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Gothic economies: Global capitalism and the boundaries of identity

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**GOTHIC ECONOMIES: GLOBAL CAPITALISM AND THE BOUNDARIES OF
IDENTITY**

BY

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DISSERTATION

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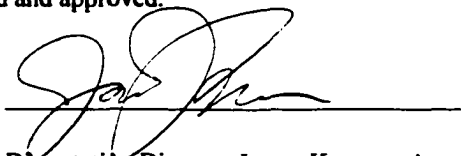
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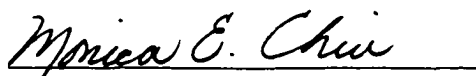
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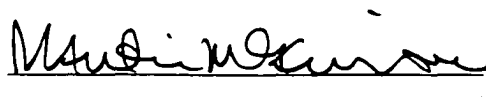
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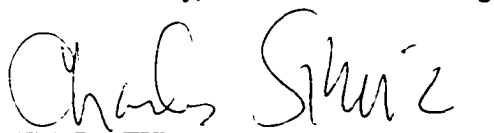
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DEDICATION

*To my parents and to my wife
for their love and support*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	vi
CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
I. FAMOUS IMPOSTERS: THE VICTORIAN METROPOLIS.....	40
II. <i>DRACULA</i> AND THE CRISIS OF SUBJECTIVITY	67
III. ELIOT AND THE GOTHIC	93
IV. VAMPIRE CULTURE: GIBSON AND THE GLOBAL AESTHETIC	118
V. BABES IN THE GARDEN: THE SUBURBAN IDYLL	143
BIBLIOGRAPHY	169

ABSTRACT

GOTHIC ECONOMIES: GLOBAL CAPITALISM AND THE BOUNDARIES OF IDENTITY

by

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University of New Hampshire, December, 2002

Since Dickens and Mary Shelley, the Gothic has provided a rubric for literary conceptualizations of modernity. Dickens' depictions of industrial London characterize it as a labyrinth of temptations and horrors, haunted by monstrosity and by personal and social demons; the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is the disfigured byproduct of science and technology. Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, perhaps the most effective "global" narrative to come out of the British *fin de siècle*, grafted elements of a pre-Enlightenment atavism onto the turn-of-the-century liberal metropolis. In our own era, the literature of the postmodern technopolis – the fiction of William Gibson, for example – has continued to borrow Gothic motifs and devices.

This dissertation is a study of literary representations of technology, capitalism and the modern metropolis – representations based in the anxieties and desires that accompany middle-class self-fashioning. The Gothic, in its original guise, depicts the corruption and ruination of the estate, often by economic and cultural forces emanating from the city and associated with capitalism and modernity; thus, to invoke the Gothic is also to reference middle class guilt and doubts about legitimacy. At the same time, Gothic allusions allow the middle class to retell its foundational myth of a struggle for liberation from feudal constraints.

Much 19th and 20th literature, both popular and highbrow, entertains an ambiguous and complicated relationship to the city – the site of economic, political and cultural forces which are both liberating and traumatizing. Though capitalism and technology drove its ascendancy, the middle class has traditionally seen the city as a place both of opportunity and danger, of allure and revulsion or horror – a set of mixed emotions which tends to suggest an insecure, unstable or divided subjectivity. This complicated relationship to the city provided much of the impetus for the quest to build a "bourgeois utopia" – a refuge located at the fringe of the city in which the equilibrium of a romanticized pre-urban order is recovered. But because the contradictions within middle class identity can never be fully resolved, the "utopia" always harbors the potential to become a haunted grove, visited by that which has been repressed or abjected in the process of creating modernity.

INTRODUCTION

GLOBAL LABYRINTHS: CITIES, TECHNOLOGIES AND THE GOTHIC

The American eighties and nineties have drawn a number of comparisons to the equivalent period a century earlier. One reason for this was overtly political. The cultural and political conservatives who took office in 1980 referenced what they saw as a purer form of economic liberalism – the "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" entrepreneurialism of Horatio Alger – as well as celebrating the ethos of competition which had been brought to an apex by nineteenth century industry and finance. Since the Victorian era in Britain was stereotyped as being age of chastity, self-regulation and prudence, it was predictable that the drive to create a more "moral" American culture would have Victorian overtones. Conservatives liked what they saw as the earlier period's virtues, its emphasis on the unity of culture, its willingness to promote national expansion and hegemony, and, perhaps most significantly, its apparent lack of contamination by "modern" social engineering. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, these concerns intersected with the post-Cold War sense that the U.S. now occupied the role of "global hegemon"; the last nation which could plausibly claim that title had been imperial Britain. The transformation of late-millennium America into the "indispensable nation" – especially coming after an apparent decline triggered by economic stagnation and military defeat – evoked comparisons with its predecessor in the role. "Why can't the United States today be more like the United Kingdom a hundred

years ago?" British historian Niall Ferguson lamented – a question echoed by American conservatives.

Furthermore, like the nineteenth century *fin de siècle*, the eighties and nineties were an era of globalization. The word began to filter into the mainstream at the same time as terms such as "cyberspace" and "virtual reality," and for futurists such as Peter Drucker, this was hardly a coincidence. The transformations of labor and culture which information technology was supposed to engender were, many argued, identical to those which a global New World Order would usher in. But globalization also was not an entirely new concept; the idea of an increasingly networked, interconnected and business-driven world, one in which national boundaries would become increasingly supplanted, was in vogue around the turn of the previous century. The discussion of how computer technology would transform society echoed, sometimes consciously, those which accompanied turn-of-the-century innovations in communications and transportation, most importantly railroads. This was in part because both involved the idea of "networks," of disarranged temporal and spatial laws, of distances conquered, and of the potential both for radically increased decentralization as well as for nightmares of global control.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the affinities, as well as the differences, between these two eras of globalization, but particularly with an eye to the intersection between technology, urbanism, money and sex. My project is not so much interested in showing the ways these concerns link the two eras, as it is with showing how both responded, in certain ways similarly and in other ways differently, to the fantasies and nightmares triggered by modern liberal capitalism and its associated instruments and technologies – that is, to the global Gothic.

By this I mean the projection, onto a global economy, of the Gothic's preoccupation with lost or diffused symbolic authority and with the corruption of the estate by forces emanating from the modern city. The Gothic is also traditionally concerned with the uncanny, that is, with the experience of strangeness, confusion and anxiety which, as Terry Castle has suggested, represents a sort of toxic byproduct of the Enlightenment's rationalist imperative. (Castle, 15). Recently Louis Sass, drawing on Foucault, has drawn parallels between these uncanny states and the schizoid visions of de Chirico, whose paintings invest urban structures – train stations, bridges, plazas – with a sense of foreboding. Likewise, fictional works such as *Dracula* and Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* depict middle-class characters, products of political liberalism and economic mobility, in the throes of morbid or phantasmagoric states that seem to mark the limits of their subjective integrity; in these stories the participant is often represented as intellectually or morally opposed to an experience which he or she nevertheless feels reluctant to refuse.

I read these uncanny states with reference to Kristevan abjection; that is, with the blending of horror and desire which accompanies boundary problems – the panic of the insecure border, the fascination of the forbidden crossing. But I also see them, in late nineteenth century global discourses and often in their late twentieth century equivalents, as being projected onto the technologies, economic relations, and political structures of modernity. In the geopolitical arena, the loss of symbolic authority becomes translated into fear of lost hegemony -- the problem facing Britain in the latter three decades of the nineteenth century. In the psychosexual arena, the apparent enervation or feminization of masculinity was at stake. Late 19th century neurological and psychiatric discourses,

meanwhile, constructed neurosis as the aftereffect of contact with the abject, the psychosomatic record of some unsavory trip across the never quite settled boundary between healthy and morbid, normal and perverse, moral and bestial. Meanwhile, as Laura Otis has argued, germ theory provided a metaphor for articulating fears about permeable national borders and the infection of the body politic by bacteria-like "invisible enemies." The problem of permeable borders highlighted the impasse between the idea of a global economy and the residues of English national identity based in a (romanticized) medieval agrarian order, thus extending the city-estate conflict into the international arena.

While the Gothic implicates the city in the murder or banishment of the symbolic father, the metropolis is also "Gothic" in another sense – its division into economic and social sectors, as well as the industrial city's concentration around structures representing financial or political power, recalls the labyrinths in a novel by Radcliffe or Walpole. The protean quality of liberal political economies gives birth to fictional monsters who slip insidiously in and out of categories of identity, and it also necessitates a preoccupation with boundaries, their transgression, contestation and reimposition.

During the 19th century urbanism and globalism were clearly interrelated, to the point that they could be seen as almost interchangeable. The institutions which resided in the city center – the hubs of information, the stock, bond and commodity markets – were the instruments of the world economy. But the relationship of the bourgeoisie to urban, commercial and international structures remained permeated by ambivalence. In fact, though transportation and information technologies – in a nutshell, the streetcar and the typewriter -- had formed the modern city, their ultimate effect was to aid the middle class

in its flight out of the city towards a reconstructed estate – a motion driven by bourgeois self-fashioning. As I will argue in the final chapter of the dissertation, the paradoxical end-product of globalism is suburbia, technologically and economically linked to global capitalism, yet at the same time sealed off.

When Oscar Wilde was imprisoned in 1895, his fate provided a demonstration of what can happen when cultural fears become, or are perceived as becoming, embodied by a particular person. Wilde was associated with urbanism, with literary aestheticism and with the blurring of moral distinctions. His detractors saw him as an opportunistic careerist whose ascendancy proved that secular culture was devolving; his persona exuded a sophistication which too easily suggested lack of rigor. Wilde became a public “whipping boy” for late Victorian culture at a time when globalization was exacerbating inherent tensions between England’s medieval and modern, religious and secular, imperial and bourgeois identities. Lack of rigor was bound to be an issue in imperial Britain at a time when its global hegemony was being challenged; the push to label, and criminalize homosexuality was not unrelated to fears that the nation was losing its reproductive edge. Wilde’s aphorisms seemed directly targeted at the “secular morality” with which the Victorians attempted to compensate for the decline of theology, and which, elsewhere, Nietzsche was scorning as hypocritical and doomed. Wilde, in short, represented something of an all-around threat to the cultural equilibrium. And that equilibrium was necessarily an uneasy one, since it attempted to reconcile, or at least gloss over, some basic contradictions.

Britain owed its wealth and prestige to industrial-age technology, but the forces which had made it a world power also undermined its traditional identity as a rural nation still highly influenced by the social ordering and even the institutions of feudalism. A succession of intellectuals, many with clerical affiliations or backgrounds, derided "Mammon worship" and by implication the industrial and commercial engines which fueled British dominance. The city, meanwhile, was seen as the destroyer of the estate, in which everyone had their place – socially, geographically and figuratively. Money, the city, and technology were related and to some degree interchangeable; the fact that they were related suggested the idea of a "nexus", in turn giving birth to cultural paranoia and its sagas either of taming and conquering, or coming under the oppression of, networks of diffused power.

Because networks are labyrinthine, mysterious and characterized by full or partial concealments, the Gothic genre – which critics have argued developed in the late eighteenth century as a response to the perceived displacement of the estate by the city – became a mode of choice for representing modern urbanism, along with its associated technologies, monetary instruments and media. Dickens, for instance, turned the city into a kind of vampire: he saw the city as "a wasteland, a system of physical debris and human dereliction (Lehan,41). Literary projections of the city tended to emphasize its filth and squalor, depicting it as a tainted, disease-ridden space, even though Victorian London was, paradoxically, becoming cleaner rather than dirtier; for example, public works projects had cleared the excrement-filled streets. People were more likely to sicken, become alcoholic, give birth to illegitimate children, go insane, or commit suicide in rural areas, rather than in the city, yet the dominant representation of London in 19th century is

that of a frightening, dangerous and lonely place, not to mention a contaminated one. In other words, dystopic representations of the metropolis often reflected a "feeling about the city" more than they did an empirically verifiable reality. They constructed the city as a site of abjection, a physical, spatial, and visual representation for intense feelings of anomie and revulsion.

Feelings of revulsion also figured in the controversy over Darwinism. Evolution was not guilty of single-handedly destabilizing religion -- geology had already thrown into question the literal accuracy of Biblical timelines; biblical scholarship gave stunning demonstrations of the scientific method's ability to demystify sacred texts, and the bleak view of existence as a "darkling plain" was already implicit in Malthus. Victorians who accepted developments in physics as intriguing found evolution unsettling. The intellectual peril posed by evolutionary theory was not the sole reason why it became a flash point: its power to provoke also derived from the implied image of a man-ape coupling. Darwinism could be, and was, seen as lewd. The emotion which it triggered was the horror of a violated taboo -- a horror reflected, for example, in the question Wilberforce was said to have asked Huxley (was it through his mother or father that he claimed descent from an ape?) and the latter's clever reply. That exchange was probably apocryphal, but the popularity of the story itself suggests at the emotional morass which the intellectual debate barely concealed. The view of nature which Darwin offered was not only cheerfully amoral and brutal, but also messy, multiplicitous, teeming. There was something monstrous about it.

While Britain had a distinguished tradition of critics of urbanism, commerce, and technology, by the *fin de siecle* much of the debate had shifted to continental Europe, and most importantly to France. One landmark attempt to theorize the ills of the city was provided by Emile Durkheim, a founder of the discipline of sociology. In 1897 (coincidentally, the year in which Bram Stoker's *Dracula* appeared) Durkheim published *Suicide*, a tour-de-force in the application of rigorous sociological method to problems of human life and behavior, and also an influential conceptualization of the city as a site of neurosis, psychopathology and violence. Durkheim provides three categories of suicidal behavior: egoistic, anomic, and altruistic. The first two categories, as Durkheim describes them, clearly reflect urban, capitalist, and secular conditions, most importantly the supplanting of "organic" social ties with the utilitarian ones of business and commerce. The Protestant church is also implicated, because of its bleak individualism; the guilt-ridden Lutheran or Calvinist, alone before his unknowable and usually angry God, is more likely to self-destruct than the more social and amiable Catholics, with their ritualistic, sublimatory outlets for abject emotions. England occupies a special place in Durkheim's scheme, because its governing faith, Anglicanism, is closer to Catholicism than any other Protestant church; its clergy is organized in a hierarchy, for example, and "shows an inner unity incompatible with a pronounced religious individualism." (Durkheim, 161). Plus, nineteenth century England had an unusually high number of clergymen, and clerical influence in daily life remained strong. Thus, even though Britain was "the classic land of individual freedom," its suicide rates were lower, although (we can surmise), the steady influence of the Evangelical movement was introducing ever-stronger doses of anomie into the English soul.

Durkheim bases his third category, altruistic suicide, on what was already a commonplace distinction between the civilized (in both the sense of advancement and of urbanism) and the primitive, one which was perhaps most succinctly formulated by Tonnies, who distinguished between the norm-driven and organic *Gemeinschaft* and the more functional ties of the *Gesellschaft*. People in "lower" societies, Durkheim proposes, are more likely to kill themselves for the welfare of the group as a whole. This kind of suicide, in Durkheim's analysis, also differs markedly from the other categories in terms of its emotional quality; as opposed to the languor and morbidity that characterizes urban despair, altruists kill themselves energetically, enthusiastically or joyfully on behalf of the group or the greater cause.

Durkheim's study, like a number of other *fin-de-siecle* works addressing social ills, was in part a response to what seemed to be a dramatic rise in suicide rates in France during the Third Republic, and thus it was part of a more general project of diagnosing cultural pathology. The implication was clear: European societies were moving too far in the direction of liberalism, cosmopolitanism, urbanism, and individualism, and the result was a collective mental breakdown. Like his contemporaries, most famously Max Nordau, Durkheim invokes the spectre of that characteristically hypercivilized, oversensitive urban individual, the neurasthenic:

Due to [the] extreme sensitivity of his nervous system, his ideas and feelings are always in unstable equilibrium. Because his slightest impressions have an abnormal force, his mental organization is utterly upset at every instant, and under the hammer of these uninterrupted shocks

cannot become definitely established. It is always in the process of becoming. For it to become stable past experiences would have to have lasting effects, where as they are constantly being destroyed and swept away by abruptly intervening upheavals... (Durkheim, 60).

The neurasthenic, in this diagnosis, is the logical product of a fragmented, egocentric, discontinuous modernity; he lacks the harmoniousness which, Durkheim insists, can only be established by "time and custom," as well as the mental and moral constitution which are established by social norms. Because he is constantly "taken by surprise" by circumstances, the neurasthenic has to invent new forms of conduct, but his improvised contrivances never quite suffice. This model of neurosis makes the neurotic the very embodiment of the city itself, a kind of human screen on which the characteristic forces of modernity register their markings. Durkheim's neurotic is a perceiver of "impressions" rather than the possessor of a coherent, stable angle of vision. And, though couched in a quasi-medical discourse which shows the influence of Charcot, the source for this idea of the neurotic is more literary than medical; it hearkens back to the Baudelairean flaneur, that high-strung basket of nerves whose broken field of vision is both a source of pain and proof of his contemporaneity.

Durkheim's answer to the modern problem lay in the socialist transformation of labor – for him, the rational and progressive option. This was not, however, the only possible answer suggested by the diagnosis of urbanism as alienating, artificial and neurotic. Durkheim's contemporary Max Nordau, for instance, saw the modern psyche in similar terms, but his recommendation was to promote athletics and fitness, as well as

systematic repression of "morbid" intellectuality (and sexuality). If Durkheim was the father of sociology, a rational discourse, others would reject this avenue in favor of reclaiming the non-rational. Yet although Nordau's screed, in retrospect, appears the opposite of a "scientific" approach, in fact *Degeneration* was couched in scientific vocabulary and scrupulously imitated the empirical precision associated with science. (Micale, 206) The term "degeneration" itself had a nice evolutionary-biological ring to it. Generally speaking, what linked many of the critiques of modernity during the *fin de siecle*, whether "progressive" or "reactionary," was a shared interest in measurement, empiricism, and the creation of a scientific or quasi-scientific methodology; this distinguishes late nineteenth century critics from, for example, earlier figures such as Arnold or Ruskin, whose approach was more humanistic. Yet these "scientific" projects remained – at times almost transparently – driven by the wish to make results confirm national, religious or cultural biases, or to support established norms.

English interest in "degeneration," for example, became ratcheted up following the Boer War; as Victorians analysed the national shortcomings that led to this fiasco, they focused on the physical and mental decline of working class men. French interest in mental health was also partly propelled by military defeat, in this case during the Franco-Prussian war. (A direct line exists between these late 19th century projects and the sinister, anti-Semitic "inquiries" into national degeneration initiated by the Petain regime during World War II). In an era during which not only Britain, but a succession of emerging rivals, competed for geopolitical mastery in a "globalized" environment, the fear of decline, of reproductive disadvantage, or of loss of rigor became operative. Such deficiencies threatened national power and rendered the state, and more generally

"civilization", vulnerable to attack. The need for defense not only legitimized rigor-inducing social and cultural policy, but tended to defuse ethical concerns which might be raised by militarism and colonialism (Arata, 621-45)

Perhaps most importantly, the emphasis which these theories placed on categorization – of mental disorders, sexual perversions, criminal behaviors, and so on – seemed to offer some hope that boundaries could, after all, be reliably demarcated. The problem of boundaries almost automatically came hand in hand with the increasing political, economic and moral complexity provided by modern urbanism, and arguably was – and remains – the point at which the political and the psychological are most immutably joined. Nordau's *Degeneration* and, for that matter, the poetry of T.S. Eliot played off of the equation between sickness of the physical body and sickness of the social or political body, both subject to loss of integrity and contamination. The translation of ideological or moral uncertainty into mental chaos or bodily affliction was hardly a uniquely Victorian phenomenon, but some have argued that the Victorians made the connections with more ease and less skepticism – in other words, they found it "easy to 'somaticize' their anxieties, that is, to express emotional distress through psychogenic physical symptom formation." (Micale, 170) For some theorists, intense experiences of abjection, revulsion and mixed horror and fascination accompany "the breaking down of a world that has erased its boundaries." (Kristeva, 9) and an additional feature of projects such as Krafft-Ebing's was that they succeeded in creating a kind of freak-show of abject and other fascinatingly horrible specimens – yet the abjected feelings were also those of the viewer, projected away from the self in a mirroring way which bears comparison to the theater.

