation with regards to behaviour: people move 'as though they were puppets'; 'as if they were jostling on a string'. Characters feel estranged from their own behaviour, as though in horror at what it is that their bodies to signify to others about them.

The identity and location of the agency which seems to be exerting control over the character must itself remain unresolved. This dislocated sovereignty may be internal (in which case the 'problem' is with the subject) or external (in which supernatural explanations may be given) but in naming it, the writer provides a cue to the schema as to which inferences will be more productive. This solves the

crisis of uncertainty, even if its advances an irrational view of the world and the self. It was argued that, besides this problematisation of immanent agency of the self, other techniques could be devised which interfere with the appearance of character free will. This specifically relates to the third aspect: that of obstacle.

In conventional forms, obstacle is identified and has qualities which are diametrically opposite to those of the character. It also has an equivalent force. In uncanny treatments of character, the obstacle which prevents the characters attainment of goal. A much greater order of magnitude than him and seems unidentifiable and ubiquitous in that it seems to comprise everything that is not the character. The obstacle is therefore a process which enfolds him. It many cases the character cannot identify the nature of this obstacle. It seems to have a particularly uncanny effect if the character himself is unconsciously the obstacle to his attainment of the goal. The obstacle is therefore sublime and unpresentable. As a result, the character's behaviour is always better understood within a framework which permits an irrational connection between behaviour and desire.

The last quality of the uncanny and behaviour concerns that of doubt. It was argued that while conventional characters may experience doubts about aspects of the self, the uncanny character experiences doubt about the existence of the self and the possibility of faithfully recounting aspects of the not-self. For this to be presented to reader, representation of character is necessarily heavily interiorised. The uncanny effect is realised by the rational coherence which is lent to the vision of aporetic solipsism in which the self can never say anything about the other that it knows to be true but cannot stop itself from speaking all the same.

The next chapter contextualises these and other aspect of the techniques for creating an uncanny character within a discussion about the relevance and suitability of rules for the purpose of creative writing and the other possibilities which exist for developing alternative epistemologies with which to approach the characterisation process.

CHAPTER FIVE NOTES

1 This is a feature of contemporary film noir drama – such as Angel Heart, L.A. Confidential - in which the cultural distinctions between identity roles are heavily blurred to amplify a feeling of moral relativism. This is not the same as the uncanny because it resolves itself by finally assigning the character to one category or another and because its hesitation is only categorical, it does not place the reader in the position of hesitating between rational and irrational explanations for characters' behaviour without any help in achieving closure.

2 Developing those expectations only to frustrate them is strategy which has often been attributed to Paul Auster (Sorapure 1995).

3 In Jasper Fforde's comic postmodern novel *The Well of Lost Plots*, the characters who are aware of their fictive nature discuss the fact that none of them have ever had breakfast or have had to cut their toenails. The 'real' protagonist, Thursday Next, realises that the reason for this absence in their fictional lives is that nothing dramatic happens over breakfast and that clipping toenails is not the kind of action that signifies much about anyone (Fforde 2003).

4 Confusion in this regard is, after all, the failure of presumptions to correspond with reality and in most other situations, presumptuousness is something to be challenged and criticised, rather than rewarded.

5 The accusation that such advice is 'reductive' or 'inane' needs qualification. Naturally, texts which are designed for the purposes of teaching or instructing aspiring writers have a tendency to present techniques in such ways as to allow students to understand and identify with them. Such methods, supposedly, permit the student to master some basic concepts before 'transcending' them and seeing how problematic they are. However, I have never been satisfied that this bartering away of complexity for the sake of communication serves the purpose it declares for itself. By reducing character development to a 'solved problem in moral arithmetic', failing to point out the limitations of this conceptualisation and dismissing the relevance of philosophy to the art of fiction, Frey's advice closes up the enquiry and affirms its approach as an end in itself.

6 It is tempting to see in Quinn's pursuit of Stillman his pursuit of a re-integrated self: Stillman the cipher for the other-as-lost-self. This interpretation still holds the same transformation of dissolution over solution.

7 This is *uncannily* similar to Wittgenstein's own summary of the import of his *Tractatus*: "what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence". There is a strong irony in this claim from a narrator who, despite his attempts 'to stick to the facts' in the same way that the Tractatus tried to isolate the sayable from the unsayable, he errs in the same way that Bertrand Russell alleged of Wittgenstein: in making this argument about epistemology, one has already said "what cannot be said". The Tractatus is an extremely useful book for devising uncanny-like techniques with regards to language since all of its statements about factuality and presentability are as confessedly aspirational as creative writing discourse claims to be descriptive. The similarities, with regards to names in particular, between the ideal logical grammar prposed in the *Tractatus* and the advice of Marshall, Frey and Bickham is quite remarkable:

3.325 In order to avoid such errors we must make use of a sign-language that excludes them by not using the same sign for different symbols and by not using in a superficially similar way signs that have different modes of signification: that is to say, a sign-language that is governed by logical grammar--by logical syntax.

(Wittgenstein 1958: 33)

8 Many other examples of this deletion of agency occur in Auster's trilogy. Here are a few more examples:

> For reasons that were never made clear to him, he suddenly felt an irresistible urge for a particular red notebook at the bottom ... He was at a loss to explain why he found it so appealing.
>
> (*City of Glass*: 38)

> Auster was no more than a name to him: a husk without content. To be Auster meant being a man with no interior, a man with no thoughts.
>
> (*City of Glass*: 61)

> He did not feel himself to be the author of what he wrote.
>
> (*City of Glass*: 4)

9 In Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche writes: "Anything which is a living and not a dying body... will have to be an incarnate will to power, it will strive to grow, spread, seize, become predominant - not from any morality or immorality but because it is *living* and because life simply *is* will to power... 'Exploitation'... belongs to the *essence* of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will to life." (Nietzsche 1989: 259)

Chapter Six

Conclusion

6: CONCLUSION

This chapter summarises the discussion of the uncanny approach to characterisation and contrasts it with the conventional, rationalist modular approach promoted in popular creative writing discourse. The different solutions they present to the representation of human nature and behaviour in the characterisation process are used to devise a quasi-formal model of the uncanny effect. The role of rules, constraints and guidelines in the production of creative writing is discussed and it is argued that, while constraints are necessary for productive creativity and meaningful communication, what Margaret Boden calls the 'heuristic of constraint-negation' is one way in which a creative domain can be expanded and its dominant assumptions or chronic tendencies can be destabilised (Boden 1990). The idea of a 'conceptual space' for the creation of different approaches to creative problem solving (Fauconnier 1997; Fauconnier and Turner 2002) is presented and its relevance to characterisation is examined. The application of conceptual space blending to the transformation of author-character relations which might ensue from this is then outlined.

6.1: A MODEL OF THE UNCANNY

This dissertation had as its goal the development of a framework for characterisation techniques which have an opposing epistemological basis and critical function to those treated in popular examples of creative writing discourse. In examining the uncanny and related concepts which trade in ontological and epistemological insecurity, the process of characterisation was revisited to devise techniques which would result in a disquieting estrangement for the reader in her decoding of character. The trilogies of Beckett and Auster were used as prototypes of this approach and their consonance with the techniques attempted in *Monsters Worse to Come* was highlighted.

The contrast between these two highly dissimilar approaches is partly simplified by the fact that, for the most past, their techniques are perfectly antithetical. The uncanny is based on troubling rational and dominant 'knowledge' about ontological boundaries, conventions for representation and the self-other distinction. As such, it is the inverse of the knowledge expounded in rational discourse about characterisation in popular creative writing guides. What the rational discourse represses and denies to be useful as 'knowledge' is what is

recovered by the uncanny effect. The rational and irrational aspects of intersubjective relations are inscribed in uncanny characterisation which has as one of its features an implied proposition of their co-equivalence in which the narrative suspends judgement.
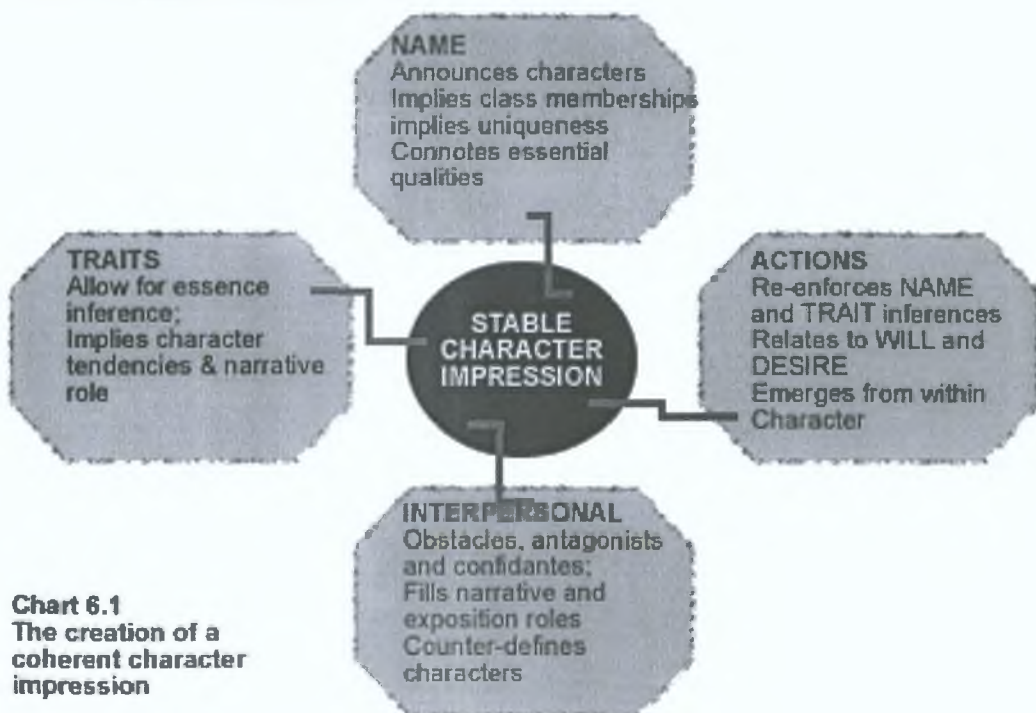
In treating aspects of the uncanny, three general properties were proposed to be fundamental to its effect. They were:

- Reader hesitation;

- Irresolvable confusion of superordinate ontological categories;

- Return of repressed knowledge, fears and taboos.

These features were examined in detail for their presence in, and impact on, the creation of names for character and in the treatment of character agency and behaviour. In pursuit of comprehensiveness, the same approach could be applied to the other elements of characterisation to unearth the 'local grammar' of uncanny transformation with regards to elements such age and 'distinctive speech patterns', for example.[1]

The principal differences between the rational-modular and the uncanny approaches are summarised in the following sections using visual representations of the organisation and function of each approach.