Urban life was at once crowded, stratified, and alienated. Victorians found public lighting, for example, creepy because it illuminated crowds of strangers; the world of the estate, by contrast, was one of familiar ties and known identities. Again, Dickens had explored this contrast well before the *fin de siècle*; in the world Pip leaves, everyone – and their reputation – is known; it is hard for a fugitive to find a hiding place. In London, by contrast, everyone is in some sense a fugitive – a point brought home by Pip's eventual destiny (fleeing with Magwitch; being jailed on account of unpaid debts). One promise that Lombroso's criminological procedures held out was that of identification and classification: facial and bodily features, if physiognomy could reveal character and behavior, the terrors of the modern city became a little less unpredictable.

The bourgeoisie's attitude towards urban reality was characteristically ambiguous; the middle class was hardly separable from the city and its economic forces, but at the same time its members tended to want to distance themselves from what they saw as the city's brutish or unsavory aspects; this was especially true among affluent strata which pushed against the dividing line separating bourgeoisie from aristocracy. As Robert Fishman notes, the need for an intermediary or "buffer" zone drove the creation of suburbia, the bourgeois utopia, the symbolism of which frequently echoed the aspiration to claim or at least imitate the life of the estate. Architecturally, the fixation on boundary demarcation was expressed by gating and firm property divisions.

For the middle class in particular, boundary-setting was a pressing concern because bourgeois identity was far from secure, for at least two reasons. The definition of "middle class" was inevitably amorphous; new entrants churned up from below, and at both the lower and upper limits the distinctions tended to blur. It was possible not only to

rise but to plunge; a number of Victorian tales, from Stevenson to Doyle, concern men who are on their way down. Furthermore, the bourgeoisie obviously risked being implicated in the charges that were continually brought against modernity, money, and the city. If modern society was immoral, then members of the middle class could hardly avoid the implication that they, too, were immoral. And if boundary erasures generated Kristevan abjection, from the bourgeois standpoint that abjection could be self-reflexive. For Marxist critics, such as Franco Moretti, much of 19th century bourgeois culture is an attempt to defuse or channel self-loathing, preferably through the construction of validating mythologies. One of these, of course, was the myth of the moral middle class – driven by a set of ideals and ethical imperatives and not by, on the one hand, mere gain nor maintenance of privilege. Many Victorian works turn on the question of where to draw the line between moral aspirations and immoral opportunism; their plot conflicts often center on a transgression which has caused the protagonist to step too closely near, or over, that line. Figures such as Dorian Gray, Jekyll, and Jonathan Harker all come to mind: in all these cases, transgression is given meaning by the characters' middle class identities. To a degree, for an aristocrat the question of "good" or "evil" is subjugated to the legitimized right to exercise power; there are cruel aristocrats as well as amiable ones, but the aristocratic identity in itself is not contingent on the moral code. The robber baron is still a baron.

For Moretti, the popularity of Gothic architecture in 19th century Britain developed out of "the great ideological lie of Victorian capitalism, a capitalism which is ashamed of itself and which hides factories and stations beneath cumbrous Gothic superstructures: which prolongs and extols aristocratic models of life; which exalts the

holiness of the family even as the latter begins secretly to break up." (Moretti, 94). This "shame" has many dimensions, not least of which was the degree to which the middle class coveted the legitimacy of the estate. Nor should it be overlooked that conservative elements within Britain also perceived historical continuity as a way of containing bourgeois political and economic ascendancy. Gothic architectural styles tended to be used for structures associated with the traditional vested interests – churches, universities, and the state. Pugin, who designed the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Palace, unabashedly advocated a full-scale return to the agrarian, feudal times of 1450, and hoped that the Perpendicular Gothic would help persuade the Victorian public to embark on this program. In the neo-medieval state envisaged by Pugin, a Catholic, the urban middle classes would not disappear, but they would "know their place." The Gothic provided emblems of continuing imperial authority in a time of liberalization, as though to drive home the fact that monarchical power – and historical English "identity" – still had the last word. They were part of a deliberately formulated attempt at a "national style," which, imposed from above, reminded the expansive commercial classes that they still had to answer to Queen, God, and England. And they offered an enticing fiction of a better-regulated, better-structured, more stable society in which "the poor respected the rich, the rich protected the poor, and all was governed in accordance with the laws of God" and the monarchy. From the perspective of liberalism, meanwhile, England's Gothic identity both created and solved problems, because liberalism rests on a sort of foundational myth of emancipatory rebellion against feudal and clerical structures. As Alison Milbank suggests, the Gothic in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* can be read as an attempt to sift the desirable from the undesirable elements in a medieval past which was both

crucial to, and problematic for, English identity. (Milbank, 29-45). We can, of course, read all this as a "great ideological lie," but we can also look at it more neutrally, as a Victorian strategy designed to maintain equilibrium. The effort to balance centripetal against centrifugal forces was a defining feature of Victorian Britain, but as the twentieth century dawned, this balance would prove more difficult to sustain.

In 2002, the railroad corporation Union Pacific began running a television commercial that stressed the relationship between industrial-age networks, such as railroads, and their later electronic descendants. "You could say we've been online all along," the commercial concluded, following a three-minute reminder of the trade opportunities which railroads afforded. The ad was broadcast at a time when economic and other turmoil – a stock market downturn, the collapse of internet and telecom bubbles, and terrorist attacks on Washington and New York – had shifted public focus away from the novelty of the information age towards the perennial problems of liberalization: its inherent volatility and its conflict with ethical norms. In the wake of accounting scandals that threatened to undermine liberalism's basic tenets, discussion shifted towards a topic Mina Harker would have found familiar: the good and bad uses of money.

Some readers who had followed nineties neoliberalism at its most optimistic might have already experienced a sense of *déjà vu*: writers such as Thomas Friedman and Francis Fukayama had echoed, at least in part, Roger Angell's 1909 belief that intertwined business interests led to a condition in which war was suicidal, hence no

longer conceivable. Fukayama celebrated the “long-term progressive evolution of human political institutions in the direction of liberal democracy,” while Friedman proposed his “Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention,” which claimed, inaccurately, that no two countries with McDonalds franchises had gone to war. 1909 and 1999 were both decades in which new technologies had fueled a drive towards transnational commerce; trade barriers were not, as some have claimed, lower in Angell's time than in ours, but they were nevertheless low. In both eras, the impetus towards globalization ran into conflicts with the idea of national identity; both, also, saw the rise of movements that regarded technology and liberalization as suspicious.

While liberal capitalism could be seen in utopian terms as ushering in a “global shopping mall” in which ethnic and religious enmities would be forgotten, it could also be seen, dystopically, as a Darwinian nightmare of predation and victimhood. Historian and social commentator William Leach, for example, portrayed transnational corporatism as an insatiable, accumulative and devouring force which uses technologies – communication networks, transportation infrastructure – to destroy restraints on its expansion. Leach depicts a “dizzying profusion of highways, gateways, and vehicles” that at once manufactures global economic interdependence while uprooting localities, creating a drifting workforce of part-timers, temporaries and undocumented migrants, all ruled over by a new breed of “floating executive.” Filmmaker Roger Moore, director of *Roger and Me*, was among those who articulated the liberal-left case against the “new economy,” advocating regulation as a counterbalance to capitalist excess. The liberal-right, on the other hand, saw the “virtues”, defined in self-consciously Victorian terms, as the necessary counterbalance. Both left and right were interested in maintaining what

they regarded as the benefits of liberalization – for the right, “wealth creation”; for the left, social and cultural freedoms – while avoiding anarchy. Both mourned for, and often sentimentalized, a lost equipoise, an integrity which has been destroyed by shifting points of moral reference.

Liberalism, technology and globalism all have attributes which can make them seem unnatural, and a recurring theme that accompanies that of technological and social progress has been that of violation or wrongdoing. This sense of violation drives much of popular culture's fixation with catastrophic or horrific violence, often depicted as a punishment brought on itself by a degenerate society. Violence in film and literature also concretizes, physicalizes and renders immediate ("up close and personal," to use one catch phrase of the nineties), forces which are widely seen as part of the dynamic of capitalism. The closest equivalent to a nineteenth century literary figure in millennial America was arguably Stephen King, a horror writer whose most ambitious work was a three-part trilogy that presented modern-day America as a scene of Biblical apocalypse. In a number of movies and novels of the eighties and nineties, the virtues of competition which Ronald Reagan was proclaiming ("the magic of the marketplace") become transmuted into bodily violence, and the figure of the entrepreneur or capitalist adventurer finds his alter ego in that of the sexual predator, rapist or serial killer.

For Brett Easton Ellis' psycho, Patrick Bateman, murder is a kind of appendage to stockbroking and CD collecting; the novel juxtaposes passages of luridly explicit violence with analyses of Huey Lewis songs, hinting that the zeitgeist of the eighties governs both. When he's not enjoying his preferred outlets, Bateman's taunting the homeless, burning hundred-dollar bills in front of them. Ellis was widely condemned for

his novel, in part because readers found it difficult to pigeonhole his intentions; was *American Psycho* a satire, or simply a grotesque indulgence? They had an easier time digesting Thomas Harris' *Silence of the Lambs*, which concerns a cannibalistic psychiatrist, though the two novels share related themes. Like Ellis, Harris implies that a monster such as Lecter is a product of culture's narcissism and excess; the psychopathic doctor takes such quintessential late-millennium values as self-actualization and impulse-gratification to their logical extremes. While Lecter is the novel's presiding evil genius, the plot centers on crimes committed by a dumber, degraded psychotic who seizes and imprisons young women in order to remove their flesh. Ellis' novel provoked controversy, in part because it ignored distancing tactics that would normally allow readers to observe violence at a safe remove; in *Psycho*, the villain is also the protagonist, and the tone is chilly and satirical. At least as interesting as the degree to which Ellis's novel and protagonist aroused horror is the way *Silence of the Lambs* deflects it. The revulsion that we would expect to be associated with a story about serial murder becomes channeled onto a degraded, abject character – the transvestite – while at the same time the reader's fascination and even admiration become directed towards the psychopathic doctor, Hannibal Lecter. Lecter, who is an erudite, highly intelligent member of the professional class, intimidates and gains power over the novel's lower-class heroine, the inexperienced police officer Clarice Starling, and ultimately over the reader as well. He becomes a kind of anti-hero, even an attractive figure, not least because his victims are portrayed as morons, opportunists or self-seekers who bring their grotesque fates upon themselves. Within the terms that Americans often used in order to make distinctions, Lecter comes out ahead, a winner rather than a loser. The reader's ability to be horrified

by Lecter's actions is short-circuited by ideology; we have trouble feeling revolted by an apparent success.

If novels such as King's, Ellis's and Harris's conjured up plausible visions of depravity, the director Ridley Scott set about transferring the idea of a hostile nature inhabited by voraciously self-gratifying predators onto an extrapolated future. In *Alien* (1979) and its successors, an insect-like monster inflicts punishment on a futuristic extension of eighties America, one in which a corporate oligarchy has merged with the military machine to produce a imperial superpower bent on intergalactic conquest and exploitation. The graft and dishonesty which Ripley's superiors habitually demonstrate leads directly to episodes of horrific suffering which are then covered up. Scott's future is given added plausibility by the way it refers back to the American past: Ripley and her cohorts are latter-day versions of those who colonized the American landscape, engaged in take-no-prisoners warfare with enemies who must be demonized in order to be eradicated.

The bleak future envisaged by Scott contrasts with the more optimistic one presented by TV's *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Though updated to take into account such information age issues as cyborgs and virtual reality, the show remained mostly faithful to the rationalist vision of its sixties-era predecessor. In Gene Roddenberry's universe, most problems can be solved through dialogue, hostility gives way to understanding, international (and intergalactic) agencies function as a benign advancement over the nation-state, the military is used for purposes of maintaining

stability and harmony. rather than for conquest, and is in any case constrained by a “prime directive.”

Roddenberry offers an imagined universe in which the Enlightenment tenets underlying modern-day liberalism are conscientiously, at times dogmatically, applied, and it unapologetically endorses the idea of progress. It not only embraces the gospel of individualism, but optimistically trusts that even the most illiberal beings – in this case, a collective known as the Borg – can become humanized and individualized. No monster that appears in *Star Trek* remains monstrous for long; over its course, the show has introduced and humanized a succession of enemies. Self-consciously allegorical, *Star Trek* did not balk at alluding to real-time political problems such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Political implications could be read into *Alien*, but the politics were of a decidedly edgier variety. Scott’s paranoid version of the future mined the same energies that drove suspicion of governments, big business and internationalism. The films present an alien that can neither be understood, negotiated with, or tamed; presents the new world order, or a future version of it, as incompetent and corrupt; enshrines predation rather than coexistence as the law of the universe; and suggests that the more things progress, the more they stay the same. Finally, the *Aliens* tetralogy (Scott directed only the first installment) is deeply invested in ideas of sin and punishment. The intrusion of monstrous aliens comes as a kind of collective punishment for the sins of the Corporation. And death and suffering are typically meted out by the aliens to individuals who are either guilty of human error, or of some wayward desire. A kind of cosmic Darwinism becomes combined, in Scott’s films, with the idea of an essential depravity

within humans, nature, and by extension the universe. If *Star Trek* is rationalist and ameliorist, the *Aliens* movies are evangelical. Nothing short of a purging ritual can provide closure to the sequence of horrors inaugurated when Ripley and the crew of the "United States Commercial Starship Nostromo" dock at the wrong intergalactic petroleum refinery.

Late twentieth century American capitalism, like British industrial capitalism during the nineteenth century, remained strongly undergirded by evangelism, which provided the "Protestant mentality" which Durkheim saw as an (unattractive, in his view) feature of modern life. At its fringes, it also bred paranoid discourses which attempted to recover the purity of a (mythical) liberalism by cleansing it of corrupt elements – entrenched governmental structures, foreign "elements," and decadent cosmopolitanism. While they usually placed themselves in opposition to what they perceived as "decadent" popular culture, they also were informed by and belonged to it, just as the militia groups, with their mimicry of procedures and drills, borrowed from the same "government-defense complex" which they supposedly rebelled against. An example of the intermarriage between popular culture and populist paranoia came about when the Oklahoma City bomber, Timothy McVeigh, attempted to explain his motivations by citing George Lucas' "Star Wars." In McVeigh's view of things, he was the real-life equivalent of a Han Solo, a plucky outsider fighting to loosen the grip of an oppressive government apparatus that used technology to maintain control. McVeigh apparently expected that bombing the Oklahoma federal center would spark a chain reaction, causing the whole "system" to disintegrate (much as the Death Star explodes after Luke Skywalker, using the "Force," locates its weak point), or fueling a national uprising.

Neither happened. Militia movements, in turn, tended to lose steam when they proved unable to locate and “take out” the locus of state power.

The fringe discourses, on both the left and right, that depicted a sinister international force using technology to oppress authentic, common folk reiterated the paranoia that had accompanied the burgeoning urban sprawl during the previous century. The city had been described as a parasitical organism that sucked the countryside dry; nineteenth century anti-urban and anti-technological movements often invoked localism and authentic Englishness as the counterpoint to what they saw as an insidious cosmopolitanism. On the American right, the “government” – located in urban centers and surrounded, allegedly, with cells of bureaucrats as well as parasitical “welfare dependents” – was depicted as the enemy to be seized and tamed by “peasants with pitchforks.” The left, meanwhile, was more forgiving of government, instead vilifying the other powerful inhabitant of the modern city: the global corporation. Both left and right were, generally speaking, preoccupied with identifying and naming the sites where (in their view) oppressive power was concentrated. Yet these sites were not so easy to identify. One of the characteristics of late twentieth century globalism was its increasingly diffused and decentralized nature.

One way in which the globalism of the 1990s differed from that of the previous century was in the relative decline of the city. The structure which corresponded to the “centrifugal” forces of the new economy was the exurb or technoburb – sprawls that depended on technology (the car, the telephone, and, increasingly, the computer) in order to maintain connectivity. In late twentieth century America, the suburb was no longer

simply a refuge from the city; it was supplanting the city. In the Victorian era the centralized city had been widely regarded as a parasite which drained rural communities; a hundred years later, those who disdained suburbia depicted it as a parasitical entity which fed off of city centers. The city, once seen as a kind of vampire, was now being “vamped” by the New Economy.

In fact, as Robert Fishman suggests, the rise of the exurb grew out of the ambivalence Victorians – and specifically bourgeois Victorians – felt both towards the city and by extension towards themselves. The city was the urban structure which expressed the dynamics of capitalism, which enriched the bourgeoisie; the bourgeoisie in turn used its affluence to create refuges for itself that mimicked the “estate” which the city had killed off. 18th and 19th century British suburbia had not only served to keep its bourgeois inhabitants at a distance from material unpleasanties (crime, poverty), but also provided a site for the construction of bourgeois idylls. In their décor, architecture and nomenclature, late 20th century American suburbs have also tended to indulge nostalgia for the estate – a nostalgia which expresses the bourgeoisie’s perennially unfulfilled desire for aristocracy and its implied legitimacy.

As the city became supplanted, it too transformed into an object of nostalgia. Culture still liked to imagine itself living in the big city with its lures and dangers; when audiences watched sitcoms to find out “how we live now,” those sitcoms as often as not depicted youthful flaneurs living in easy poverty in mid-town Manhattan. Yet this continued use of the city tended to reveal the extent to which urbanism had become more virtual than real. Only a fraction among the audiences which watched shows depicted in the city were likely to actually live in the city, which was increasingly divided between

the abnormally wealthy and the chronically poor. Middle-class America now overwhelmingly inhabited the exurb rather than the metropolis, while within the metropolis, dolled-up shopping districts provided a simulation of urban bohemianism. The “real city,” on the other hand, was arguably the inner city, which few from outside wanted to visit. And while proponents of the “live city” advocated local ownership, grassroots politics, and spontaneity, in practice these attributes were systematically repressed, as public entities, often in collaboration with private interests, used eminent domain to shut down open-air markets or drive out undesirable tenants. Meanwhile, the nineties battle over the city, which pitted residents of the “authentic city” – the drug culture’s Haight-Ashbury or bohemian Greenwich Village – against intruders associated with the new corporatism and the dot.com economy – paralleled the broader ideological warfare over globalization.

Nineteenth century conceptions of the metropolis, as much as they stressed its disorienting capacity, also thought of it as a organism with a center – a seat of government, a financial and business sector. But by the end of the 20th century, this conception of the metropolis had been more or less supplanted by the sprawl, exemplified – for critics such as Jameson and Baudrillard – by Los Angeles, “the labyrinth with no center.” The transition from the city to the sprawl, moreover, was seen as embodiment of an ideological transformation from modernism to postmodernism; Jameson’s influential telling of this narrative sees modernism as harboring a belief in order and transcendental meaning, for which the fragmented subject searches for within the wasteland; postmodernism, by contrast, flattens out all hierarchies and short-circuits attempts at meaning-production.