6.1.1. COHERENT CHARACTER IMPRESSION

NAME
Announces characters
Implies class memberships
implies uniqueness
Connotes essential
qualities

TRAITS
Allow for essence
inference;
Implies character
tendencies & narrative
role

STABLE CHARACTER IMPRESSION

ACTIONS
Re-enforces NAME
and TRAIT inferences
Relates to WILL and
DESIRE
Emerges from within
Character

INTERPERSONAL
Obstacles, antagonists
and confidantes;
Fills narrative and
exposition roles
Counter-defines
characters

**Chart 6.1
The creation of a
coherent character
impression**

The rational-modular process requires the agreement of the different elements of characterisation with respect to the information provided about the character. Within this approach, each element must enact and then refer to the same impression. 'Character impression' is another way of describing the essential and prototypical aspects of character which dominate in the reader's internal representation of who or what the character is. This singular impression is stabilised by ongoing re-enforcement through the supplementary agreement of other elements. The stabilising elements which were treated in the dissertation were name; actions/behaviour; traits; interpersonal relations. The rules which operate within rational-modular approaches to characterisation were as follows:

The **Name** must be unique and refer singularly to the character. It must be consistently applied throughout the narrative. This name must be sociologically plausible and its relationship to the character may not be degraded by phonological or graphical similarities to other names. Its descriptive function is enhanced if its connotation corresponds with the other facets of the character construct.

Actions must be meaningful and related to the traits of the character and the objective which she is trying to achieve. 'Meaningful' means differentiating: the actions must separate the character from others and be related, by narratorial projection or character penetration, to the desire, will and situational intentions of the character. Arbitrary or ambivalent actions are censored. Unwilled actions are impossible.

Character **Traits** are immanent and have a simple aetiology in the character's past which need not be investigated. Traits are activated by the presence of a threat or an object of desire within the character's sphere of influence. It is impossible for a character to deny their traits. Traits produce actions and both signify related aspects of the character's essence.

These features are re-enforced, realised or exposited through **interpersonal relations.** Obstacles counterdefine the character and provide focus for actions; confidantes allow for the character to externalise her desire and intentionality. This in turn allows for the narrative to explain character action within a rational frame. Obstacles and antagonists must be easily identified and have equivalent

resources of will to that of the character. They must require the character to summon up 'maximally rational' behaviour.

These, and other aspects of characterisation can be regarded as complexes of signifiers which provide material with which the reader can begin and sustain the creation of a coherent impression of character through schematic inferences. These rules describe an orientational aesthetic in which the chaotic and ambiguous aspects of other people encountered in real life settings – the reasons for their behaviour, their 'nature' if such a thing exists, their distinction from the self – are excised so as to allow for an 'easy' transcendent reasoning to take place by the perceiving subject, the reader. This free ability to capture the nature of another is both endorsed by and endorses rational ideas of subject-object relations which always rest on contradictions without acknowledging or exploring them. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in the spirit of Heidegger, writes about the problems of this assumed epistemological mastery of the world outside the perceiving self:

> Matter is "pregnant" with its form, which is to say that in the final analysis every perception takes place within a certain horizon and ultimately in the "world." We experience a perception and its horizon "in action" rather than "posing" them or explicitly "knowing" them. Finally the quasi-organic relation of the perceiving subject and the world involves, in principle, the contradiction of immanence and transcendence.

(Merleau-Ponty 1964:2)

These contradictions become more problematic when the "world" spoken of is another self with whom the self is interacting. The circumscription of Others is therefore also a limitation of self, in that fixing the qualities of another allows for the maintenance of a rigid self concept which exists only in simple contradistinction. The writer who subscribes to this easy mastery of others does so not only at the cost of neglecting the many possibilities for intersubjective relations which the novel affords, but also at the expense of affixing his own self-concept to a set of contradictory and closed ideas. Because the uncanny puts this familiar knowledge of others at a distance, it always produces hesitation and doubt in the subject who would otherwise contemplate another without conscious

contradiction or the possibility of disorientation. In comparison with the rational-modular approach to characterisation, the uncanny produces more than one character impression and its 'matrix of signs' points in many different directions at once. These features – disorientation and multiplicity - are the engine of its hesitation and basis of its confounding effect.

6.1.2 UNCANNY CHARACTER IMPRESSION

NAME
Fails to refer uniquely to character;
Contingent in origin;
Connotes 'more' than designated character

TRAITS
Weakly signalled;
Non-essential;
Liable to change depending on situation;
Do not cohrere into a complex of traits

UNSTABLE CHARACTER IMPRESSION

ACTIONS
Not an expression of intention;
Fail to match with self-concept;
Non-telelogical;
Inconsistent with traits;

INTERPERSONAL
Obstacles are sublime and ubiquitous;
Identity of confidantes and enemies is unstable
Liable to be confused with self

Chart 6.2
The Uncanny character impression formation

The uncanny approach can be summarised by referring to its operation in these same four aspects of characterisation (name; traits; actions and interpersonal relations):

The uncanny approach to **Naming** specifies that it should be non-unique in its designation, and therefore barely referential in any strict or meaningful sense. That is, its use does not exclusively and uncomplicatedly focalise on one character but may invoke any number of others. One consequence is that the central character's self-concept may become tied to another through common qualities in their designation. The name is prone to change within the narrative for reasons which are not explained by the economic rationality of the character (i.e. it cannot be an intentional disguise which the character has adopted) or the discernible intentions of any other agent in the narrative. The name is contingent in its origins and it may also be non-descriptive – that is, its phonaesthetic and

referential functions may produce no useable impression of the characters traits. As a reference though, it may produce 'superfluous' or excessive meaning: the single sign, the rigid designator of positivistic logical grammar, may appear elsewhere in different forms: anagrams, abbreviations, non-name collocations, morphemes and phonemes, which hint at other characters and other referents.[2] In this form, its boundlessness calls to mind Beckett's comments on the confusion of "nameless things and thingless names" (*Molloy*: 31) which describes the nightmare of ambiguity in language - that the sign is not attached or owned by its bearer and operates autonomously outside of our intentions in using it.

This failure of expected relations also obtains in a lack of complementarity across **Traits**. In the uncanny approach, traits do not necessarily produce the highly specific actions which would otherwise reveal them, and the character's essence, in rationalist readings. In fact, the existence of traits, in so far as an observer can be certain of their nature, may never be clear: the uncanny character often seems to have become detached from her own basic emotional life and, as a result, anything as essential and stable as a trait often fails to emerge in her behaviour. These behaviours are largely interior, where the narrative permits comment on the character's state of mind and thoughts. Where the narrative focus remains external, behaviour is usually distanced from the character, described in strangely passive terms, as though the character has no responsibility for her actions, possesses no will and has no consciousness of an objective.[3]

The **obstacles and antagonists** which would stand in the way of this objective are therefore less obvious. In fact, they suffer from nominal frustration, are sublime and unnamed. The obstacle may in fact be coterminous with the self. That is – it may be an aspect of self which is not bared to the character's consciousness and which therefore precludes the possibility of the character ever achieving the objective, or her own transformation.[4] This is the nightmarish logic of the "Paradox of The Gods" wherein the act of trying to attain a goal is itself the act which guarantees its failure (Clark 2002). In such a case, the only way to avoid failure is to refuse to entertain the goal in the first place, which is equally 'suicidal' for a fictional character, who should otherwise be maximally and rationally pursuing an heroic end.

In making this summary contrast, it is perhaps striking that the transformation of character from rational-modular to uncanny potentially has very formal properties which could be clearly enunciated using something like a narratorial grammar. This would require that the general principles considered here are expressed as notational rules which stress when, for example, character action should be expressed passively or how character traits can be systematically devised to create an impression of acceptable incoherence. Chapter 1 discussed the need for creative writing discourse to avoid a stentorian tone when writing about techniques so as to avoid the impression of prescriptivism or the implication that creative writing is as formal and algorithmic as this invocation of rules seems to insist. In order to distance this model of the uncanny approach from claims that it simply replaces one reductive grammar with another, and that the idea of creativity necessarily precludes the possibility of rules governing its expression, I will now consider the usefulness, and the problems, associated with these kinds of exhortations and constraints in the characterisation process and in the creative process in general.

6.2: RULES AND CREATIVITY

> A merely novel idea is that one can be described and/or produced by the same set of generative rules as are other, familiar ideas. A genuinely original or radically creative idea is one that cannot. It follows that the ascription of creativity always involves tacit or explicit reference to some specific generative system.

(Boden 1994:78)

Contrary to romantic views of creative expression, contemporary psychology argues that creative ideas do not emerge from the workings of an alien mental architecture undergoing some divine entelechy but in the harnessing of everyday cognitive abilities to create new arrangements of conventional tokens (Simonton 2003, in particular)[5]. This is labelled a combinatorial or combinationist approach to creativity. It implies simply that the process which leads to creative solutions to problems, insights and innovative ideas, is not of a different cognitive nature to general problem solving. The impetus behind research into the cognitive processes of creative originality has been the desire to remove it from the realm of the Kantian sublime and, in seeking to account for some of its features –

propose a commonality to different forms of creativity in different fields of endeavour - to avoid its mythicisation and a subscription to Karl Popper's belief that original or creative behaviour results from a process about which nothing meaningful or rational can be said (cited in Gigerenzer 1994).

The label "creative" is problematic because it is a term in the social construction of human behaviour as opposed to an empirical observable which has a fixed set of criteria. Margaret Boden's distinction between "novel" and "radically creative" defines the former as a minor outgrowth of existing approaches and techniques to the creative problem and the latter as something which cannot have been predicted – and cannot be accounted for - by these same approaches. A radical piece of creativity is not a generative product and involves an implicit rejection of extant techniques and received ideas about how the creative task can be accomplished, whereas *merely* novel creativity is generative and can be traced back to the system of rules which have typically produced such work in the past. In the area of creative writing, this describes a work which subsequently will require the development of a singular and tailored hermeneutic model to be able to perform textual analysis upon it (such as Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* or Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*).

This definition of the radically creative seems to mythicise creativity once more, by making it an exception from everyday cognition. However, it also implicitly acknowledges the relationship between the creative act and the constraints which typically operate in a creative domain. It suggests that radical creativity involves the rejection, as opposed to the extension, of these constraints. In either case, creativity is defined by rules – through adherence or negation. This provides a useful starting point for analysing how transformation of creative techniques can be formally devised. It also suggests a partial defence for an approach to characterisation in the novel which supports the inclusion of non-rational epistemologies while at the same time appealing to rationality in the development of these techniques.