Jameson and Baudrillard have tended to see the postmodern sprawl as a site of anxiety. While turn of the century observers such as Durkheim regarded the city as the epitome of impersonal functionality, capable of fostering morbidity, psychosis, and suicide, their postmodern successors elegize the city as a site which provides for human needs. It is the network, the city's successor, which they see as unhealthy; its infinite loops generate paranoia and initiate a process of endless decoding that culminates in psychic collapse. The stories and novels of William Gibson visualize a futuristic society in which this situation has been brought almost to its ultimate extreme – one in which moral distinctions have been so totally flattened out that it is no longer possible to evaluate the sprawl as either a utopia or a dystopia; there is no position from which such an evaluation can be made. His protagonists – the 'console cowboy' Case (a "head case" as well as in the detective-novel sense), and his companion, the psychopathic female assassin Molly Millions – are damaged goods, lowlifes whose psyches have been shaped by physical, psychological or sexual trauma, and whose identities are inseparable from their functions within the network. They entertain periodic aches for transcendence, but transcendence itself is an 'experience' accessible either through computer software or chemical substances.

In 1994, Gibson produced "Agrippa," the disappearing book which was supposed to self-destruct as it was being read; etchings that came with it mutated when exposed to light. A virus contained on the disk corrupted the text as it scrolled by. Collectors who simply put the book away without opening it were denied reading the story, whereas those who opened the book triggered the virus and saw their investment depreciate. (In actuality, the story did not "disappear." Within days, hackers had figured out how to

break the encryption code, and the text was being internationally circulated on electronic bulletin boards.) "Agrippa" turned out to be an elegy for Gibson's father, and was, understandably, interpreted by critics as a more general elegy for the "dead father" of the symbolic order. (Jonas, 236-38; Schwenger, 239-45). The excitement about the possibilities of cybernetics took a variety of forms, but the most persistent one was that of an escape from the law of the father, coupled with the (not quite fully dead and buried) father's attempts to reimpose authority. In the 1990s you could hang out in Maxis Corporation's Sim City, the city you don't have to live in; you could work for virtual corporations, declare loyalty to a virtual nation; the most profitable businesses on the web provided virtual sex, the sex that wouldn't kill you or destroy your marriage.

Cyberspace fostered utopian and other transformative discourses, which, at their most euphoric, promised a wholesale revision of what it meant to be human. Yet the transformations it enacted can be seen not so much as a radical break from the past as the continuation of trends which earlier technologies – trains, telephones, the automobile, William Leach's labyrinth of intertwining highways and roadways – had effected. The American 1990s shared with the Victorian *fin-de-siecle* a pervasive sense of temporal and spatial dislocation, both exciting and fearful, brought on by the creation of networks. And the idea of vast, interlinked networks spreading across and connecting the globe tended to give rise, in both eras, to fantasies of control – of the possibility (or nightmare) of conquering and taking hold of the network.

Simultaneous with the fantasized paradise of cybernetic life was the fantasized nightmare. Millenarian panic found a suitably cybernetic slant when it became widely feared that a programming bug could instantaneously shut down the global informational

infrastructure; the panic fueled apocalyptic fantasies, including a short-lived genre of articles, books and videotapes which taught survival tactics useful for surviving an information catastrophe. As usual, the panic was in part driven by yearning – yearning for a situation in which “authentic” skills, such as hunting and shelter-building, would once again enjoy their rightful significance. The sudden global shutdown is a recurring plot in American culture, from comic books to Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged*; the fact that technological society as a whole resembles a complex, sophisticated machine for the production and distribution of goods (Kranzberg, 406) perennially suggests the possibility either that the machine could break down, or that somebody – some authority, institution, or cabal – has control over it and could work its levers.

Control was also at stake in another internet-age metafiction, that of Microsoft as vampire. The tale begins with Microsoft’s trickery in persuading behind-the-curve IBM execs to give away rights to the all-important disk operating system, and escalates into a saga of insinuation, predation and monopoly extending beyond commerce into the social fabric. As the network’s “resident demon,” Microsoft came to personify the frightening possibility that a vast, decentralized network could be seized and controlled. The firm was rumored to collect private information through concealed scripts carefully embedded in Windows: it was believed to be tracking people’s e-mail, recording their online activities through hidden “cookies,” and causing software – that made by competitors – to crash or not run properly. With his almost comically bland appearance and style of dress, company founder Bill Gates fit the description of the utilitarian tycoon-autocrat who subjugates and enslaves for the sake of endless acquisition. At the same time as Microsoft was being demonized, an unforeseen political phenomenon of the nineties – the

globalization movement – was similarly demonizing another group of vampires: the economists and technocrats of the IMF and World Bank, the international agencies most closely associated with neoliberalism and the free market.

All of this echoed the late nineteenth-century quest to identify the "masters" who were in control of modernity's diffused and intersecting flows of cash, information and sex. Nineteenth century anti-Semitic conspiracy-mongering recurred both overtly and more subtly, with the far right conjuring up a "Zionist Occupation Government" and the fringe left hinting at dark collusion with the state of Israel. Arguably, the effort to locate the nexus of control betrays the anxious desire that someone should actually *be* in control. Yet it has been plausibly suggested that the dynamic of the marketplace is "not predictable; nor is it the product of a single conscious will," (Ferguson, 295) and it is this aspect which has troubled people both during the nineteenth century *fin de siecle* and during ours.

The first half of this dissertation offers readings of Victorian texts as well as the early poetry of T.S. Eliot, who I am discussing here as a transitional figure. The final section concerns literature and film from the "postmodern" American eighties and nineties.

Chapter One discusses the ways in which, through literature such as the Sherlock Holmes stories of Doyle, Stevenson's "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde," and Stoker's *Dracula*. Victorian readers attempted to sustain a moral discourse that could order and make sense of the anxieties and desires created by technological change, as well as conflicts between capitalism, empire, and ethical norms based in religion. Stevenson's famous story thrives

on the tension between rationalism and the supernatural, between "professional" and "primitive" man, between the Victorian moral order and the drives it seeks to regulate and contain. Hyde is at once a supernatural creation, a regression to the primitive, a violation of class boundaries and evidence of homosexual misalliance; his alter-ego, Jekyll, is an example both of modern ambition and of modern neurosis. Stevenson's tale strongly intimates that technology and the city are to blame for bringing to existence the monstrosity of Hyde, whose inhuman behavior overtly recalls the "Juggernaut" of machinery, industry and technology. The sense that human values have been violated and abandoned is compounded, in "Jekyll and Hyde," by the sterility of its characters, middle-aged male bachelors who are evidently incapable of, or simply uninterested in, marriage.

Jekyll also personifies one of the inherent terrors in a world of social and professional mobility: that of exposure and disgrace. As in a number of Victorian tales, Stevenson's supernatural story draws power by its resemblance to a plausible scenario: that of man of status brought down through a homosexual affair. Indeed, this is how the other characters initially perceive his predicament; his friend Utterson believes Jekyll is involved with "rough trade." Problems of concealed origins, hidden identity, fraud and imposture haunt the Victorian city, in part because of its contrast with the abandoned world of the estate – that is, of a predominantly agricultural social order based on local and familial ties. The familiarity of the estate, and the apparent alienation of the city, are recurrent themes in Victorian literature dealing with the city, from Dickens on. The city is the site of functional transactions between strangers, transactions which may involve ill-gotten gains, as they usually do in the emerging genre of the crime story. But there is always a risk within a commercial economy that all gains could be seen as ill-gotten, and

it is this problem which motivates the fastidious way in which Victorian literature habitually approaches the topic of money.

Reaffirming the moral order is one way to deal with the volatility and ethical instability of globalization and capitalism. But the concept of secular morality became difficult to sustain because its norms were rooted in a fundamentally religious view of the world. It is for this reason, as a number of critics suggest, that the late Victorian era becomes increasingly preoccupied with fashioning new methods of distinction that invoked science and the scientific method as their guarantor. This preoccupation is one of the reasons behind the emergence of the detective-story genre, starting with Poe and continuing with Doyle; the detective, of course, becomes an exemplar of the application of empirical rigor to social and human problems. In the real world, figures such as Cesare Lombroso and John Galton were attempting to formulate ways to categorize people based on measurable traits such as race and genetic background; psychiatry attempted to define and classify mental disorders; Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* did the same thing for sex. Marx, meanwhile, provided a "scientific" analysis of social relations based on the apparently measurable category of class. One novel which fully inhabits the era's ongoing tension between the moral, the scientific, and the supernatural is Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. In describing the behavior of his Transylvanian vampire, as well as his effect on victims, Stoker uses specific terms and phenomena taken from Krafft-Ebing, and the novel as a whole is loaded with references to contemporary methodologies, including Lombroso's criminology. Yet these "positivist" elements in *Dracula* are blended with supernatural elements, some of which derive from Irish folk tales that Stoker had encountered as a child, and the novel perilously conflates scientific rigor with tribalism

based in race and "English identity." Chapter Two focuses on this novel, arguing that in it Stoker was able to capitalize on the productive tensions of his era – between the technological and the human, the futuristic and atavistic, between post and pre-Enlightenment conceptions of Europe, and also, obliquely, between Protestantism and Catholicism. These tensions are so productive that Stoker has trouble containing his novel and bringing to a closure.

Dracula was significant not least because of the success with which it morphed the world of the Gothic onto late nineteenth century globalization, with its networks of commerce and information, its disorienting technologies, and its labyrinthine metropolises. Invoking the imaginative affinity between sex and blood, on the one hand, and "fluids" such as money and information, Stoker was able to locate, and capitalize on, aspects of a commercial, technologically driven, liberalizing society that people were capable of reacting to almost as though they were confronting something physically unsettling. By drawing this equation, Stoker made his novel more than just a tall tale or a "novel of sensation" – he gave it an ideological depth which has been almost obsessively mined by the novel's critics. The techniques Stoker used to such effect in *Dracula* were borrowed, in a more serious and dangerous way, by political movements that set about equating demons with actual individuals or social groups. But what is the source of the affinity between the Gothic experience and the modern one? Julia Kristeva, in her discussion of horror, has provided one way to approach this question; she theorizes that boundary disruptions – real or perceived threats to the subject's integrity, whether bodily or psychological – provoke an almost automated reaction of mixed fascination and revulsion. Others besides Kristeva have argued along these lines; Klaus Theleweit, in his

two-volume study of proto-fascist German paramilitary soldiers during the Weimar Republic, sees their fixation with excrement and bodily fluids as a concretization of an internal state of uncertainty, disorder, and imminent psychosis. With these interpretations in mind, Chapter Three considers the modernist poet T.S. Eliot and offers a reading of his *Gothicized London* – a treatment which owes specific debts to Stoker – as part of his attempt to write a poetry which would record an emotional and psychological response to modern conditions. In fashioning his poetic persona, Eliot conceived of a broken subject that was a sort of screen on which the abject emotions accompanying the journey into modernity were projected; this subject exists precariously at the borderline between sanity and derangement, as well as on the border between "normal" and "perverse" sexuality – a positionality which Eliot tended to inhabit also in his "actual" (as opposed to literary) life.

Chapters Four and Five are concerned with the "globalization era" that began, roughly speaking, with the election of a *laissez-faire* oriented administration in 1980, received a further boost with the collapse of the Soviet bloc, and became further propelled by the information technology boom of the nineties. The era was in no small part defined by its perceived difference from the previous decade – that of the oil crisis, *malaise*, *détente*, and the loss in the Vietnam War. As Kirby Farrell and others have noted, the desire to bury the threat of American decline drove everything from military expenditures to education overhauls to welfare reform, and the re-armoring – both literally and figuratively – of America seemed to pay off in the nineties, with victory in the Cold War followed by an abnormally long economic boom. In fact, American productivity had not reached the apex some claimed; it was higher in the fifties and early sixties. And globalization, in some important respects, was constrained; immigration barriers, more

pronouncedly in Europe but also, to a degree, in the U.S., were stiffened even as Benetton ads proclaimed the unity of peoples. Nevertheless, the idea that a combination of capitalism and hi-tech would usher in a de-nationalized and de-racialized (or, seen negatively, deracinated) global supermarket became almost taken for granted – celebrated by ameliorists as putting an end to such atavisms as the nation-state and even the nuclear family, and derided by traditionalists for the same reason. (Ferguson, 292). At its most excessive, eighties culture seemed to have been purged of any reference points other than its own dynamic energies; there was no underlying program except vaguely defined "self-realization", ideologies were automatically suspect, and the logic was one of endless interchangeability. Cultural products ranging from music videos to the film *Ferris Bueller* both typified and exploited this aspect of the eighties. In other words, the eighties became stereotyped as an ideological vacuum, much as the seventies were "decadent," the sixties "revolutionary," or the fifties "uptight." Chapter Four reads the novels and short stories of William Gibson within the context of eighties global culture, seeing them as virtuosic montages of images and sensations, highly textured and evocative renderings of an extrapolated future in which the traditional components of "identity" – race, gender, history, memory – are transformed into marketable "consensual illusions" through the intercession of high tech. Despite the Dashiell Hammett mean streets veneer which Gibson applied to his characters and their environments, the worlds he imagines are not really dystopias. His tales are ultimately about aestheticizing the new economy, transforming its objects – machines, electronics – into emblems of desire. Chapter Five, meanwhile, discusses a contrasting type of "consensual illusion" based on technology. The seeming antithesis to Gibson's dense labyrinths (which amount to a rewrite of the

19th century "dark city"), postmodern suburbia is no less a synthetic product, a fantasized idyll which promises to gratify the middle-class desire to reconstruct the estate. With the postmodern technoburb, the equation between globalism and urbanism breaks down, and the city becomes an object of nostalgia, dispossessed by the same forces which helped to create it.

The flip side of global euphoria, of course, was global panic, and by the mid-nineties the collective unconscious was having increasingly bad dreams, as suggested by a vogue of apocalypse and urban disaster movies which continued until real disaster struck in September 2001. Millenarial jitters were probably not helped by a succession of violent incidents – Oklahoma City, Columbine – nor by the Clinton-Lewinsky scandals, which lasted a year and at times generated a mood of near-hysteria among detractors and defenders alike. Meanwhile, well before the end of the decade, discontent with globalization had come to crystallize around the financial and international institutions that were most closely associated with it (the IMF, the WTO), as well as around new technologies, such as genetic engineering. In part, this phenomenon reflected the search for a target. Globalization was frightening, often for the same reasons that made it appealing, and one of the most frightening/liberating things about it was the seeming lack of a center – an authority, a locus of power, a point of accountability. The dystopianism which ran parallel to the "irrational exuberance" of the global era is reflected in films such as Scott's *Blade Runner*, its predecessor *Alien*, the *Terminator* movies and a particularly paranoid example, 1999's instant "cult classic," *The Matrix*. Heavily laden with special effects as well as leather fetishism, *The Matrix* depicted a species of bloodsuckers, disguised as businessmen and FBI agents, that preys on human infants, and

must be violently purged, as in a 19th-century vampire story, by a band of comrades. Their armed struggle becomes the key to a David-versus-Goliath plot in which the big guns and "ideological state apparatuses," to use Althusser's term, are eventually defeated. Despite the popularity of this narrative mode, it can hardly escape notice that its governing principles are at some level in basic conflict with the economic, social and cultural life of late twentieth-century middle class Americans – that is, the very audiences which flocked to movie theaters to enjoy movies such as *The Matrix*. But this conflictedness is neither new nor entirely surprising. One of the signature problems facing liberal societies – not just ours, but our late Victorian predecessors – has been that of reconciling, or at least forcing an uneasy truce between, the imperatives of science, technology, secularism and rationalism, and norms rooted in more tribal, and often religiously-based, conceptions of identity. That problem, alternately productive and catastrophically destructive, promises to be an ongoing one.

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CHAPTER ONE

FAMOUS IMPOSTERS: THE VICTORIAN METROPOLIS

One problem with middle-class self-fashioning is the risk that unacceptable attributes will come back to embarrass and undermine the self which has excluded them. That happens to Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll, who finds that his unusually high professional, social and moral aspirations are accompanied by an equally unusual propensity towards degradation. His bipolarity places him in the select company of such figures as Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, the cocaine-taking genius, and more generally within the context of the fin-de-siecle interest in morbidity and neurosis. The overwhelmingly male ambience of Stevenson's story, as well as the symbology (closets, back doors, a man bludgeoned to death with a cane), also signal the homoeroticism which was frequently as a morbid symptom.

Yet Hyde seems to personify something even more serious than the scandal of covert homosexuality. For one thing, Utterson suspects from early on that Jekyll is conducting back door liaisons with rough trade from the streets. It is the obvious explanation: his friend has become entangled in a "disgrace." and is being blackmailed. The irony present in the third chapter, in which Utterson tries to find out the truth about Jekyll, feeds off of the gap between what Utterson obviously thinks he knows, and what we, the readers, already sense that he doesn't. "I am a man to be trusted. Make a clean breast of this in confidence." Utterson tells Jekyll, no doubt repeating the words he has

used with his other "downgoing" acquaintances. Although, for Utterson, a concealed sexual identity may be "abominable," it hardly sums up the horrifying potential of Hyde. Surely a tolerant fellow like Utterson, friend to the misbegotten, has encountered the gay subculture (Showalter, 109) before. For the discovery of Jekyll's secret to have the fatal effect that it does on another character, Dr. Lanyon, it must represent some deeper monstrosity, a contradiction, void or imposture within liberal subjectivity, a poisonous byproduct of its rational and moral pretensions. Hyde's existence, as a supernatural phenomenon, kills Lanyon because it undermines, and shows the outer limits of his staunch positivism. The violent feelings which Hyde arouses in Mr. Enfield, meanwhile, suggest an unacceptable primitivism, a monstrosity existing within this otherwise sanguine personality. The mob scene that almost erupts after Hyde's first crime (the injury of a child) reveals the limits of the Victorian moral compact and the drives it seeks to regulate and contain; anticipating, meanwhile, Gustave LeBon's conception of modern crowds as a primitive and violent organism. Hyde's existence is both the result of Jekyll's aspirations (he experiments in the hope of achieving scientific distinction) and the embodiment of debased social status, something which Jekyll, the accumulator of degrees (D.C.L., L.L.D., F.R.S., etc.) has left behind in his professional climb. Finally, the idea of shifting identities and bodies works as a figure for the protean quality of middle-class identity and the liberal political and social economies on which it is based. Like a number of *fin-de-siecle* narratives, "Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" alludes to the era's emerging psychiatric and sociological discourses while undergirding them with a standard Gothic preoccupation with corruption and fraud.

The Victorian preoccupation with imposture was perhaps most famously articulated in *Great Expectations*, which equates social ambition with concealed abjection. Dickens' novel is famously concerned with the low or questionable origins that haunt social climbers as they make their way towards the upper bourgeoisie; not only is the criminal Magwitch the hidden, monstrous source of Pip's wealth – the fortune which both makes and contaminates him – but Pip eventually acknowledges him as a (symbolic) father. Because the events in the novel unfold out of an original transgression (Pip provides food and sustenance to a convict), Dickens' novel implies that a sense of criminal guilt is inherently connected with Pip's aspirations, his desire to transcend his place, to leave blacksmithing, and to marry Estella. The narrative's conclusion reveals Pip and Estella as uneasy nomads, divorced from the ties of locality and custom which both constrict and enrich Pip's uncle, the blacksmith Joe, and his wife Biddy.

In Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes story, "The Sign of Four," Mary Morstan is also the heir to a dubious fortune associated with crime and murder, and with the larger problem of British colonialism. The length of the story – at seven chapters, it amounts to a novella – is in part due to a long episode set in India during the time of the Mutiny – arguably the pivotal event in the history of Britain's imperial adventure, and regarded by Victorians as their national myth, their Homeric epic – and narrated by the villain, Jonathan Small. As the treasure makes its way from India to Britain, it in a sense brings colonialism home, along with its associated violence, avarice, and ethical confusion. Holmes and Watson are surprised when they enter the shabby, non-descript house of Thaddeus Sholto and discover a kind of portable Orient:

We were all astonished by the appearance of the apartment into which he invited us. In that sorry house it looked as out of place as a diamond of the first water in a setting of brass. The richest and glossiest of curtains and tapestries draped the walls, looped back here and there to expose some richly mounted painting or Oriental vase. The carpet was of amber and black, so soft and so thick that the foot sank pleasantly into it, as into a bed of moss. Two great tiger-skins thrown athwart it increased the suggestion of Eastern luxury, as did a huge hookah which stood upon a mat in the corner. A lamp...filled the air with a subtle and aromatic odour. (123)

The journey of the treasure begins in an act of duplicity by its owner, an opportunistic rajah who plays off of both sides in the Indian-British conflict, and brings trouble to everyone who comes into contact with it: the servant who transports it is tricked and murdered; the conspirators are caught and jailed; the British officers feud over it and Morstan dies of a heart attack; Sholto is hounded to death by a wooden-legged pursuer, and his son Bartholomew gets killed by a poisoned needle. Given this provenance, it is no wonder that Mary Morstan's attitude towards the treasure cools significantly by the end of the tale. What bothers Mary Morstan, though, is not simply the bad luck associated with the treasure; it is the problem of illegitimacy and guilt which the bad luck expresses. Possessing the treasure amounts to benefitting from a long string of outrages originating in the atrocities of the Mutiny, which Small recounts in lurid detail.

Watson hopes that the treasure will not be found, because he believes it would be an "insurmountable barrier" between him and Mary Morstan, with whom he has fallen in

love. His concern that Mary might take him for a vulgar fortune-seeker, or, even worse, set her sights at someone more prepossessing than a “half-pay surgeon,” partially conceals a deeper anxiety – than his beloved might turn out to be venal and materialistic. When Watson describes her, it is always in idealized terms: Watson is put off by the treasure because it is the symbol of base economic motives which threaten the sentimentality of his romance with Mary Morstan, and indeed with his self-definition as an moral Englishman. For her part, Mary not only displays a reassuring lack of interest in the Agra treasure, but demonstrates an admirable concern for her friends – she faints during Watson's account of the chase down the Thames, apparently because because “it was a shock to me to hear that I had placed my friends in such horrible peril.” Either Miss Morstan is as noble-minded as Watson would like to believe, or she intuitively knows how to play to Watson's expectations. Instead of becoming a financially independent, problematic New Woman, she is provided the safer option of becoming wife to Watson, promptly disappearing from the Holmes stories until her death is reported in “The Adventure of the Empty House.”

Watson's queasiness about the treasure anticipates the disgust with which both he and Holmes later respond to Jonathan Small's “strange story.” Like the explorer Richard Burton, who offended guests at fashionable London dinners by regaling Oriental exploits that included murder, Small discloses a world of ethical relativism which is too alarming for his listeners to countenance. As Small points out, the choice was between his own death or that of the unlucky Achmet. What bothers Watson even more than the cold-bloodedness of the story is the Small's “somewhat careless and flippant” manner as he recounts the events. The blurring of moral boundaries which is so disturbing in Small's

tale applies more generally to the Indian mutiny, a conflict in which savage atrocities, including the butchering of women and children, were inflicted by both sides. Thus, there is a sense in which Holmes and Watson are recoiling from a brutalism in which England itself is deeply involved. Their disgust grows out of the same impulses which motivate Watson's solicitous, and patronizing, wish to protect Morstan from the treasure – in other words, from the filthy realities underlying the accumulation of colonial wealth. When Watson regales her with anecdotes about his own imperial exploits (he served as a medical officer in Afghanistan), the stories he tells have a much nobler tone: as we know from "Study in Scarlet," Watson was saved from the "murderous Ghazis" by his devoted and brave orderly.

"The Sign of Four" tries to articulate an ethic of friendship and loyalty which both opposes, and is partly defined by, the vices of venality and avarice. Though he repels his listeners (Watson: "whatever punishment was in store for him, I felt that he might expect no sympathy from me.") Small is redeemed by his loyalty to the Four, and even the murderous Tonga elicits sympathy when Small describes him as "staunch and true...no man ever had a more faithful mate." These gestures not only humanize Small and Tonga, but also suggest the degree to which the Victorian concept of loyalty may have originated in the problems and difficulties posed by imperialism. Comradeship is a military virtue, and it is also, as Small tells us, characteristic of lonely men in foreign places: "white folk out there feel their hearts warm to each other as they never do here at home."

Like many Victorian texts, Doyle's tale is partly about the difficulty of negotiating the proper relationship to money; as we have seen, Miss Morstan is spared what is apparently the unpleasant fate of having inherited too much of it. In Stoker's *Dracula*,

meanwhile, much energy is expended on determining whether money is capable of being a force for the good. "Think of the wonderful power of money!" exclaims Mina Harker. "What it can not do when it is properly applied; and what might it do when basely used!" The word "base" connotes debasement, disgust; and the attitude which Victorian characters often demonstrate towards money is that of powerful desire mixed with an equally powerful sense of horror, as though to touch money risked contamination. If filth, as Kristeva proposes, is not a quality in itself but the product of boundary relations, then such monetary disgust was related to its ability to traverse – and thus further undermine – the already shaky boundaries of a burgeoning liberal economy that, at the same time, preserved the residue of a stricter caste system and a clerical-monarchial social order. A characteristic of money is that it is hard to know where it's been; thus it automatically carries with it the taint of a violated prohibition, a broken taboo. But this squeamishness about money conceals an even deeper horror concerning middle class identity; the need for money to have a "moral, anti-economic end" (Moretti, 94) is a metonym for the bourgeoisie's quest for self-legitimization. Without the canonical basis for identity to fall back on – the land, the castle – the middle class compensates by asserting itself as the guardian of the moral life; yet this noble aim continually risks being exposed as unauthorized and fraudulent, the product of venality.

The bourgeois predicament shaped two 19th century institutions: psychiatry and the theater. Both provided arenas in which experiences, desires and impulses that were outside the pale could be acted out under the legitimizing *aegis* of, respectively, medicine and art. What was more, the distinction between these two institutions was permeable, as

theater became the site of psychological drama, while at his Saltpetre clinic, Jean-Martin Charcot provided a theatricalized medical spectacle.

Charcot's clinic provided a medium in which interested observers could witness the somatic performance of psychic trauma (as he defined hysteria) and his pedagogical approach depended on posters, photographs, and illuminated projections (Micale, 198) as well as on the ability of his patients to reproduce on demand their hallucinatory symptoms. A hysterical patient might "crawl on all fours...barking furiously when told she was a dog, flap her arms as if trying to fly when turned into a pigeon, lift her skirts with a shriek of terror when a glove was thrown at her feet when she was told it was her baby." (Axel Munthe, *The Story of San Michele*, quoted in Bronfen, 182). Not only did these behaviors resemble a repertoire of performative devices, but the incentive for performing was obvious – the clinic was world famous, attended by literary and other celebrities; furthermore, the patients as a group, as well as some individual hysterics, acquired celebrity status. Charcot – who was already a medical celebrity before he turned his attention to hysteria – was not unaware of the performative element in the demonstrations, writing that "in the multitude of cases, [the hysterics] have taken pleasure in distorting, by exaggerations, the principal circumstances of their disorder, in order to make them appear extraordinary and wonderful"(Bronfen, 177). There was no shortage of detractors, who accused Charcot either of naivete or imposture, and Salpetriere accumulated an aura of scandal which strengthened its affinities to the theatre: Jules Claritie's novel *Les amours d'un interne* (1881) helped promulgate the belief that hysterical patients were involved in *liaisons amoureuses* with each other and with Salpetriere staff. (Micale, 196). The demonstrations at Salpetriere certainly constituted a

spectacle, but it was like all public spectacles it required a legitimizing principle, in this case that of rigorous empiricism. Its legitimacy became undermined in the late 1880s and 90s (Charcot died in 1892) as evidence accumulated that the magnetic trance states Charcot induced were an elaborate, consensual illusion, not necessarily staged with calculation but in any case produced by the suggestibility and willingness of Charcot's patients to provide the behavior he expected, plus either deliberate or unconscious coaching by his assistants. (Veith, 239-41)

Hysteria was interesting to the 19th century because it seemed to offer a liminal zone, that is, one in which the boundaries between the rational and the magical, moral and primitive. As Elisabeth Bronfen observes, "hysteric performance has always meant the public confession of an intimate trauma and of intimate phantasies. But this act of self-presentation has also always colluded with a given public's notions of what constituted a healthy body, a stable psyche, a safely contained imagination"; in fact, because it provided the negative or supplemental values, it was a necessary part of the construction of health. An abject figure, the hysteric takes upon herself the role of performing under the legitimizing sign of a medical disorder, based in traditional notions of womanly frailty. The doctor-patient scenario, meanwhile, consisting of distressed femininity and beneficial masculine intervention, offered a convenient pairing of gender roles, while at the same time providing a confessional forum, with the doctor taking on the role of public or symbolic authority. Given its protean, simulative quality, hysteria also had increasingly obvious utility as a metaphor for the category instabilities of modern, secular and commercial culture, while its role as a "female malady" was adaptable to *fin-de-siecle* degeneration theory's spectre of cultural feminization. By 1900, hysteria's utility as a

category capable of absorbing the supplements of liberal cultural and political economies had led to a proliferation of interpretations, so much that interpretive overload set in and the category collapsed; as Mark Micale notes, "hysteria during the European fin de siècle came to mean so many different things that...it ceased to mean anything at all. (Micale, 220).

Another performative arena was the theater, and this presented its own dangers. In 1881, Sarah Bernhardt, who had attended Charcot's demonstrations, partly in order to refine her portrayal of high strung or hysterical characters, was the source of an apparent outbreak of hysterical contagion. Bernhardt was portraying the consumptive Madame Gautier in a Moscow performance of *La Dame Aux Camellias*. As Gautier expired, the audience was seized by a collective fit of uncontrollable coughing. Press accounts cited not only the supposed psychological ill-health of the theatergoing audience, but also the disruptive influence of the medium itself. The nineteenth century theater of illusion, it seemed to contemporaries, had a disturbing power to erode distinctions between subject and object, perceiver and perceived, fantasy and reality. (Vrettos, 81).

Theater accommodated that which the middle class needed to cast symbolically away from itself, but the process was not only one of casting away – there was a kind of rebound effect, as the audience experienced the emotions provoked by the staged scene, which itself was a projection of desires and fears that the audience brought with it into the theater. Thus, the theater amounted to an elaborate game with mirrors which permitted abject or otherwise problematic material to be viewed at a slant, and responded to rather than suppressed. This process provided catharsis, but it also tended to subject the theater

to charges of being corrupt, and, as the Bernhardt incident seemed to demonstrate, of contributing to the deliquescence of civilization, the weakening of its resolve and its moral fiber. In Britain, these alleged dangers became specifically linked to the aestheticism of Oscar Wilde, which celebrated exactly what worried others: the power of theater (and, more generally art), to “express everything.” Wilde promoted the suspicion that actors become the characters they portray, and that the theater, by extension, infiltrates the psyches of its spectators, destroying the barrier between art and life – a formula which bears obvious affinities to the idea of vampirism, with its simultaneous allure and power to infect. In *Dorian Gray*, Sibyl Vane acts well only when she is capable of losing herself in the characters she portrays; her love for Dorian causes her to become “self-contained,” interrupting the flow between actress, character, and audience, and ruining the performance.

Wilde favored the persuasive or contagious aspect of the theater but without its regulatory aspect, rejecting the idea that the theater had a moral duty, or that moral terminology had any relevance to theatrical art, except perhaps as an “unpardonable mannerism.” To his detractors, Wilde’s aesthetic was that of gratification. Henry Irving, by contrast, stressed craftsmanship and the social role of theater, its function within society, conceiving the theatrical company itself as a community, a group working in solidarity towards a common end. Whereas Irving’s portrayals of murderers and other debased characters was seen as admirably meeting the requirements for social catharsis, Wilde’s aestheticism suggested contamination. A number of critics have identified Irving as the likely source for Bram Stoker’s conception of *Dracula*, but what may be even more pertinent is that the Irvingesque theater strongly influenced Stoker’s approach to the

novel. "To give strong grounds for belief, where the instinct can judge more truly than the intellect, is the perfection of suggestive acting," Stoker wrote in his *Personal Reminiscences*, and the idea of intellect-transcending "grounds for belief" figures importantly in *Dracula*, where the disbelief of Dr. Seward, the rational skeptic, gives way to the persuasive power of Van Helsing – a charismatic, visionary figure who belongs in the same company as Stoker's idols, Irving and Walt Whitman. Irving's aesthetic, or Stoker's interpretation of it, also provided the novel's crucial opposition between egotism and altruism, between the isolated sociopath and the group united in common cause – a cause which is defined and energized by the sociopath.

That opposition was fundamental to the distinction between "normality" and "perversity" which late nineteenth century sexological discourse – specifically Kraft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) – tried to stabilize. (Mighall, 62-75) The aesthetes drew opprobrium not least because they represented artists as "anti-social madmen, sexual perverts, criminals who killed life by representing it, even vampires whose art preyed not only on nature but upon the souls of the readers whom it insidiously influenced." (Kilgour, 47). In contrast to the perverse theater of aestheticism, Stoker holds up Irving as an exemplar of normal, social, and moral theater. Yet Stoker's conception of himself as defender of the health of art, a kind of stalwart knight acting on behalf of his king (Irving) is riddled with ambiguity and self-contradiction. Irving had attracted Stoker's admiration because of his uncanny power to enter into, and convey, the psyches of murderers and sociopaths; Stoker himself was known to his contemporaries as a specialist in "lurid" and "creepy" tales. Extended passages in *Dracula* add a breathy, quasi-pornographic gloss to material which, as Robert Mighall has suggested, is drawn at

least in part from Kraft-Ebing; Stoker is alternately romanced by, and repulsed by, his monster. If Oscar Wilde was perverse, what about Stoker's idol, Walt Whitman, who D.H. Lawrence was later to describe as the epitome of decadence, almost a kind of spiritual vampire – "a very great poet, of the end of life...of the transitions of the soul as it loses its integrity"? (quoted in Kilgour, 51). The taint of imposture hangs over not only Stoker's defense of the theater, but also over Stoker himself – the "muscular Christian" who cultivated a reputation for gallantry and bravado could not successfully contain persistent, uncorroborated rumors about his marriage, sexual orientation, and syphilis.

If the Irvingesque theater is a presence in *Dracula*, so too is the Salpetriere clinic. "The great Charcot – alas that he is no more!" Van Helsing tells Seward, as the two discuss hypnosis. Whereas Seward personifies empiricist rigor, his companion inherits Charcot's involvement in a questionable, perhaps fraudulent discipline. About hypnosis, the two agree that "Charcot has proved that pretty well," but they are mistaken: hypnosis was in fact the issue that catalyzed opposition to the goings-on at Saltpetriere. (Veith, 238). In the 19th century, hypnosis had largely continued to mark the dividing line between legitimate and illegitimate science, with Mesmer's "animal magnetism" viewed as beyond the pale, and Mesmer himself as a charlatan who exerted charismatic influence over impressionable upper-class women. (Micale, 23) Charcot, like the Italian criminologist Lombroso, belongs in Stoker's fantastic narrative because both were figures who claimed the authority of science, while inhabiting its marginal fringes – that is, territory where positivism did not seem to have fully crowded out the magical and superstitious. In *Dracula*, Van Helsing is likewise, is a doctor whose credentials risk coming into doubt; and in fact the other characters do doubt him, especially when he

proposes what seems to them a bizarre, blasphemous ritual, the staking and beheading of Lucy's corpse.

At one level, *Dracula* works out the problem posed by two contaminated spouses; the effect of a vampiric visitation is to transform the victim into a debased figure, one that takes on the undesirable or unwelcome social roles that are necessary for the construction of sanity, health and normalcy. In Lucy's case, Dracula's bite reveals her as an erotomaniacal narcissist; in Jonathan Harker's, as an ineffectual husband. Not only does Lucy's symptomology (insomnia, sleepwalking, languor, nymphomania) match that of hysteria, but the scenario which her affliction establishes seems to deliberately mirror a canonical 19th century British diagnosis of hysteria as a calculated strategy to gain attention from a suitor. Carter (1853), for instance, had suggested that the disorder results from the patient's discovery that "she can, at will, produce an apparently serious illness, and thus make herself an object of great attention to all around her, and possibly, among others, to the individual who has been uppermost in her thoughts." (Veith, 203) Lucy succeeds not only in gaining the nearly round-the-clock attentions of her four suitors, but also in extracting their fluids, while the fact that her attacks come when the suitors are absent amplifies the implied suggestion that her root problem is insatiability.

For Jonathan Harker, meanwhile, the results of a vampiric encounter are his transformation into a nervous, demasculated male who suffers from recurrent delirious fits and remains terrified of an apparent Master figure (whose dominance he resists, unlike the almost thoroughly interpellated Renfield) as well as of three women who are out to consume him, and who have already, it seems, figuratively castrated him with their teeth. As her plea to Van Helsing indicates, the quest in *Dracula* is not only to save

England but also to provide Mina with an intact, healthy husband, that is, one who can impregnate her with a baby – her contribution to the maintenance of the English stock. The circumstances which define Harker at the story's outset – the fact he is a husband-to-be, and has also just advanced from clerk to "full-blown solicitor" – imply the possibility that his supernatural experiences are in some way connected to failure, and may even constitute hysterical alibis. As Elisabeth Bronfen observes, Stoker is careful to lay down possible clues to an alternative, skeptical explanation for Harker's woes; he may be suffering from "railway spine" as a result of his Transylvanian journey; he may have experienced a psychotic attack while conducting his business transaction, leading him to hallucinate that his host is a supernatural creature; the Count and the three vampire women could indeed be "hysterical transformation of the physicians and nurses watching him" as he recuperates in Buda-Pest. That Harker's vampire story has the quality of a preposterous lie, concealing some terrible stigma or failure, is suggested by Mina's own politely expressed doubts:

...that terrible record of Jonathan's upset me so. Poor dear! How he must have suffered, whether it be true or only imagination. I wonder if there is any truth in it at all. Did he get his brain fever, and then write all those terrible things, or had he some cause for it all. (196)

If Harker, as Bronfen suggests, is traumatized by uncertainty about his readiness to assume his symbolic mandate (Bronfen, 209), that concern indicates how the novel equates the private and global arenas, so that the young solicitor's woes become revealed

as part of a general problem; a perilous vacancy of authority; a lack, void, or contradiction at the heart of the order of things. The novel's conflation of personal and cultural panic with symbolic confusion necessitates a battle for the scepter of authority, so to speak, between two charismatic, autocratic male figures; this is why Seward, the exemplar of modern methodology, cannot lead the quest, why it has to be a Van Helsing. The world of the Saltpetriere clinic was appealing in part because, while remaining "scientific," it simultaneously, and contradictorily, promised a return to the safer, patriarchal and symbolic order, the magical order governed by the priest or shaman; the charismatic doctor fulfills both imperatives and provides the comfort of a "real presence," to use George Steiner's term. Hysteria, in this sense, can be read not only as the utterance of a lack, but as the desire for the paternal authority who can come and fill it. As a tale which is both contemporary and a rewriting of an earlier fantastic genre, *Dracula* provides the link between Gothic narratives of the dead father and the stolen, corrupted estate with *fin-de-siecle* discourses which, while influenced by and often invoking the language of scientific empiricism, often amounted to variations on the Gothic theme.