Martindale (1996) and Csikzentmihalyi (1997) have separately hypothesised that innovation within a particular discipline (such as poetry, art or science) tends to occur when all of the most potent variations of a particular approach to the discipline (or to the generative system) have been exhausted. Practitioners learn

the tacit rules of the discipline by following the conventions of their peers and those laid down in the formal or informal canon of works regarded as the best or most exemplary of their kind. This will always tend to result in similar formal properties and thematic concerns within the work. Any literary generative system (such as social realism, dadaism, existentialism which rely, of course, on language) will therefore serve to impose certain constraints on what is produced in that it already answers some of the many questions which attend the production of the work. This happens in the same way that language, by having a formal system of grammar, dictates along syntactic, morphological and semantic lines what constitutes a sentence and what does not.[6] When the most cogent variations permitted by this system have been availed of, the generative system may be tweaked or replaced by one which affords greater affect.[7] This is the distinction offered between the novel and radical. It can also be seen that such evolutions and revolutions – the Kuhnian paradigm shifts in thinking about the nature and acting out of change within the discipline (Kuhn 1955) – hold out the promise of there being distinct formal properties to the changes which involve the interaction of creative cognition with a generative system within which the rules may be very oblique.

This points to the key question with regards to creativity and formalism - is the creative process algorithmic in nature and can its principles be pre-determined? Is there even a place for rules in creative writing? Popper's objection to the formal study of creativity and innovation was premised on that fact that, in the case of radical creativity, the creative thought is not logically produced by a describable generative system. Because of this it is, by these standards alone, irrational and, being irrational, has no qualities that can be expressed in systematic terms. And so, the truly creative cannot be rationally accounted for. But this rhetorical argument can, and has been, turned on its head to suggest just the opposite: considering that the product has been created, that creativity has been achieved, it must have been generated *somehow*, even if the generative system which has produced it cannot be described in formal terms. In computer science such a problem is defined as one without an algorithm. But even problems for which no algorithm – no step-by-step rule-governed recipe – exists have some formal properties, recurring patterns, possible and impossible forms.[8]

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Creative writing is non-algorithmic in the sense that the complexity and variety of permutations which exist at each level of the writer's 'decisions' together create an almost infinite set of possibilities to be explored.[9] The 'decisions' may also be informed by metaphorical thought, by counterfactual hypothesis and other features of associative and analogical reasoning whose principles remains largely mysterious and closed to formal description. These permutations of creative writing are limited if one obeys the constraints which are presented within the creative writing discourse. These constraints are not part of the system *per se*, but are part of the 'field's' attitude to certain permutations which the system allows. By naturalising constraints against other permutations, by labelling deviation from them as 'bad writing', creative writing discourse serves to make the process more and more algorithmic. It lessens the role of unconscious, associative and analogical reasoning in the process and thereby hampers the development of the writer's identification and even recognition of suitable approaches to the creative problems which novel writing represents.

The presence and usefulness of rules and constraints in creative writing can be explained in the following way: the conventions which underpin acts of communication are not simply ways of freezing or reducing the potential for expression, but are inimical to the act of communication. They offer ground against which the meaning of the communicative act can be figured. Without conventions, social interaction and its attendant meaning lose their bearing. Creative writing, in working within the conventions of language and narrative, amongst other schema, inherits these conventions. Which is a way of saying that creativity must always operate with *some* constraints, otherwise its form becomes too nebulous for its communicative purpose to be discerned. However, if creative writing is approached as a task which involves the distillation of impressions, images and words solely through a system of constraints, then its social, aesthetic or expressive purpose is equally difficult to discern. For this reason, it seems reasonable to argue that the deletion or negation of certain constraints is where the formal aspect of creativity lies.

In examining the uncanny approach to characterisation, what has been advanced is a countermeasure to the dominant rational set of rules which govern creative writing. This amounts to a negation of the constraints about characterisation

which abound in the creative writing discourse. In that adhering strictly and unthinkingly to any set of conventions always leaves something unsaid, since conventions necessarily bring exclusion, any attempt to formalise writing techniques must also know what its conventions are doing. A writer must be rooted somewhere, partially integrated into a way of thinking about literature, about people and about the act of representation, but at the same time strive to explore these areas. Csikzentmihalyi argues that its is in the ongoing movement between these two forces, the comfort of integration (familiarity) and the challenge of differentiation (estrangement) that the flow of creativity reaches its peak (Csikzentmihalyi 1990).

The relaxed formalism of this approach to creative writing, its attempts to be critical about its own purpose and expression, does not benefit from an overly descriptive approach to such issues as constraint negation. That is because creativity, for most people, does not automatically result from becoming familiar with the rules of the generative model and producing work according to its logic, or according to the modified logic which follows from negating one or other of the constraint which mark it. The role of analogical and spatial reasoning in the genesis of creative ideas has been well documented and provides a throughway between formless and unconstrained attempts at creative exploration in writing and overly constrained, systematised production. The combinatorial view of creativity, in common with contemporary views of the function of metaphor in human reasoning, suggests that ideas arrive out of the unconscious drawing of analogies between objects in domains which are otherwise regarded as unrelated. This analogical 'mapping' across conceptual domains, being an element in creative thought, can be looked at as a semi-formal means of generating unconsidered approaches to different aspects of the creative writer's task.

6.3: A BLENDING OF SPACES

> To overcome a limitation in conceptual space, one must change it in some way. One may also change it, of course, without having come up against the limits. A small change in a relatively superficial dimension of a conceptual space is like opening a door to an unvisited room in an existing house.

> (Boden 1994:80)

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Characterisation can be construed as a conceptual space in that it comprises a fixed set of elements whose form is influenced by structured rules which describe the relationship these elements have with each other. The transformation of the character space which has been outlined in the dissertation could be viewed to partially result from the negation of the constraint on rational character behaviour and epistemological mastery of the character, amongst others. The notion of conceptual space blending as outlined by Fauconnier and Turner (2002) provides another means of looking at this, in that it outlines the constraints which operate in the generation of new ideas through analogy or conceptual blending and integration.

GENERIC SPACE
Background knowledge about people and fictional characters

TARGET SPACE
Universe of elements and rules in detective fiction

SOURCE SPACE
Character in absurdist text

BLENDED SPACE
Failure of character to satisfy narrative requirements

Diagram 6.3
Conceptual Space blending for absurd characters in detective fiction
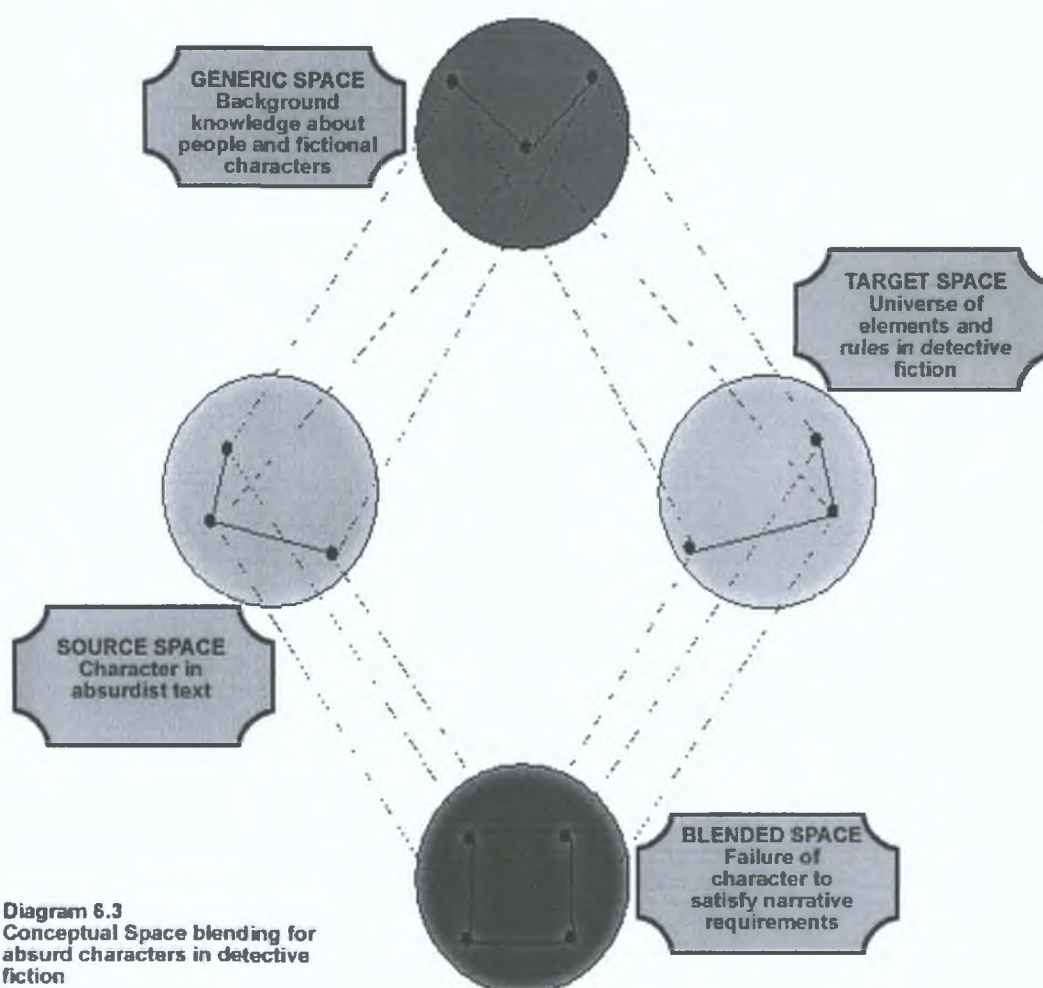
The premise of conceptual blending and its application to creative writing is simple: mapping concepts from different domains produces new associations and new means of dealing with representational problems. In the following diagram, the integration of elements from different discourse spaces (in this case, fictional genres) is outlined. 'Generic space' refers to the type of experiential background

knowledge which the domains require and invoke for the process to make sense so that the comparison can be made sensible. In the case of characterisation, the most important set of knowledge is that of social knowledge or cognition about other people - the meaning of their behaviour, for example, and genre-specific knowledge about how characters are expected to behave, act and what these behaviours signify. The 'Source' and 'Target' spaces refer to the domains which are being blended to create the new set of associations. If we take the example of a 'prototypical' character from the absurdist existentialist drama of Beckett - with her defining qualities of inaction, non-transformation and lack of referentiality - as the source and project her into the role of detective in archetypal detective fiction, we can imagine the odd interplay between character and environment which will ensue. The elements which are specific to the detective genre (the character's goals, traits, relationship with others) are cued by the genre and so the Beckett character is mapped into a foreign universe in which her qualities generate highly peculiar relationships. This imperfect but sufficient mapping (the production of a fragile analogy) can be seen in the detectives in both Beckett and Auster's trilogies: the floundering, sceptical and self-less pursuer who recognises and misrecognises himself in his quarry and who seems unaware of the normal teleology of the genre. He is incapable of delivering the behaviour appropriate to the narrative conventions.[10]