Stoker shows a debt to the continental literary fascination with hysteria, as evidenced by Flaubert, Baudelaire, and perhaps most significantly for the English *fin-de-siecle*, Huysmans. Doyle had borrowed from this tradition in his creation of Holmes, but Holmes is not the only example: Thaddeus Sholto in "The Sign of Four" is an excitable, histrionic aesthete whose dramatic physical appearance ("a small man with a very high head, a bristle of red hair all around the fringe of it...") signals his personality. The most overt borrowing from Huysmans was, of course, Wilde's in *Dorian Gray*, and Wilde not

only absorbed the superficial characteristics of the continental literary hysteric but also, more dangerously in the view of his public, trafficked in the celebration of neurosis and morbidity as the source of rarefied pleasures. Stoker's presentation of hysteria, meanwhile, is characteristically ambiguous, drawing both from Nordau's dystopic vision of a sickly, feminized and degenerating society, and from a contrasting view of histrionic behavior as demonstrating (laudable) emotional authenticity: Van Helsing sympathizes with, even approves, of Mina's collapse, since it proves her empathetic nature, and when the friends (Christopher Craft's "Crew of Light") band together to exorcise Dracula, they are aware of the potentially "mad" quality of their heightened emotions.

To interpret Count Dracula in relation to hysteria is inevitably to exchange one metaphor for another, since by Stoker's era hysteria had essentially lost whatever precision it had ever possessed as a medical term and become a kind of catch-all metaphor which could be used to posit an increasingly complicated set of linkages between various fin-de-siecle pet peeves. Indeed, it is the quality of being a totalizing metaphor which most clearly establishes the affinity between Stoker's vampire and hysteria, the "resident demon" of 19th century neuroscience. Both provided a figure, one fictional, the other ostensibly "medical" that conveniently lent itself to a number of often contradictory claims. For example, while hysteria could be, and was, used to label Jews as genetically prone to neurosis (and thus to degeneration), the Jewish-born Nordau regarded anti-Semitism as evidence of Europe's degenerated and hysteria-prone state, one which generated regular outbursts of irrational, anti-Jewish rage. Hysteria had frequently been used to define female moral and behavioral pathology in relation to an implied standard of conventional wifely behavior, but some critics charged that the "pathological" behavior

was simply the natural behavior of normal women, whereas the hysterical diagnosis was contrived and artificial. Furthermore, while traditionally a female affliction, hysteria was now being broadened to include males, often as a means of demonstrating degeneration theory's claim that men were becoming enervated and feminized. Nordau's diagnosis of Impressionist art, his condemnation of modern culture's tendency to fragment into schools and movements, and his overall preoccupation with "disintegration" signal the root fear which underlies degeneration theory: that of lost integrity and unity. For Nordau, the Impressionists were "hysterical painters" who suffered from amblyopia (dulled vision) and dyschromatopia (distorted color perception), both of which were symptoms of their neurosis. Instead of possessing a unified vision, these painters evidenced a defective and fragmented gaze which "breaks up from an integrated field into isolated spots over the retina." (Micale, 206).

The source of this fragmentation was, Nordau intimated, none other than the complex, layered, labyrinthine metropolis, along with the technologies that powered it and ordered social behavior according to mechanistic imperatives. Degeneration theory, with its imitation of medical diagnostic tools and its reliance on the ideas of evolution and devolution, provided a fashionably Darwinian and positivistic spin to what had become a much-invoked representation of the city as an image for the confused modern consciousness, as described by Funck-Brentano (1876):

...the instincts are refined and needs are multiplied, thought is developed and divided to infinity; the social constitution becomes complicated, accord between his thoughts and his acts is more difficult for every man;

the difference grows in the relations of peoples with each other. (quoted in Laffey, 9)

On a more lowbrow level, this indictment of urban society found expression in a series of panics, scandals, and epidemics of psychosomatic illness, which generally tended to be strongly loaded with anti-urban and anti-modernist significance. In the early 1880s, for example, an apparent epidemic of suicides among mostly low to mid-level white collar males provided support for the widely-held, Arnoldian sentiment that all the redeeming virtues of earthly life had been lost due to commercialism and routinized labor. (Farrell, 12) The conversion symptoms of neurasthenic males seemed to confirm the fear that the mechanisms of urbanized and industrialized life were inscribing monstrous effects on the body: a patient who made constant, repetitive clock-like movements was discovered to be a watchcase-maker (Showalter, 62-63).

Discontent tended to become associated with specific technologies which seemed emblematic of all that was threatening and disturbing – the railroads, for example. Many train-riding Victorians worried that they could develop “railway fever” because of being jostled and thrown off balance. Charles Dickens had provided some of the most visceral representations of the train-as-Juggernaut -- representations which drew from his own nerve-shattering experience during the Staplehurst accident in 1865. Dickens’ first class carriage was derailed and left it hanging over a bridge at an angle, held only by the couplings attaching it to the carriages behind; seven carriages in front had already plummeted into the river below. Dickens, like Bram Stoker several decades later, performed acts of heroism, ministering to the injured and rescuing trapped passengers.

The experience left him with a variety of post-traumatic symptoms, including loss of balance, headaches, sensations of dizziness and weakness, loss of his voice, and panic attacks while travelling. As the Dickens example illustrates, the demonization of the railroad cannot be attributed simply to a rote, superstitious anti-modernism; people actually did get mangled, killed, or traumatized. Nevertheless, the power of railroads to scare surely resulted in part from their ability to provide a concrete image for modern culture's sense of division and self-contradiction. Train accidents suggested, among other things, a split between human nature and the requirements of mechanization – the Staplehurst incident, like so many other rail disasters, had been the result of human error; a foreman had consulted the wrong timetable. Perhaps even more significantly, the railroad diminished the control and status of the individual -- the life of even a first-class traveller was in the hands of anonymous, unaccountable and possibly malevolent strangers – the deceitful and vaguely hostile proletarians who inhabit, for example, *Dracula*. Rail transportation remained a potent metaphor for the brutality and indifference of mechanized life well into the twentieth century, and arguably remains so in countries where rail travel is still a primary means of transportation. Some of its metaphorical potency, however, has been siphoned away by even more anxiety-inducing transportation technologies – not so much the individual-centered automobile (which has its own demonology), perhaps, as the airplane, which amplified the things which people found worrisome about trains: the relegation of control to an unknown operator and a perhaps fallible “system”; the potential not only for injury and death but, even worse, for dying as part of a mass catastrophe. We are ultimately dealing here with what Louis Sass has

called the “doublet” of modern subjectivity – its self-enhancing delusions of grandeur and its simultaneous perception of lost prestige and authority.

Electrification provided another fertile metaphor. As James Krasner has noted, with the advent of electric arc-lighting Victorians became almost instantaneously nostalgic for gas lamps, even though when gas lighting had been “state of the art” it too had been regarded as dehumanizing. Each successive development in urban lighting took on the burden of representing all that was scary about industrial, modern life, while outdated technologies became reconceived as friendly and cozy. This was in part because the newer technologies in fact did amplify and perfect the attributes which people found troubling: electric lighting *was* brighter and more uniform than gas lighting, and gas lighting in turn more closely resembled the old world of candlelight. At the same time, the root problem seems not to have been the concrete attributes of different kinds of lighting, but rather the ideological problem urban lighting in general represented: “like the railway,” Krasner observes, “it represented a dehumanizing, centrally regulated urban infrastructure.” The electrified city was one in which “power” – electric power, to be sure, but by extension power in general, was taken out of the home and placed in the hands of a central authority, or, as Robert Louis Stevenson envisaged, in the hands of an anonymous operator who could illuminate or darken all of London with the flick of a switch. Not only was lighting taken out of the individual’s hand, but it illuminated anybody and everybody, revealing one of the salient characteristics of the modern city: that it was full of strangers. A city of strangers is inevitably a paranoid city, and the widely-held Victorian belief that electrification spawned crime reflects this paranoia. Logically, an illuminated city would seem to be a safer city, but not if lighting is being

thought of primarily as a figure for subjective emotions of unease and apprehension; “crime,” in this context, works as an externalization of inner violence, as though every modern city had the potential to summon a Hyde.

In fact, in Stevenson’s tale, that is more or less what happens. The well-known passage which describes the eerily electrified nocturnal city inaugurates a sequence of events which culminates in a barely constrained demonstration of mob violence. Enfield’s feelings of unease predate the startling incident with Hyde and the child; he describes to Utterson the sight of the nocturnal city with its empty streets illuminated by public lighting – a phenomenon which puts him “in that state of mind when a man listens and listens and listens and begins to long for the sight of a policeman.” Since lighting diminishes, rather than increases, the possibility of crime – in a dark city, Hyde’s actions might have gone unobserved – Enfield’s distress is partly self-reflexive; as the only man about the streets, he feels like a criminal. After Hyde is chased down and surrounded, Enfield confronts something which is as disturbing, if not more, than the crime he has witnessed: his own murderous loathing. Along with the rest of the crowd (including with the doctor who arrives on the scene, a “cut-and-dry apothecary...about as emotional as a bagpipe”) Enfield feels an intense desire to kill Hyde. “I knew what was in his mind, just as he knew what was in mine; and killing being out of the question, we did the next best” – namely, extortion. Hyde is forcibly persuaded to turn over 100 pounds for the welfare of the traumatized child (who seems to have recovered). It is not clear which is ultimately more frightening: Hyde’s callous brutality, or the possibility of the crowd – ordinary English people, including two professional men – tearing him to pieces. Stevenson depicts the urban center as a kind of deconstructive abyss – a place where

meaning collapses, where the dualities and contradictions of the social realm reveal, and are seen as projections of, modernity's "split subject," and where the citizen has to negotiate between his internal violence and the violence without. (Lehan, 81).

The electrified city is also the unclean city. The color "yellow" occurs in fin-de-siecle literature with notable persistence, probably because the characters are being illuminated by incandescent lighting, and also because the color triggers multiple connotations of dirt and grime, filthy lucre, and the Orient. Within the Victorian context, it's a seedy, disreputable color. If the sight of an empty city lit up at night by mechanized lighting provides an Eliotic "objective correlative" for urban paranoia, the yellow light of gaslamps, well before Eliot's use of them in *Preludes*, had long been used to suggest to convey oddity, abnormality, morbidity, sexual deviance, or venality: the "blaze of yellow light" which surrounds Thaddeus Sholto in Doyle's "Sign of Four" also illuminates the "yellow and irregular teeth" as well as the pendulous lip and obtrusive baldness of this peculiar, exotic, yet ultimately benevolent character. Grease, fogs, puddles, mist, and the reflection of lamps on the (probably less than pristine) waters of the Thames are recurrent images of the era, forming part of a repertoire of images designed to communicate an unease characteristically associated with the crossing of thresholds – especially moral ones. Thus, as Dorian Gray sets out for an opium den, he encounters "ghastly" streetlamps in a dripping mist, along with some lonely brickfields "(“strange bottle-shaped kilns with their orange fan-like tongues of fire”), light-filled puddles and slimy pavements. All of this enticingly filthy, if at times overdone, imagery anticipates the exotica which will greet Dorian when he enters the den, with its chattering Malays.

drunken sailors, psychopaths and addicts, and its horrifyingly greasy, quivering decor – ribbed tin, fly-blown mirrors, muddy sawdust and torn curtains.

In Doyle, the city is squalid, polluted, or morbid in part to heighten the effect of Holmesian lucidity and reason, which penetrates the murk and sets things in order, yet exists in an oddly symbiotic relationship with the realm of dark ambiguities. While he happens to be on the side of the law, Holmes' purposes are ultimately self-gratifying: "I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession, or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world." Watson regularly points out or tries to deflate Holmes' egomaniacal tendencies, and one senses that were the stories being told by the genius detective himself, they would be unendurable. Yet Watson too has his moments of decadent melancholia:

...the day had been a dreary one, and a dense drizzly fog lay low upon the great city. Mud-colored clouds drooped sadly over the muddy streets. Down the Strand the lamps were but misty splotches of diffused light which threw a feeble circular glimmer upon the slimy pavement. The yellow glare from the shop-windows streamed out into the steamy, vaporous air and threw a murky, shifting radiance across the crowded thoroughfare. There was, to my mind, something eerie and ghostlike in the endless procession of faces...

Watson follows this tour-de-force with assurances to the reader that "I am not subject to impressions," thus alerting us to the "dyschromatopic" art whose effects are being

imitated here. and if we are not yet convinced that we, along with Watson, have entered the world of the morbid, he furthermore tells us that the “impressions” made him “nervous and depressed.” All this is in a chapter which concludes with a Spenglerian portrait of the city as throwing “monstrous tentacles” into the country. The subjectivity of the vision – the fact that it is more the projection of an emotion or psychic state onto the city than a study in reportorial objectivity – is indicated by the accumulation of adjectives, which subjugate the reality being described to the intense, and intensely morbid, emotions which it has apparently provoked in Dr. Watson. The yellow light – the light of fellowship and commerce – is both cozy and contaminated, and the Victorian sensibility that observes it is alternately confident and gloom-laden.

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CHAPTER TWO

DRACULA AND THE CRISIS OF SUBJECTIVITY

The revival of critical interest in Stoker's *Dracula*, following a period in which it was routinely dismissed as a mere "novel of sensation," has been in part because it resonates with a postmodern interest in polyvalency, deferral, epistemological instability, and decentering. A text consisting of other texts (letters, diary entries, newspaper clippings, ship's logs), it juxtaposes multiple protagonists and discourses (personal, public, rational, irrational, scientific, supernatural) and references a variety of contemporary topics, from the New Woman to the Irish Question. Its allusions could be described as existing in a metonymical relationship to each other; they represent manifestations or facets of an implied overall problem, personified in the text by the vampire, which is always looming yet hard to pin down. The nightmarish fantasy which Jonathan Harker enters when he crosses the threshold of Castle Dracula – freely and of his own accord, for this is a liberal nightmare – can be read in part as a crisis of language; the scrupulously conventional Harker, whose diary repeats the rote gestures and clichés of identity expression, finds himself confronted with, forced to bring into discourse, the unspeakable. More than that, he is faced with the possibility that identity is based on soluble distinctions. For example, the idea of "Englishness" comes under examination: as Alison Milbank has pointed out, it depends on a dichotomy between medieval and modern, Catholic and Protestant, yet at the same time on a contradictory notion of continuity across history.

Yet the problem of English identity is only one of many permutations -- displacements, as it were, of an overall sense of threat. The contemporary preoccupations – the political and cultural “hysterics” of 1897 – register the traces of mingled desire and apprehension as it is expressed in public discourse, the “authorized” and supposedly neutral languages of medical, psychiatric and sociological science. Lombroso’s criminology, like Nordau’s degeneration theory as well as fin-de-siecle approaches to treating “hysteria” shared a common goal: that of containing, by means of systematized language, the burden of abjection which haunted liberal society as a kind of alter ego to its amelioristic optimism. Abjection, that “vortex of summons and repulsion” with its “twisted braid of thoughts” (Kristeva, 9) and intense sensations of mingled loathing and desire, which in turn become acted out through illness, fever, retching and hysterical expostulation (Mina Harker: “unclean!”) culminates in ritualistic, quasi-religious demonstrations designed to reimpose coherence and affirm the rule of law.

While psychoanalytical theory tends to present abjection as though part of the universal, never-ending conflict between the symbolic order and its supplements, we can also read it historically, as the concretization of fears which originated in the sense of shifting boundaries which accompanied liberalism. The conflation of public and private danger allows political or historical phenomena to be transformed into threats to bodily integrity – piercing, penetration – while in turn the apprehensions of the private citizen become globalized, taking the form of a paranoid political discourse which links an open-ended set of phenomena together as facets of “evil.”

Dracula thus demands both psychological and historicist readings. Its

unprecedented popularity and long “shelf life” as a pop culture artifact is in part due to its capacity to access, and provide a representation of, the mixture of desire and revulsion experienced by the suspicious inhabitants of a modernizing urban metropolis, one characterized not only by proximity to strangers, but also by stratification and segregation along class lines – which themselves were under some pressure as the expanding middle class continued to fragment into its many layers. With the distinction between “upper class” and “aristocracy” blurred, and new claimants to middle class status continually arriving from below, the concept of “middle class” was becoming increasingly amorphous. The demographics of modern Britain, in other words, lent themselves to a perception of society as labyrinthine, multi-tiered, and haunted by dissolving identities. That perception was amplified by the inherent existential conflict within what, for the sake of simplicity, I will refer to as the bourgeois subject, even though we are really dealing with something more complicated and nebulous, like the “middle class” itself. Anxious about its illegitimacy, its lack of authorization (liberalism, after all *crowns itself*) the bourgeois subject is that which aspires to, pretends to, identity; and, for that reason, habitually indulges a nostalgia for history, for aristocracy, for the norms of a *Gemeinschaft* – in other words, for precisely that which liberalism overthrows in order to come into its ascendancy. At the same time, *Dracula*’s global reach, shown by its protagonist’s (and its villain’s) ability to cross continents, dramatizes the ambitions of that same white-collar, low-to-mid-level stratum which, lured by the promise of mastery in ‘dark and distant places,’ provided much of the manpower for colonial expansion.

This is why *Dracula* both is, and is not, an “aristocrat.” Franco Moretti, in “*Dracula and Capitalism*,” has challenged the unexamined assumption that Stoker’s

vampire is what he says he is, arguing instead that Dracula's nobility is a facade, concealing from a blindered middle-class readership what it cannot bear to look at: the "hidden violence" of capitalistic social structures, and monopoly capital's potential for insatiable, totalizing tyranny. (Moretti, 90-98). Dracula is an unusually joyless aristocrat, exemplifying not the conservative doctrine of enjoyment but rather the Protestant utilitarian virtues of "thrift" and "use." He provides Jonathan Harker with the bourgeois pleasures – an "excellent roast chicken," a bottle of "Old Tokay," and a cigar – but he himself does not sup, drink, or smoke. His main activity, bloodsucking, inevitably works as a metaphor for his interest in the acquisition of capital (gold coins) and real estate. Starting in the early scenes at Castle Dracula, the stage is being set for what will emerge as a quintessentially bourgeois, and hopelessly self-contradicting, discussion on the "good" versus "evil" uses of money.