The optimality constraints which Fauconnier and Turner suggest for the integration of concepts from different domains[11] seem to me to be necessary formalities for a *post facto* description of the reasons for a successful or unsuccessful blend. But, in the throes of creativity, the writer's intuited feeling about the qualities of such a blend does not need an exhaustive elucidation of these facets and repressing this concern is more likely to allow him to see further connections between source and target. The concept of blending between discourse spaces, of which genre integration is just one example, gives rise to all kinds of possibilities for novel writing outside of the process of characterisation: the blending of philosophical and fictional discourse spaces, with the transplantation of elements from one to the other is exemplified by the use of footnotes, bibliographies is a feature of the works of Flann O'Brien (1998), Beckett (1955), Auster (2004) and the travelogue and memoir genres are

imbricated in the fiction of WG Sebald through the extensive use of diagrams and photographs. The generative quality of blending is in its illumination of previously unseen connections between elements of the creative writing problem which will often result in the arrangement of characters with elements (location, conflict, desires) which are alien to the reader's background knowledge and expectation of their traits. The initial incompatibility of the character with the target text world will produce hesitation in the reader, and then a process of recognition or misrecognition of the appropriateness of the fit.[12]

As such, striking combinations of elements holds out great scope for development and exploration of character in that it breaks the writer free of the co-occurrent creation of the character with the generic world within which their behaviour is most reasonable. By defamiliarising the character from their context, and creating a strange context for them to act in, the writer forces himself to work imaginatively to maintain what Auster calls a "sufficient realism" – one which retains the familiarity of the elements, but produces an estrangement because of the unexpected and fragile nature of their combination.[13]

6.5: CAVEAT LECTOR

There is a difference between describing a formalist approach to an aspect of writing a novel and executing that approach. Owing to the dual nature of this dissertation – the critique shadowing the content – I have found myself worrying about how adequately or otherwise the approach outlined here reflects the characterisation undertaken in the novel. Some of the interiorisation of character thought and desire, the summation of past experience which explain a presented action, all run against the grain of the uncanny effect by affording a seamless explanation for character behaviour to the prospective reader. In such cases, no hesitation effect could be reasonably expected since no cue or absence is provided to provoke that reaction. Which is to admit that there are discrepancies between the description and the employment of the techniques. From this observation follow two reflections on the relationship between creative writing and writing about it as a process:

1) It is a salutary lesson on the limits of formalism and another indication of the non-algorithmic nature of creative writing. In the heat of composition, most

writers suspend their concerns with techniques, do not consult a log book which explains to them the correct function for achieving a desired effect, and proceed to write, hoping to emerge at the other side of the work with something that is useful and interesting to them. Knowledge of technique may help to overcome flaws and shortcomings after the fact, but during the fact, they only serve to interrupt the creative process. Theoretical models provide ideas, suggest correctives and, when mastered, enhance the writer's ability by broadening his repertoire of ways of seeing and representing. But they do not generate the work and, frequently, they do not comprehensively explain the generation of the work because other ways of thinking often hold sway in creativity.

2) Any effect or technique which contrasts so heavily with dominant techniques and reading strategies often needs to be accompanied by those strategies so that the contrast can be discerned. Novelty, or deviation, gains meaning by virtue of its difference form the norm against which it is set. Having characters behave in (even minimally) rational ways allows for the uncanny character elements to stand in relief and invites reflection on the significance because of its difference. If all the characters are deficient in reason, or cannot be understood using any conventional reading strategy, then the writers runs the risk of overstepping the mark between evoking mystery and producing utter confusion. The balance between a complicated style and one that is incomprehensible to most readers, or what Jonathan Frantzen calls the contract and alienating styles of authorship (Frantzen 2002) is a political and aesthetic issue which would require another dissertation. The crux seems to be this: writing, when it requires *reading* by another, is one element in a process of communication. Being aware, consciously or subconsciously, of how communication systems operate to maximise comprehension does not mean that the writer must adhere to it but he benefits by his awareness in that it once again increases the range of conceptual spaces over which he can deliberate in order to explore the range of possibilities which the novel affords.

One last comment: one discovers what one wants to say by saying it, by writing it, by doing what seems correct and not by unthinkingly identifying one's voice with that produced by a formal system, particularly one whose advocates do not acknowledge its contingency. The key idea in all of this is that of identification.

When I was younger I started writing because I felt an identification with the feelings evoked in me by the writings of others. I tried to emulate the syntactical peculiarities of Cormac McCarthy, the elaborate metaphors of Nabokov. Howard Gardner writes that in the acquisition of skill, a young writer works through informal mentorship, studying the work of one they admire, feigning to emulate them (Gardner 1983). If the writers stops there, no matter how great the one being emulated, then they cannot develop themselves or contribute meaningfully to the discipline. They become stuck in a one-sided relationship with the emulated writer, over-identifying and unable to differentiate themselves from embedded practices. The same absence of growth obtains in the subscription to any formal system – while it comforts in that it always has an answer to a writer's concerned question, it is precisely because it always has a prepared answer that it is best doubted and the weakness in its offered knowledge brought to light.

CHAPTER SIX NOTES

1 Once again, the discernment of uncanny techniques such as these is not intended to advocate the simple replacement of one set of rules with another but to illustrate ways in which a writer can come to understand the contingency of writerly practices through praxis and, in giving these facts consideration, can use them as material for the origination of approaches to characterisation which do not valorise singular coherence over ambiguity, tension and complexity.