Although Moretti overstates his case (it's true that Dracula "does not like showy clothes," the theatre, hunting, receptions and stately homes, but that's because he's a medieval warlord, not a regency aristocrat – we're dealing with a different kind of "nobility" here) he has, nevertheless, located a central problem in discussing the vampire's identity: we have no proof, other than Dracula's word, of his noble pedigree. Since so much of Dracula's initial conversation with Harker is a performance, one which conceals from Harker the crucial information concerning his predicament, the vampire is from the outset an unreliable narrator. Moreover, Dracula's account of himself is reaching us second-hand, by means of the journals written by a nervous, and increasingly deranged, Harker; we lack certainty that his memories are not mediated by "brain fever," or are themselves an elaborate coverup of some unmentionable transgression committed

during his foreign travels. By the end of the novel, we know that Dracula has another identity: that of an anti-Semitic caricature. As Judith Halberstam points out, “his peculiar physique, his parasitical desires, his aversion to the cross...his blood-sucking attacks, and his avaricious relation to money” resemble nineteenth-century stereotypes of the Jew. (Halberstam, 86-106) In other words, his pedigree becomes revealed as a fake, though of course his new, revealed identity is *also* a fake, reflecting the biases of the novel’s characters, author, and readers.

The source of Dracula’s nobility is not “authentic” Transylvanian history, but rather the imaginary aristocracy conjured up by middle-class nostalgia. In other words, when Dracula regales his guest with tales, he is providing Harker with exactly that which he craves, because Harker has that compensatory preoccupation with history, origins, status, and roots which masks the instability and lack of authorization, the haunting sense of counterfeitness and illegitimacy, which troubles middle-class subjectivity. What better way to engage the attentions of a petit-bourgeois solicitor, and, for that matter, a largely middle-class readership, than to brandish a coat-of-arms, a genealogy going back centuries, and a claim to power validated not by mere commerce (“filthy lucre”), but by heroic, historic actions? Nostalgia for aristocracy serves two intertwined purposes: it allows liberalism to rehash its foundational mythology of liberation from feudal tyranny, while at the same time indulging the bourgeoisie’s secret appetite for, and envy of, autocratic power. If Harker finally becomes Dracula, as he does in Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922), it is because that is what he has wanted to be all along. Harker desires not only the aristocrat’s lineage – his “legitimate” origins validated by centuries of history, but

also his privilege of enjoying “sotalic” delights of the sort described by Stoker’s acquaintance, the explorer Richard Burton.

Nor is Harker alone in his craving for autocracy; the envy of, and desire to attain, aristocratic power was a driving force in the ratcheting-up of colonial expansion which began in the 1870s. The allure of superiority over, and domination of, “a world of dark skins in remote places” (Hobsbawm, 70) figured most largely in the imaginations of new, upwardly mobile, entrants into the middle class – the white collar workers and clerks whose social status, in London, remained modest, but who could become, in a colonial setting, elevated to “gentlemen” and “masters.” The desire to kill Dracula and take his place as lord of the castle is implicit in Stoker’s narrative; Harker is both, in a sense, the baby who is brought in to feed the vampire daughters as well as Dracula’s own son, who he loves and who will kill and supplant him.

But Harker’s revelation of his desire is intolerable; it threatens to dismantle all the psychological, sexual, and sociopolitical categories on which his identity, and more generally speaking, Victorian middle-class identity, is built. What it reveals is a cognitive wrinkle at the core of liberal ideology – a persistent atavistic irrationalism, a craving for tyranny, embedded within liberalism and its democratic claims. It is also a linguistic problem: because discourse has no terms for it: Harker’s desires are “unspeakable,” even “unthinkable,” and hence have to be stated in the fearful terms of the obsessional imagination. Harker discovers that Dracula is not what he claims to be, that he has been reciting a script devised for Harker’s entertainment, and simultaneously, because of his own “burning desire,” Harker faces the possibility that he too is not who he claims to be. Discourse, attempting to accommodate the “unspeakable,” cracks open; Harker himself

slips from sanity into madness, the narrative makes a leap from the plausible into the fantastic. The zone which both reader and character enter is one where the “constructed” or “scripted” quality of identity becomes suddenly apparent, opening up a deconstructive abyss in which the collapse of one basic distinction – fantasy and reality – triggers a chain reaction, threatening other distinctions: English/foreign, modern/atavistic, Protestant/Catholic, heterosexual/homoerotic, sane/insane, normal/criminal. The fantasy is plausible, indeed in a sense is more plausible than realism, because it allegorizes the uncertainties, the mingled excitement and fear, sense of opportunity and sense of having transgressed, and ultimately the sense of fraudulence at the core of identity, which accompany the middle class in its assumption of power.

Middle-class mobility is the social force most powerfully at work in *Dracula*. The novel’s demographics offer a sampling of various points along the curve between “lower” or “recent” middle class and “upper bourgeoisie,” and one of the beneficial effects of Dracula’s arrival in England is to force an alliance between these potential adversaries. Harker’s name indicate humble origins, a tradesman’s genealogy; the stilted quality of his journal writing, its rote mimicry of Baedeker travel books, labored attempts at description, pious reminders to himself that he is about to be married, and his refusal to believe that he is engaged on anything other than a legitimate business mission, all demonstrate the extent to which he has not yet fully “arrived” at bourgeois status. He is not part of the “comfortable class,” which lives ensconced among textiles and “decorated solid objects.” over-indulges in food and wine, and permits itself to contemplate sexual adventure; rather, his social predicament dictates a need for self-regulation. The same is

true of his fiancée, Mina Murray; to laugh at her pious refusal of Lucy Westenra's sexual bravado is to overlook her positionality as a middle-class aspirant. Both Lucy and Mina have a thinly concealed Irish identity, but while Lucy's name identifies her as aristocratic (the Westenras were Irish barons in County Monaghan), Mina's maiden name is ordinary and plebeian – one of Ireland's most common. She is an assistant schoolmistress who envies her friend's leisure to walk by the sea and receive the attention of suitors. Lucy, meanwhile, chooses not the professional man, Seward (the novel's equivalent of the lonely workaholics who populate Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*), and not the Whitmanesque American, but rather the one who holds, or is soon to hold, an aristocratic title. Her trances, nerves, ailments, and psychosomatism "mark" her as belonging to a higher milieu; Mina's industriousness and pragmatism are of a piece with her moralism – both identify her not as comfortably established, but as part of the up-and-coming middle class.

Stoker's depiction of these industrious, slightly paranoid social climbers illustrates an alertness to middle class anxieties and the related need to observe decorum – an alertness probably resulting from his own tentative status as member of a privileged London cultural milieu. That identity depended almost totally on his role as *factotum* to Henry Irving, and Stoker's prodigious literary output, especially as Irving approached the end of his life, betrays a worried need to achieve independence and fend off financial and social disaster. The degree to which the social position of a middle-class Anglo-Irish literary intellectual remained tenuous was dramatically confirmed in 1895 by the trial, jailing, and exile of Stoker's fellow Trinity College alumnus, Oscar Wilde. Wilde had been punished less for "sodomy" per se than for, as it were, his upstart behavior in

challenging Queensbury – he was effectively “sent down” for having too daringly pushed the limits of his socially constructed positionality. It is entirely apropos that Queensbury’s challenge to Wilde included the word “posing,” as though that, just as much as the particular sexual transgression, was the important issue.

Whatever ambivalent feelings Stoker had about the misfortunes suffered by Wilde were concealed in torrents of strident language, couched in the cliches of muscular Christianity, designed perhaps to assure his English audience that Stoker was not like that other Irish transplant, Wilde, who refused to properly observe decorum and thus displayed terrible ingratitude for the “powers” and “opportunities” afforded him. Given that Stoker, in 1908, was becoming aware of his own financial straits, his essay on censorship was very likely a desperate public relations maneuver, designed to show that he, Bram Stoker, was not like that other Anglo-Irish fellow, the one who had shown such ingratitude for the opportunities given him. At the same time, though, it is the culmination of a long preoccupation with maintaining decorum, with setting boundaries that conceal homoerotic or other transgressive sexual behavior within discrete, carefully guarded cells of private interaction and knowledge. Stoker, in other words, was a kind of apostle of the closet. His admiration for Irving was from the beginning due in large part to a shared aesthetic of distance and dissimulation: “the function of art,” Stoker records in his *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving*, is to do and not to create – it is to make to seem, and not make to be, for to make to be is the Creator’s work.” Likewise, he idolized Whitman not for being explicit, but for being euphemistic – for drawing attention away from the physical act of “sodomy” and reconfiguring it as part of liberal-utopian discourse of manly love. In both his fiction and non-fiction, Stoker recurrently invokes

ideas of brotherliness, cooperation, and the common good – values which he opposes to the megalomania of the vampire, interested only in self-gratification; this distinction between social and sociopathic behavior figured not only into psychiatry's evolving category of the "pathological" but was also invoked by Max Nordau and others with reference to Wilde. The prevailing assessment of Wilde among his detractors was that he was an egotistical careerist who had "vamped" his way to the top. At the same time, Stoker could hardly have been unaware that his own idol, Irving, was a defender of Wilde who, as Barbara Belford has put it, "felt contempt for the members of his profession who were riding to Lord Queensbury's hounds" – in other words, those who participated in the sexual heterogeneity of the theatrical demimonde, yet hypocritically cast themselves as defenders of Christian morality. The contradictory, ambiguous position inhabited by Stoker in relation to the Wilde scandal is reflected in an unverifiable rumor, also cited by Belford, that Stoker sent money to the exiled Wilde and even visited him in Paris. Saccharine as it is, the apocryphal story reflects the element of social tension that was at work in the scandal, highlighting the degree to which Stoker's and Wilde's shared identity rendered them equally vulnerable to the vested interests represented by figures such as Queensbury. If Wilde is reflected in Stoker's text, it is arguably as Lucy Westenra – the more presumptuous of the two Irish friends, the one who is, as Wilde was, "led astray...by vanity and conceit," and thus victimized by an alluring, predatory enemy.

Stoker's erasure of Wilde's name from the record of guests entertained at the Lyceum suggests that he viewed himself as protector of the theater, defending it against the taint of sexual scandal, and placing himself as an intermediary – the bouncer, as it were, at the stage door – between the theater and the bourgeois audience. His

intermediary position, in turn, reflects his conception of the theater as a place of semblances, distinct from the real world and separated from it by theatrical conventions and devices. His insistence on maintaining convention – not only those of art, but also the moralistic conventions of Victorian normality – is thus intertwined with his personal identity, his role at the Lyceum, and in addition with his view of the theater as a site where morbid states can be safely, vicariously, and voyeuristically entertained. Stoker brings the same aesthetic stance to his novel. His sensorily charged writing contrives to mimic the devices and effects of the Irvingesque theater. In the vamping scenes, words such as “voluptuous” and “languorous” signal the variety of exotic experience which is occurring – a decadent, morbid kind (“voluptuous” is a term frequently used by Kraft-Ebing in his accounts of “lust-murder”) – while a technique of displacement transforms fellatio (in the scene with Mina) and anal penetration (in Harker’s case) into imaginary simulations – simulations which can be entertained by Stoker’s audience precisely because they are displaced. As with his alluring nobility, Dracula’s alluring eroticism is only a tease which briefly conceals his predatory virulence. Elsewhere, the text signals that the vampire is *not* erotic, but, by contrast, unpleasantly alien, predatory, and grotesque. As Harker discovers, opening the monster’s coffin, “[Dracula’s] cheeks were fuller, and the white skin seemed ruby-red underneath...the deep burning eyes seemed set amongst the swollen flesh, for the lids and pouches underneath were bloated. It seemed as if the whole awful creature were simply gorged with blood. He lay like a filthy leech, exhausted with his repletion.” In a way similar to the erasure of Dracula’s aristocracy becomes abruptly overwritten by anti-Semitic caricature, the depiction of vampire as

glutton erases the soft-porn languor of what we may somewhat too easily refer to as the “seduction scenes.”

A number of readings emphasize the sexiness of vamping and being vamped, the transgressive way in which he “compels Mina into the pleasure of vampiric appetite,” although in addition to sexy transgression the scene with Mina also suggests real-world equivalents which are much less “pleasurable”: serial killing, rape. In fact, it is a scene not of pleasure, at least not in the Barthesian sense, but one of gratification: the vampire, with the same utilitarian spirit that characterizes all of his doings, shows up, takes what he needs, and departs. The infantile nature of the proceedings is signalled by the odd, yet appropriate analogy which Seward, who is watching the scene, offers: “the attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten’s nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink.” Naturally, vamping is infantile, since, as Van Helsing reminds us, a vampire has a “big child-brain.” The reader is provided two versions of the episode in the Harker bedroom: the first is Seward’s, and, since Seward is the chief representative in the novel of the positivist disciplines that included sexology, his account strongly suggests Dracula’s relationship to the cannibals, necrophiliacs, fetishists, serial killers, child murderers, and other case studies detailed in Kraft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Dracula is a “wild beast” with a “blood-dripping mouth”; Mina’s nightdress is smeared with blood, as though she has been knifed, not bitten. Mina’s account, though also horrified, emphasizes the morbidity of the experience: it is an ambiguous betwixt-and-between state in which she feels “bewildered” and compliant: “strangely enough, I did not want to hinder him.” Mina’s description of herself as passive conflicts with Seward’s version, which has her resisting with all her strength: her arms are at “full tension.”

Both the psychopathological and the “morbid” connotations of the scene suggest that Stoker’s intention was to create a prose equivalent to the persuasive acting of Irving, whose specialty was the portrayal of murderers and sociopaths. Stoker’s admiration for Irving, and his choice of the Gothic as the preferred narrative model for his fiction, both illustrate his characteristic concern with the legitimate forms in which “morbid” emotions or experiences can be entertained – the same Stoker who would later rail against the artistic glorification of vice admired the way Irving, in a performance of Thomas Hood’s *The Dream of Eugene Aram*, seemed to identify with the killer he portrayed. (Milbank, 16). Stoker certainly had no qualms about providing lurid subject matter (especially in *Lair of the White Worm*, with its fevered, semi-pornographic descriptions of orifices and fissures), given the license afforded by the crucial distinction between “legitimate” and “vicious” art. That distinction, in turn, depended heavily on a secondary distinction between egotism and selflessness, which is also reflected in Stoker’s depiction of vamping as infantile needs-fulfillment. The vampire, like Kraft-Ebing’s “lust-murderers,” and, for that matter, like the Oscar Wilde depicted by unsympathetic writers such as Max Nordau, is a self-gratifying narcissist. The key issue which the sexological case studies emphasize is not sex but perversity. In other words, they are concerned with mapping behaviors as abnormal, beyond the pale, and most importantly inhuman, and in so doing, they implicitly define that which is human. They construct perverse or pathological sexuality as self-gratifying, rather than transactional; the perpetrator of monstrous sex enjoys a “voluptuous excitement” that feeds off the other participant’s agony. In terms of the ideological work it is doing, sexology, like

criminology and the emerging discipline of psychopathology, was attempting to address the quintessentially liberal problem of determining the parameters of identity.

As it invokes the spectre of monstrous sexual behaviors which limit and thus define the healthy and normal, *Dracula* parallels the message it is delivering about the “good” use of capital: “Think of the wonderful power of money! When can it not do when it is properly applied; and what might it do when basely used!” Like money, sex should not “have its end *in itself*, in its continuous accumulation.” We can see from this formulation both why *Dracula* is ultimately heterosexist and homophobic, but also why homophobia is itself part of the self-policing mechanisms of fin-de-siecle liberalism, which uses tales of extremism to illustrate the (exaggerated) dangers awaiting those who do not properly regulate their thoughts and behavior. Kraft-Ebing’s case studies, in addition to what they say they are (the legitimately “scientific” work of a positivist discipline), also function as cautionary tales. Their presence in the text of *Dracula* feeds an obsessional logic which determines that any transgression immediately translates into the worst possible transgression, bringing on itself the most draconian possible penalty – that of total ostracization, exile not merely from the old-fashioned *Gemeinschaft*, but from the liberal, global *polis*. The new, sexological category of perversion revokes not only social identity, but that of being human: a figure such as Marchalls Gilles De Ray, reported to have tortured and murdered over eight hundred children, is an “inhuman wretch,” a man-beast, a non-person. Yet the threat of Kraft-Ebingian monsters roaming through the modern metropolis cannot be taken entirely seriously: it works, rather, as a histrionic metaphor for the more plausible problems of economic, financial, and social failure that

haunted the middle class, and, in a broader sense, for the uncertainty which remained an endemic part of bourgeois identity, constituting the anxious flip side of liberal mobility.

Dracula's simultaneous invocation of transgression and policing, its equating of desire and fear, are related to the novel's most urgent concern: that of authentication. The novel (and its author) is obsessed with legitimizing its own morbid impulses, demonstrating that it is not pornographic, not homoerotic, and not part of the species of "vile" literature which Stoker was to attack in 1908. It thus depends on an optimistic blend of "muscular Christianity" and liberal ameliorism as the means of proving the health of the narrative, clearing it of possible charges of decadence. In this respect, *Dracula* is very much bound up with the personal mythology of its author. Stoker took pride in his athleticism, his butch physiognomy, and his powers of self-control, all of which demonstrated that he had overcome a mysterious childhood illness, though his vagueness about that illness suggests the extent to which it figured in a self-consciously created personal mythology. "Certainly till I was about seven years old I never knew what it was like to stand upright," Stoker asserts. "I was naturally thoughtful and the leisure of long illness gave opportunity for many thoughts which were fruitful according to their kind in later years." In fact, he had reason to pay tribute to his childhood invalidism, since many of the themes, images, and motifs of his fiction were drawn from folk tales told by his mother to her ill child.

What Stoker admired in Whitman was the poet's vigor, forthrightness and expansive masculinity – as opposed to morbidity and squalor, Whitman demonstrated cleanness and strength. Homoeroticism in Whitman became, or at least did for Stoker, channeled into discursive system that legitimized it. In a similar way, Stoker's

autobiographical mythology of his a triumph over sickliness provided a way to legitimize what could have been construed as an unmanly maternal attachment, a peculiar attachment to superstitious folk tales, and a persistent connection to backwards, non-Protestant Irish heritage. The maternal influence could be acknowledged if it resulted in a muscular Christian capable of winning a dozen athletic cups, not to mention brave acts of rescue --Stoker once dove off a ferry in order to save a would-be suicide. Stoker's strategy was successful insofar as it forced public discourse to construct him a certain way – his feats were recorded in newspapers, and he was praised as a gallant and an exemplary Christian. At the same time, the almost campy performativity of Stoker's heroism, his histrionic protestations of manly virtue, and his tendency to overload his fiction with a moralism that even his Victorian readers found heavy handed, all tended to subtly undercut his public persona. Stoker's construction of a vigorous self automatically calls into being its opposite – the shamed, abject self which is vulnerable to both physical and nervous disease. Moreover, culture, in viewing Stoker, senses this fact; in our collective imagining of Bram Stoker, the genial Irish gallant, popular with the ladies, is always accompanied by his alter ego, a pock-marked syphilitic whose final novel, *Lair of the White Worm*, reveals a mind no longer able to fend off insanity.

In a way similar to its use of sexology, *Dracula* invokes psychiatric discourse, equating demon possession with the new category of psychopathological lunacy (what Kraepelin, a few years later, would term *dementia praecox*) and in doing so both welcoming and subtly undermining positivism's claim to superior knowledge. Renfield's mannerisms, his penchant for wordplay, his riddles and enigmas, and his compulsions all

resemble the diagnosable symptoms of a psychiatric category, just as the over-detailed accounts of characters' physiognomies throughout the novel clearly references phrenology. As with monstrous sex, insanity is held out as the penalty befalling those who are weak-willed or lack self-control. Renfield's fate is linked to Harker's; it is the worst-case scenario, the bad thing that could have happened to Harker had the latter failed in his act of fortitude, or, perhaps more to the point, given in to the temptations of vampire sex. In diagnosing Renfield, Dr. Seward also cites the selfishness/unselfishness distinction which has figured in the novel's treatment of sex and money, but in a way which seems to offer the reverse message: "in selfish men caution is as secure an armor for their foes as for themselves," whereas the unselfish are likely to become "dangerous," especially if devotion to a duty or cause results in centrifugal unbalance. Seward's analysis seems, on first reading, to confirm the value of selfishness. Yet, as Van Helsing's later assessment of Dracula's character shows, selfishness and caution are attributes of the vampire, whereas the comradely band which chases him back to Transylvania are unselfishly, dangerously carried away through their devotion to a cause.

In short, something about Seward's analysis seems at odds with the novel's valorization of heroic action, as well as its invocation of the supernatural. As the chief representative in the text of the claims of fin-de-siecle positivism, Seward offers the promise of being able to contain abjection, monstrosity, and pathology within psychiatric/medical categories, but that promise is also implicitly threatened by the idea of vampires. Renfield shares with Lucy Westenra the role of being a "case study" proving the existence of Dracula to the unbelieving rationalist, Dr. Seward. On the one hand, the Renfield episodes provide a means for Stoker to introduce the terminology and

analytical tools of psychiatric discourse, thus legitimizing the modern project of recategorizing the supernatural according to positivistic terms. Example. On the other hand, though, despite his professional prowess, Seward hopelessly mismeasures his patient's affliction, failing to recognize its true source and contributing, finally, to Renfield's murder by Dracula. In Chapter 18, a now-lucid Renfield urgently requests release from confinement, as well he should, since the restraints of psychiatric incarceration make him powerless to flee Dracula. Yet Seward curtly refuses the request – a decision which not only results in Renfield's death, but contributes to Mina's vamping. Indeed, the cause of Seward's blindness is located within psychiatric discourse itself; the ease with which it diagnoses Renfield as schizophrenic forecloses the possibility of alternative explanations.

The novel's emphasis on madness accomplishes multiple objectives – which is to say that it provides a metaphor which links together a number of different problems. For one thing, the propensity of culture to become neurotic or morbidly insane was an often-cited element of turn-of-the-century degeneration theory, which in turn seemed to show the limits of "civilization", the point at which it self-destructs. At the same time, the prevalence of morbidity and madness signals that all the characters, from least sane (Renfield) to most sane (Seward) are caught in an epistemological crisis, the "deconstructive abyss" opened by the rupture of realism by Gothic fantasy. Renfield, lured by the appeal of a medieval primitive-Catholic order in which the master hands out favors to his preferred servants, has almost totally abandoned reason, individuality, and (as his insect-eating is meant to imply), humanity. His cautionary example is never far from Seward's mind; Seward's cognizance of the similarity between doctor and patient –

Renfield, after all, is an educated man, a professional – requires him to take refuge in the fortress of reason, thus accounting for his extreme reluctance to admit the existence of Dracula. Faced with empirical evidence of that which is outside empiricism, forced to acknowledge that which is supplemental to rational belief, Seward worries about losing his mind: “I sometimes think that we must all be mad and that we shall wake to sanity in strait-waistcoats.” Unable to countenance the idea of the supernatural, his opposition acts as a drag on the discovery of the true affliction that devouring Lucy Westenra; Van Helsing’s “monstrous ideas” are, according to Seward, “lurid...outrages on common sense” and possibly evidence that Van Helsing is insane. As Robert Mighall has noted, Seward never really accepts the vampire as supernatural being; his engagement with *Dracula* is heavily mediated by the psychiatric and criminological paradigms that contain “supernaturality” by categorizing it as “abnormality.” Indeed, as the band of anti-vampires solidifies, Dracula’s mysteriousness, and with it his formidable power to allure and terrify, undergoes some diminishment as Van Helsing seeks to recategorize him as Lombroso’s criminal-primitive. This recategorization is part of the negotiations required in order for the alliance to be formed – that is, in order for Van Helsing to enlist the doubting Seward, he must construct Dracula in a way that Seward can accept.

Seward falls under Lacan’s description of the obsessional: as Elisabeth Bronfen explains, “he uses language and knowledge in an effort to exclude radical Otherness, lest it allow the lacks and gaps, which make him anxious, to appear...” Van Helsing, in contrast to Seward, believes in the reality of the supernatural; he is a “scientist” whose special area is located precisely in those zones banished by positivism. In other words, from a strictly positivist point of view, there is something fundamentally

oxymoronic about the idea of a “vampire expert.” But his openness to the supernatural means that Van Helsing, like Lacan’s hysteric, “recognizes a lack or void in the symbolic order of laws... preserves a fluid boundary to the unconscious,” and acknowledges a “radical Otherness” beyond the social.

When Van Helsing meets Mina for the first time (a pivotal moment in the narrative, for it marks the juncture where the Lucy storyline and the Jonathan/Mina storyline merge), she has an emotional collapse: “I suppose I was hysterical,” she writes gingerly in her journal. “I threw myself on my knees and held up my hands to him and implored him to make my husband well again.” Besides the intriguing sexual dynamics here (Harker may be suffering from impotence as a result of his brain fever; we can easily imagine a slippage of language in which Mina’s utterance turns into a request to Van Helsing to “make a husband” for her; in other words, revive Jonathan’s libido or, perhaps, supplant him as Mina’s husband), the episode not only marks Mina as hysterical, but in addition shows that Van Helsing does not repress hysteria. He understands; he becomes histrionic himself, delivering a lengthy, overwrought discourse on good women and hope. Henceforth, Van Helsing will mediate between the imperatives of obsession (that of bringing desire and fear into an ordered system) and hysteria (that of insisting on the supplement). The task of opening up and maintaining a stream of information between the “symbolic” and “social” and its supplements is given to Mina. If her maiden name (Murray) reveals her Irish origins, her surname hints at an unsuspected identity as occult priestess; as Alison Milbank has pointed out, Stoker may well have named her for an acquaintance, the medium (and wife of the French philosopher) Mina Bergson, who was involved with the Order of the Golden Dawn. Given that Stoker’s Transylvania

allegorizes the “Irish struggle towards modernity from a Gothic past,” it would not be surprising, within the terms of Stoker’s narrative, that a woman of Irish descent would be gifted with the powers of a medium. Mina’s trances, which she enters on Van Helsing’s instructions, would make no “sense” to a Seward; yet they prove essential to the novel’s resolution. Thus, while *Dracula* subsumes its supernatural content under the dominance of positivist-inspired diagnostic methodologies (the vampire becomes recast as a subject of criminological study, an example of mental affliction or a sex pervert), it continues to illicitly subvert its own obsessionality through the intercession of Mina.

In fact, the subverting of reason lends itself to what becomes, in effect, a dichotomy between “morbid” and “healthy” madness; as with money and sex, there appear to be “good uses” of madness. While critics (for example, Kilgour, 1998) have tended to dismiss the novel’s ending as a simplistic, predictable reinscription of heterosexist norms, Stoker’s portrayal of comradely solidarity anticipates the idea of *elan vital* proposed by Bergson, as well as the antirationalism which figured strongly in the imaginations of the young British men who, less than two decades after *Dracula*’s publication, went enthusiastically off to war. The need to somehow reclaim, within the parameters of modernity, what was perceived as the vigor of pre-Enlightenment medievalism is justified in the novel, as in many fin-de-siecle discourses, by the twinned ideas of devolution and reverse colonization. By posing the threat that a robust savage might gain reproductive advantage over men who are overrefined and civilized, *Dracula* provides a way to legitimize the transformation of its middle-class professionals into heroic warriors. The concern with legitimacy signals, as it does throughout the text, the

novel's core preoccupation with inauthenticity or counterfeitness, which in turn, as I have been arguing, reveal its social context.

There is much about Dracula for Harker and companions to envy. As Stephen Arata has shown, the novel's construction of vampires as virile and robust draws substantially from a prevalent myth of the fertile, vigorous primitive, whose fertile seed and insatiable libido poses a demographic threat to more refined peoples. Dracula embarks on a fantasized invasion of Britain; he literally transplants Transylvanian earth onto British soil, and his promise to conquer and possess "all your [British] women" is not so much an erotic challenge as a threat to cut off the supply of English nationhood at its reproductive level. If "all the women" have been taken by Dracula, there can be no baby Quinceys. Among the British men, by contrast, culture's repression of sexuality threatens to become a stifling of reproductive potential. This is demonstrated by Lucy's courtship, a prolonged, decorous affair in which the four rivals' desires are constrained by rules of gentlemanly etiquette. The whole elaborate ritual is suddenly, startlingly negated by the arrival on the scene of Dracula, who wastes no time getting what he wants; he simply invades Lucy's bedroom. The construction of the vampire as ruthless predator hints at an unacknowledged desire – each of the novel's men, despite the displays of gallantry, secretly wishes to forcibly possess Lucy.

And, of course, they get their wish. But at the same time, the equation of sexual aggression, fertility, foreignness and vigor allows this desire to be reformulated as defense against a monstrous threat. Aided by Van Helsing, the men embark on a crude assertion of male primacy. But this display of mastery, an only slightly displaced enactment of gang rape, is justified, essentially, as an act on behalf of the nation against

the danger of reverse colonization. The equation of primitivity with vigor, in other words, while providing a simulation of cultural self-examination, does the ideological work of justifying measures which cannot really be logically accommodated within the framework of modern liberalism. This is a conflict which affects liberalism at its most public and ideological, as well as at its most private levels; it bears on a number of fin-de-siecle geopolitical problems, including the revival of international protectionism during an era of ostensible liberalization, the autocratic methods used by colonial agents of a bourgeois democracy, and the inherent contradiction between the ideology of markets and that of the nation state. At a broader theoretical level, it amounts to what has sometimes been referred to as the *Gemeinschaft/Geschellschaft* split – the inherent conflict between liberalism’s subversion of norm-based “communities,” and its simultaneous need to invoke norms as a bulwark against anarchy.

The aura of inefficacy which hangs over the novel’s male protagonists provides a basis for the militaristic drilling which they undergo with the guidance of Van Helsing, who uses shock tactics to dislodge them from their habitual scrupulosity. He makes offensive jokes, utters the “unthinkable,” and exposes them to a world of primal necessity against which bourgeois decorum is an inadequate stay. Under the influence of their new tutor, the idealistic young men become acclimated to the idea of violence. Just as Harker has been tempted by Dracula’s vampire daughters, Lucy’s suitors come close to being seduced by her undead alter-ego. But with Van Helsing there to direct them, the men are able to disassociate themselves from emotional vulnerability and moral scruple. In a demonstration of masculine toughness as well as soldierly solidarity, they put to rest the sexual challenge occasioned by Dracula’s presence in England. In this way, they enact

Nordau's call for assertive action as the cure for lassitude, morbidity and perversion; this, in turn is echoed by Stoker in 1908 when he demands "militant action...against such movements of reaction and decadence as are made by the defenders of indecency of thought and action. Finally, such militancy is legitimized by the scientific discourses which the novel invokes, which reconstitute the enemy as inhuman and thus outside the domain of ethical behavior, paralleling the way a deterministic pseudo-Darwinism was used to do ideology's job of justifying the subjugation of the "primitive."

The stage is thus set for a purging ritual, which temporarily dispels the crisis, settles the text's proliferating contradictions, and allows entertaining anxiety to morph into closure. It is precisely because of the generative energy of the crisis, its power to produce more and more conflicts, that the act of authorial closure is so intensely violent, an act of overkill. No matter how histrionic the gesture, the potential for cultural boundaries to self-deconstruct can never be fully contained, which is why Stoker's novel promises further installments – sequels and permutations provided not only by Stoker, but by twentieth century popular culture.

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CHAPTER THREE

ELIOT AND THE GOTHIC

A partially obscured reference in its final section connects T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* with *Dracula*: in lines 381-83, "bats with baby faces" are seen crawling "head downward down a blackened wall." This image occurs within an extended passage of Gothic scene-setting *a la* Ann Radcliffe, complete with empty, wind-haunted chapels, swinging doors, and voices singing out of cisterns, not to mention an unnamed woman drawing her "long black hair out tight." The context for the passage is the arrival of the questing knight, Sir Perceval (the English equivalent of Wagner's Parsifal) at the Chapel Perilous. Having successfully overcome tribulations, including the temptations of a fallen woman, the knight must now defeat the dark enemy that resides in the chapel, at which point harmony will be restored to the kingdom.

Although Eliot downplayed his debt to the Gothic, it is not surprising that the genre's imagery should make an appearance in the poem. One of *The Waste Land's* central images is that of a cadaver, opened up to reveal inner putrefaction; that cadaver, however, is not fully dead, and one of the poem's aims will be to definitively purge it. As Gold has suggested, the cadaver image suggests a characteristic turn-of-the-century interest in medical science (Gold, 521) – an interest which allies Eliot with earlier writers such as Stevenson and Poe, the latter being a major influence. Jewell Spears Brooker notes, for instance, (Spears, 431) that Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," with its razor-wielding orangutan, provided both the weapon and devolutionary theme of Eliot's

"Sweeney Erect" (1920). Despite its famous absence of a unified consciousness, a gaze is nevertheless present as the poem unfolds its labyrinthine city, the gaze perhaps of a modernist descendant of the morbidly restless 19th century detective. At the same time, Eliot's walking cadaver also recalls the Gothic monster, come to avenge itself on guilty liberalism. The Gothic's traditional themes – corruption of the estate and its usurpation by the rapacious city were also those of Eliot, as well as his fellow modernist Pound, who transformed the story into a parable of usurious capitalism.

In English literature, art and architecture, Gothic motifs also signal the effort to reconcile modern and medieval conceptions of national identity, which for the Victorians depended both on historical continuity as well as Britain's status as a modern industrial and commercial power. Much 19th century intellectual debate, from Ruskin through Morris, and more pertinently for Eliot, Chesterton, reacted in one way or another to the "disintegration of Christendom, the decay of a common belief and a common culture." (Frye, 20) with science, commerce and secularism held to blame, despite the role these latter phenomena played in building Britain's global hegemony. English social criticism had, in the allegedly unified cultural field of the Middle Ages, a potent ideal against which modern secularity could be measured. As the bobsled image at the start of *The Waste Land* suggests, Eliot too subscribed to what Northrop Frye calls the "down we went" theory; in other words, that of an accelerated decline from the implied medieval apex.

Thus, the apocalyptic mood of the immediate postwar period, particularly from 1919-1921, was backed up by an already potent and long-standing cultural theory of devolution. The catastrophe of the Great War seemed to provide material evidence of

such devolution, as it also provided concrete images of the "darkling plain" which had triggered Matthew Arnold's melancholy back in 1867. John Maynard Keynes, in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, wrote that the world picture had dissolved, that what had been taken as the normal, natural and permanent foundations of Western political life had been revealed as artifices, which were now being dismantled. (Levenson, 3). In his diatribe against the Paris Peace summit, Keynes portrayed Wilson, Clemenceau and Lloyd George as masks or puppets, or – to use Eliot's phrase, hollow men. Their hollowness was the symptom of receding power, which leaves in its wake a Darwinian landscape in which "fearful selves are left to wander," at the mercy of predatory forces answerable to no God or monarch. As historically specific as these conditions were, they also lent themselves to a broader narrative of the Dead Father – which is partly what allowed Eliot to formulate his "big picture" theory of the post-Renaissance disassociation of sensibility and the abandonment of the organic Christian society.

Similarly, the emphasis on the fragmentation of vision, the breaking up of the unified field, and the dissolution of the subject into a mass of conflicting impressions and impulses represents an extension of the 19th century city of nerves, via Pater's reconception of subjective identity as a bundle of unstable, flickering and inconsistent sensations. As Lehan suggests, an "affinity of mind" likewise exists between Eliot and Max Nordau, even though Nordau was a virtuoso of anti-modernist reaction, while Eliot was one of the inaugurators of twentieth century literary modernism – not only because of a mutual interest in visual misperception and incoherence as symptomatic of city life, but also because both writers invoked turn-of-the-century psychiatric theories in explaining

this phenomenon; Nordau attributed modern degeneration to "an exhausted central nervous system," and Eliot would have agreed. But whereas Nordau wrote from the perspective of an outsider looking in, Eliot tended to depict himself as a patient – that is, a victim of these processes, here to testify about them – in need of a cure. *The Waste Land* suggests the breakdown of psychological coherence not only with its use of multiplicitous imagery, but also in the impenetrability of its symbolism. As Ruth Nevo suggests, while symbols proliferate, they do not properly symbolize; they "turn themselves inside out, diffuse their meanings, and collapse back into disarticulated images." (Nevo, 98)

Fin-de-siecle degeneration theory reproduced, and updated, earlier Gothic narratives of the corrupt and fraudulent city, producing what might be called the "global Gothic," and it is within this framework that I read Eliot's s preoccupation with boundary erasures. Eliot's characteristic emotional stance in his early poetry was fascinated horror, a blend of desire and revulsion, and this, along with his medievalism and anti-rationalism, his penchant for disguises and shifting identities, and his preoccupation with revealed inner depravity ally him with the "Gothic economies" of the *fin-de-siecle*. Eliot projects onto modern cityscapes the labyrinth-like quality, the visual disorientation, and the intense emotions of revulsion and fascination which the Gothic exploited. He offers a nocturnal vision which is the antithesis to the sunny new day promised by liberalism's sanitized utopias; against the signature technical, economic and administrative accomplishments of the Victorian and Edwardian eras – the sanitation and hygiene systems, the public works which dispelled London's formerly omnipresent stench of feces and animal matter – he portrays a city which is both unreal and unclean, full of pipes and

sewers and excrement, populated by filthy humans, and weighed down by a perennial soiled fog. Meanwhile, Eliot's citation of sources such as Frazier and his allusions to the occult, the Tarot and astrology signal his loyalty to anti-rationalism, that is, to the dreamed or unconscious life that flows alongside reason.

The Wasteland is a region of thresholds crossed, prohibitions broken and boundaries made permeable, all during the absence or impotence of the diseased symbolic authority. In this respect, the poem amplifies a theme already present in earlier satires, with their "guardians of the faith" sternly regarding the moral debasement of modern folk. For Carole Seymour-Jones, at the root of Eliot's need to conceive behavior in terms of prohibition and transgression was his inability either to accept or renounce his homoerotic desires; she attributes his crisis of 1914, the inaugural moment in his poetic career, to his recognition of the erotic nature of his friendship with Jean Verdenal.

(Seymour-Jones, 61) There are advantages to seeing Eliot this way; it relieves some of the stuffiness that has grown up around him and promises the excitement of a secret life.

James Miller (1977) and others have made credible arguments that *The Waste Land* adds up to an oblique, fragmentary elegy for Verdenal, who was killed in the Dardanelles; in this reading, the poem becomes a sort of modernist *In Memoriam*, while its inventive strategies of collage, historical and literary reference, and polyvocality are revealed as elaborate ruses, which both conceal and reveal the poem's hidden, personal content.