2 This is what Rosalind Coward and John Ellis have called 'the excess of signifier over the signified' (Coward and Ellis 1977). The idea of excess within signification holds a particular fascination within poststructuralist criticism while, within more formal linguistic disciplines, it is a mark of the irrationalism of continental philosophy. The schism is the same as that which holds between analytical approaches to the proper name and that of Derrida and his followers. The disparity between the positions adopted within the debate, and the animosity between the rival camps, disguises the fact that, in some ways, their concerns are not that mutually exclusive. The weakness of logical grammar and strict designation in natural language use is central to both stands of thought and could give rise to a neo-formalist analysis of 'how' and 'what' is excessively signified by name-sounds. Such analysis would have to be centred around generalised cognitive operations in the production of meaning from sound, and the social construction of phonoaesthetic 'meaning'. I have treated some of these issues in Appendix A: Descriptive Functions of Names.

3 Joyce Carol Oates's short story *Nairobi* (Oates 1984) achieves this effect in its description of a female character, Ginny, who 'achieves' almost complete self-detachment by viewing herself as the object which successive men have come to want her to be. Ginny is one who 'assents without agreeing', who watches herself with 'critical interest' and whose self-abnegation is so complete, that she seems to be incapable of developing a sense of loss. The character of Sr. Veneranda Clay (Princess) in *Monsters Worse to Come* is similarly modelled in her difficulty to claim ownership for her behaviour and her inability to act outside of someone else's impression of her, or model of her 'character'.

4 The same applies to other elements of characterisation – they are simply not used to provide information about character. One of Evan Marshall's prescribed elements is "Physical Attributes". Both Beckett and Auster often avoid providing any information in this area, the narrative dismissing them as "unimportant" or as details which "need not detain us long". This signals to reader that this channel or implicature is not one by which she is going to get to know the character. The same logic then extends to the duplication of the non-protagonist. Since they are not differentiated physically, they can often come to seem to look like others, and so become confused with others with the potential outcome of being confused with the self.

5 Simonton describes insightful problem solving as resulting from "constrained stochastic behaviour. That is, it can be accurately modelled as a quasi-random combinatorial process". (Simonton 2003:475)

6 Of course, while the motivations for such changes may be aesthetic in principle, and largely unconscious in operation, they are subject to localised political, institutional, developmental and social factors which may select or reject the innovation and which belie the idea that creative genius operates in isolation from the culture in which it is produced. See Dorris 2004; Simonton 1994 for discussions of creative 'greatness' arises less from individual inspiration and more from 'matching' between individual traits and sociocultural factors.

7 The validation of approaches as creative is, however, a process which disguises its social and historical nature. Innovation can easily be dismissed as inappropriate or artless in that it, by definition, fails to adhere to established rules for how art should be carried out. Martindale discusses how the 'field' of practitioners, and those involved in

the discourse which surround the discipline, exercise huge influence over what these rules are and what types of transformation are acceptable. In this way the internal grammar of selectivity is matched by an external – and more ambiguous – system of selection which decides whether or not a product has merit on the basis of how closely it conforms to work regarded as superior within the field.

8 The use of neural networks, multi-agent systems and connectionist architecture to mirror the non-algorithmic nature of human thought has been only partially successful and only in specific domains. Yet, because it mirrors the distributed and emergent nature of human thinking, some commentators express confidence that, at the very least, machinic creativity can shed light on the process which underpins human attempts at creative thinking and expression (see Franklin 1995; Penrose 1991).

9 Artificial intelligence and cognitive science researchers differ in their conception of the relationship between creativity and algorithmic processes acts. Tony Veale, for example, writes that:

> [C]omputational models implement limited and isolated slivers of creative thought, they do so largely in a reproducible, almost assembly-line fashion. These models show creativity to be grounded in the juxtaposition of knowledge-structures, mundane or otherwise, for which algorithmic accounts can be offered

(Veale 1995)

10 One could equally argue that the mapping, the projection, in fact the other way: that the narrative structure of the detective genre has been partially mapped onto an absurd universe and has produced faultlines. The provenance of the blend is an important consideration – since it dictates how the optimality constraints will function – but the effect is my main concern: the automatic production of disorientation and novelty which can give rise to further interesting analogies between the two worlds.

11 Fauconnier and Turner suggest five optimality constraints for conceptual integration networks. Integration; web; unpacking; topology; good reason constraint (Fauconnier and Turner 2002).

12 In teaching narrative, I have often engaged students in exactly this kind of experiment. This involves getting them to specify the elements invoved in a genre of television programme and defining the qualities of the character/person who presents the programme. They are then encouraged to select a familiar character who has qualities which are antithetical to those required for the target genre and transplant them, looking for ways in which the mapping between character and elements in the taget genre are affected by the replacement. The effect of this very simple mapping is usually surreal (a cartoon character presenting current affairs programmes) and often absurd (a piece of Lego hosting a blind date show) but usually highly 'imaginative'. The exercise provides a starting point for creating imaginative narratives which take the form of expositing how the character's source relationship with elements maps into the new genre (the cartoon character is not concerned with contemporary politics but with the criminalisation of erasers, for example).

13 The "fragile analogy" is something that needs more investigation. The optimality of the blend as outlined by Fauconnier and Turner produces easily understood and appropriate analogies. I think exploratory fiction benefits from failing to be optimal but, at the same time, being sufficient in its correspondence between target and source that some new associations can be generated. It is the point above which the analogy is more than sufficient, and below which too fragile, that needs elaboration.

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