Eliot's marriage to Vivienne can be seen as the rash decision of a young man anxious to demonstrate his normality, and later as a useful alibi. But a gay Eliot also presents problems, not least of which is that the evidence is inconclusive. Eliot's avowal of love for the choreographer Massine, his penchant for intense male friendships, rumored

liaisons with sailors and "rough trade," and Vivienne's apparent comparison of herself to Constance Wilde, are suggestive yet elusive, especially since Eliot – especially in the years leading up to his marital breakup – became such a virtuoso of compartmentalization and dissimulation. It could also be hypothesized that Eliot's relationships with men were platonic and "brotherly", thus to him safe, whereas he women were to him sexual and thus "dangerous" (the word he used to describe Katherine Mansfield). While critics seeking to provide a materialist debunking of Eliot's transcendental pretensions have been inclined to see his religious pilgrimage as an lofty cover-up of his sexual dilemma, Eliot's inhibitions were arguably formed by his puritanical religious upbringing – thus, in a sense, it was his religion that structured his sexual dilemma, not the other way around. Eliot's father believed sex was evil and once declared that a cure for syphilis – which he regarded as God's punishment – should never be found, since otherwise society might have to castrate its children in order to protect their purity (Gordon, 39). Given this background, it is not so surprising that Eliot regarded sex as a dangerous transgression, likely to provoke disgust and abjection. Arguably, for Eliot the most important thing about sex was its ability to become monstrous.

The Gothic provides a means for engaging abjection, allowing us both to see and not see the "basic anomalies that we both desire and dread in our quest for selfhood in a world of simulations." (Hogle, 222). Especially for critics writing in the materialist, Marxist tradition, the genre's reemergence at the fin-de-siecle registered the suppressed emotions of shame, guilt, and disgust which roiled along beneath the public ideology of

an expansionary capitalism. In his early development as a poet, Eliot learned from his influences among the French *poets maudits* to seek out abjection both among the stagnantly affluent Bostonian society of which he was a part, and among the immigrants and poor who populated the city's slums. Inevitably, this project became conflated with the exposure of personal abjection. Eliot is at once the chronicler of shame as it manifests itself in the heavily charged caesuras and erasures of upper class conversation, the urban explorer making forays into the Darwinian world of the underclass, and the "hollow man" who senses himself as the end-product, the waste of consumer culture.

For Eliot, the world is "soiled and degraded," an assessment which is hard to separate from projection of anxiety about his own "soiled" nature. The result is a disgusted renunciation of what might be called the messy, fleshly, reproductive aspects of life, or as Eliot put it, "birth, copulation, and death...the facts when you come to brass tacks." Such revulsion translates into Eliot's anti-bourgeois anti-rationalism, his hostility towards commerce, production, currency, and exchange – a stance which he inherited from poets such as Laforgue, about whom Eliot wrote "I do not think I have come across any other writer who has meant so much to me." Laforgue explicitly allied himself with the vampire's attributes: opposition to life, hatred of sunlight, and cultivation of lunar, nocturnal, "undead" states. When describing existence, Laforgue used tactile, viscous images; he described life as "lukewarm." Unlike nonexistence, which is solid and cold, existence tends towards warmth and liquidity. Laforgue blames the sun for promoting "teeming existence," renounces lyricism, comparing it to "blood clots," and replaces the traditional lyrical subject, love, with existential nausea. (None of this prevented Laforgue

from becoming happily married to an English schoolteacher). Eliot drew both directly and obliquely from Laforgue in his own portraits of teasing, self-absorbed, nymphomaniacal women; his condescension towards typists and their young men carbuncular is directed not simply at their class status or morals, but more generally at their participation in the “normal” sexual economy – the “brass tacks” of life – which brings people together to copulate, produces babies or aborts them if necessary, and subsumes the ideal to the material. Commerce, liberalism, secularity and class mobility combine to interpellate Eliot’s subject as a quasi-aristocratic freak, as someone outside of “life,” and thus the stance of condescension and superciliousness which Eliot’s protagonists defensively adopt is always at the same time being undermined by a sense of monstrosity and abjection.

The sense of monstrosity, of being anomalous, and the associated feelings of shame and disgust, figure in a recurrent type of narrative concerning the construction of the self – a narrative which, for Kristeva, reiterates our dim memories of the birthing process, during which the infant is partly inside and partly outside the mother, partly alive and partly not-alive. The liminal, anomalous, either-or, “betwixt-and-between” state which Kristeva describes bears obvious resemblance to the predicament of being a vampire. Out of a combination of literary influence, personal predilection and autobiography, Eliot evolved a narrative of the religious quest which imitates Kristeva’s liminal, abject non-self as it makes a bid for subjecthood under the aegis of symbolic and social coherence, in the process creating monsters in order to throw fear and loathing (and untoward desire) off onto them. As he constructed himself both as a literary and public

figure, and as a pilgrim engaged in a Dantescan journey of travel through purgatory towards redemption, Eliot would mimic the process by which the coherently formed and self-protected, “armored” subject emerges, while never becoming released completely from its simultaneous longing for and revulsion against an original state of heterogeneity. Misogyny and anti-Semitism figure in Eliot’s take on this narrative of subject-construction, as they do in other retellings, such as Wagner’s version of the *Parsifal* story – to transform himself into a Christian knight, Parsifal must renounce the Jewish temptress, Kundry. In Eliot’s own myth of the religious quest, he is both the aspiring Parsifal as well as the wounded King who Parsifal revives. Jews and tempting women figure in Eliot as those who must be renounced in order for coherence (as a knight of the Empire and advocate of a “Christian society”) to be achieved.

Eliot’s invocation of the Parsifal myth tends to support the argument that anti-Semitism is integral to his poetry, rather than a peripheral tic. His Jewish caricatures – for example, Bleistein, with his saggy, bent knees and outturned palms – are monstrous figures out of degeneration theory; Eliot summons these abject characters in order to cast them off as part of the journey towards grace. By shifting the burden of disgust onto the dehumanized Jew, Eliot prepares the way for the reconstituted subject’s ascension into personal, social, and spiritual completion; Burkank is destined to transcend his self-degradation, while the Jew is condemned to remain stuck “underneath the lot,” a devolved human spawned in an estmanet. The Jew becomes a literary device meant to stand for the entire range of debased phenomena – money, excrement, promiscuous sexuality, morbidity, devolution – which the poem seeks to purge. Its visual

and stylistic cacophony echoes Maurras' theories about the "Hebraic noise" that replaced classical depth. Furthermore, despite Eliot's admiration for Stravinsky, and his wish to see himself as an equivalently modern figure, the strongest musical influence in *The Wasteland* is Wagner. As Daniel McGee points out; Eliot imitates the "leitmotif" idea and pays homage to Wagner by citing the song of the Rhinemaidens, whose gold, in the Ring cycle, is stolen by the dwarf Alberich, a thinly disguised anti-Semitic figure whose role is that of installing a sinister new order based on industrial slavery and the profit motive. (McGee, 515). The three lectures gave at the University of Virginia in 1933, later collected as *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy*, would represent Eliot's own, somewhat more muted equivalent to Wagner's screed on Judaism and music; Eliot later withdrew the lectures, saying that he was "sick in soul" when he wrote them, but the way he conceived of a reconstituted agrarian Christian utopia remained implicitly defined against a secular urbanism populated by "too many free-thinking Jews."

Defilement and bestiality, in Eliot's poems, are associated with Jews and women and expressed in scatological imagery, as in the original draft of "The Fire Sermon," which opens with Fresca, a (probably) Jewish woman slipping "softly to the needful stool/ Where the pathetic tale of Richardson / Eases her labour till the deed is done." Another poem, "Sweeney Among the Nightingales." (1920) concludes with "liquid siftings" raining down on Agamemnon's shroud." Gabrielle McIntire, meanwhile, sees the downy arms of the women in "Prufrock" as a subtler manifestation of the tension between erotic attraction and repulsion that figures more crudely and virulently in Eliot's informally circulated, scatological verses about King Bolo and his hairy queen. (McIntire,

297). As more has come to light about Eliot's obscene verse (collected in Ricks, *IMH*) it has become clearer that Eliot did not consistently see them as sophomoric jokes; he attempted to get some of the poems printed in Wyndham Lewis' *Blast*, and seems at other times to have been consciously attempting to emulate the bawdy elements in Joyce' *Ulysses*, which he admired. Taken together, the Bolo and Colombo cycles amount to a kind of alternative poetic *oeuvre*, a pornographic epic existing side by side with the canonical poetry and criticism that made Eliot the elder statesman of English letters; yet because the canonical poetry is often also scatological, the dividing line between Eliot's acknowledged and unacknowledged *oeuvre* remains porous. It's as though his unofficial verse allowed Eliot access to a blasphemous and scatological energy which then filtered into his canonical work.

According to Gabrielle McIntire, the Bolo poems' obsession with buggering, huge penises, arseholes and so on demonstrate that "Eliot was both very much in the closet about his queer fascinations, and halfway out of the closet because of his willingness to play with homoerotic titillation among the members of this coterie." (McIntire, 292) Then again, sodomy is a favorite topic in much popular ribald verse of the "friggin' in the riggin'" variety, some of which Eliot either imitated or simply copied outright, and queering Eliot in this way risks overlooking the homophobic, self-consciously macho intentions underlying the banter which Eliot shared with Pound and others in his "coterie." Excrement and sodomy preoccupied male modernists in general, including the later Yeats as well as the Pound of the *Hell Cantos* (XIV.XV) which, with their jock straps and oozing anuses, approach the infantilism of the Bolo poems, though with more stridency than ribaldry, and also echo the obsessively scatological language of Italian

futurism – which Pound is said to have envied. As Cinzia Blum suggests, the corporeal excretions that recur in Marinetti's fantasies of virile rebirth are part of a "rhetoric of abjection" that also includes images of putrescence, wetness, decomposition, floods, vortices, and engulfment. In Kristevan terms, such a sphere "constructs the sphere where the body's confines are established and overcome and where the drama of individual identity and power are played out." (Blum, 56-57). Soldier-mythologies, meanwhile, urge the besieged male subject to armor himself and to achieve self-differentiation by "mashing others to the pulp he himself threatens to become" (Theleweit, 2:273). For Jessica Benjamin, male panic about impending dissolution, along with habitually militaristic, misogynistic and anti-Semitic responses, is triggered by the Dead Father; that is, the decline of authority reveals the "vulnerable core of male individuality, the failure of recognition which previously wore the cloak of power, responsibility and family honor." (Benjamin, 181).

Eliot's oscillation between transgression and regulation, his self-reflexive exploration of a perilously unstable self-identity, and his attitude towards his own sexuality – at once repressive and provocative, depending on his audience – suggest that the discursive position he inhabited, at least up until his conversion, was one of unresolved contradiction. This discursive problem, which factored into his philosophical studies as well as into his decision to choose poetry over philosophy, was bound up with his psychological situation, which was neurasthenic.

Lacan's influential formulation pairs the obsessional with the hysteric, contrasting the inflexible, male-encoded obsessional, who seeks to use language and knowledge as a

way of armoring the ego, preserving maternal fantasies, and containing indeterminacies (such as death), with the responsive, protean hysteric, who “accepts her division, feeds off her lack of a fixed identity, and preserves a fluid boundary to the unconscious.” Lacan’s dichotomy presents some important problems. For one thing, although Lacan flatters the hysteric, he nevertheless reiterates a prevalent cultural stereotyping of the hysteric as female. Vivien Haigh-Wood’s doctors diagnosed her, and condescended towards her, in terms that were not far removed from Lacan’s -- they viewed her as overly susceptible to her “protean” sexuality, which overrode her moral constraints. Lacan does not completely escape the authoritarian deployment of language and knowledge which he ascribes to the obsessional.

Nevertheless, the distinction remains useful, not least because positionalities are performed as much as defined and imposed, and Vivienne, interpellated by culture as hysterical, warmed to the role. Eliot, who sometimes referred to her as “the river girl” (he first encountered her punting on the Thames), was apparently attracted to her lack of constraint, her volubility, and her sexual forwardness. According to Lyndall Gordon, she was a “pliant dancer.” Following the marriage, these attributes soon transmuted into the deliriums, panic attacks, and psychosomatic illnesses which were at once Vivienne’s ongoing “problem” and a means, sometimes her only means, of bidding for the attention of Eliot, Eliot’s family, and Bloomsbury.

If Vivienne is Lacan’s hysteric, then does Eliot emerge as the impenetrable obsessional, who “clings to the death-like fixity of mastery and certain knowledge?” Eliot’s poem “Hysteria,” written just prior to meeting and marrying Vivienne Haigh-Wood, so closely anticipates his marital situation as to suggest that, in some sense, Eliot

found what he went looking for. The poem is written from the point of view of an embarrassed male speaker, the companion of a woman who is laughing histrionically in a tea garden. The ostensible topic is the neurotic, unhinged woman. But the speaker of the poem also seems neurotic in his almost desperate wish to stop the shaking of her breasts and recollect "the fragments of the afternoon;" notably, his engagement with the woman is not one of empathy or even sympathy, but rather one dominated by an obsessional dread of violated decorum. This is a speaker who perceives teeth as "stars with a talent for squad drill" or feels "drawn in by short gasps...lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles" – images which, in their lurid hyperbole, seem less the products of imagination than of neurotic fancy.

"Prufrock," meanwhile, dramatizes a fussy, fastidious mindset; Prufrock is peculiarly aware of his thinning hair and his rolled up trousers -- common details which others would dismiss or simply laugh off. Discourse always involves a selection process, and "normal" discourse would simply choose not to select these details, whereas for Prufrock they take on existential significance, becoming markers of horror with life, the insult of being mortal. Likewise, the "Preludes" are distinguished not only by the use of concrete detail, but just as importantly by the morbidly fixated gaze which is trained upon detail – a woman clasping her "yellow soles...in the palms of both soiled hands," the "smell of steaks in passageways," and "short square fingers stuffing pipes." It is a gaze which is both prudish and pornographic, just as fastidiousness in Eliot is characteristically twinned with an urge towards over-the-top luridness and blasphemy -- an impulse which links him to Pound in the Hell Cantos ("usurers squeezing crab lice...waving a condom full of black-beetles...a scrupulously clean table-napkin tucked under his penis," etc.) as

well as to the Gothic -- as in this example from Bram Stoker, in which beautiful Lady Arabella turns out to be a monstrous worm whose underground habitat leads "into the very bowels of the earth" and stinks of "war hospitals, of slaughter houses, the refuse of dissecting rooms... the sourness of chemical waste and poisonous effluvium of the bilge of a water-logged ship whereon a multitude of rats had been drowned."

An early reader of "Prufrock" termed it "absolutely insane," the morbid ravings of a madman, and, as Gordon has suggested, these startled reactions may have been more accurate than Pound's praise of its social satire – a depiction which shifts emphasis away from the poem's articulation of a psychological predicament. An earlier, but related poem, "The Love Song of Saint Sebastian," communicates macabre, sadomasochistic fantasies of strangulation and self-flagellation – which add an interesting context to Prufrock's worry that women would recoil should he "tell them all." Neurotic fantasy, moreover, is allied in these early poems with obsessional doubt – perhaps the defining feature of Eliot's career as a philosophy student. Eliot found it impossible to accept the conditional truth made possible by, and delimited by, a line of philosophical inquiry, seeking instead a vaguely discernible transcendence that inhabit the flux between divergent viewpoints. This refusal of partial truths validated by "mere intellect" contributed to his interest in anti-rationalist philosophies such as Bergson's and Hulme's, and also factored into his decision to abandon philosophy for poetry. The result of Eliot's attempts to transcend partial knowledge was a dissertation so contradictory and labyrinthine as to be "almost unreadable."

Neurosis in Eliot is thus not only a psychological predicament, but also an intellectual and philosophical problem – a problem of consciousness – as well as the basis

for a linguistic practice. In this way, Eliot participated in the linking of mental and psychological abnormality with the creative imagination, a project which reiterates a larger, self-reflexive preoccupation on the part of (bourgeois, positivist, colonialist) civilization with its own inherent neurotic and psychopathological tendencies. Huysmans had lauded Poe as a kind of mental explorer, investigating (like Rimbaud) the effects of alcohol-induced “cerebral pathology” on the imagination, and the critic Jules Clarite had written (in 1885) that mental overstimulation and depression formed a “deep and inexhaustible mine” to be exploited by writers. Arthur Symons, a major early influence on Eliot, had derided Stendhal as the first in literature who had “substituted the brain for the heart,” and a “sterile sort of brain at that, “set at great distance from the heart, whose rhythm is too faint to disturb it.” Louis A. Sass, in his recent *Madness and Modernism*, has proposed an organic connection between the communicative strategies of modernist art and the cognitive derailments of psychosis, identifying a common source in the “Kantian doublet” which simultaneously enthrones and disenfranchises the individual creates a paradox which is at the root of the schizophrenic breakdown in communication. A number of modernist texts, from *Finnegan’s Wake* to the poems of H.D. and the diaries of Vaslav Nijinsky, stake out positions somewhere between controlled experiment and non-volitional breakdown of language and consciousness. Eliot, who was – to his relief – diagnosed as neurasthenic rather than psychotic, would have agreed with many of Sass’ claims, for he too saw an unresolvable split at the heart of Romantic individualism: “escape from the world of fact, and devotion to brute fact.”

The attempt by culture to diagnose its own disorder presents unavoidable problems, since it entails looking in at a discourse from outside while still inhabiting it.

The link between creativity and mental pathology, and the broader discourse which associates civilization and neurosis, readily connect with degeneration theory, a recurrent cultural “hystery” which invokes the fear that the “civilized” world is at the point of self-dissolution as well as colonization by “primitive” forces located both outside and within. As obsessional neurosis entered psychiatric discourse, it was constructed in terms that invoked degeneration. Kraepelin (1898), known for his study of *dementia praecox*, a.k.a. schizophrenia, diagnosed obsessional neurosis as a product of mental inferiority. For Kraepelin, the disease afflicted those with a “weak mind” that was unable to control, and was subsequently overpowered by, irresistible urges, feelings and impulses. His contemporary, Esquirol, likewise associated the disease with weakness, calling it a disorder of will. For Zieber (1895), the key problem was a conflict between falsely connected ideas and the patient’s reason, which comprehends the error but cannot stop the mind from making it. Eliot’s doctor, Vittoz, advocated mastery through reason and willpower.

Such constructions were part of a larger conflation of neurosis, the “primitive,” deviant or excessive sexuality, and race which figured prominently in turn-of-the-century psychiatric discourse. There were repeated, and influential attempts (detailed by Sander Gilman and others) to essentialize neurosis as a product of race (Jewish) and sex (female) – a fact which adds a context to Eliot’s anti-Semitism and misogyny, suggesting an attempt to purge psychological anguish by casting off Jews and women. At the same time. Eliot glamorized neurosis as the gateway to vision, and, as a modernist *enfant terrible*, he took part in the anti-rationalist celebration of the primitive. A fervent admirer of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, he reportedly attacked hecklers with his umbrella at a

Covent Garden performance in 1921. In Eliot, as in liberal discourse, primitivity, antirationalism, and neurosis were facets of the same phenomenon.

But the celebration of the primitive, the looking backwards towards pre-Renaissance Europe, and the continual suggestion of primal and barbaric impulses roiling along just below the surface of social behavior and legitimized speech are not purely “modern” gestures. They represent extensions of what Judith Halberstam has termed “Gothic economies,” which graft supernatural and atavistic attributes onto the material images of capitalism, thus constructing a monster out of those supplemental traits which capitalism can neither tolerate nor definitively banish. Eliot’s projection of nightmarish fantasy onto the modern metropolis, participates in this economy of signification, which, starting in the late nineteenth century, overspilled the boundaries of a specific genre (the Gothic) into a variety of literary modes both high and low, as well as into non-literary discourses such as criminology and psychiatry. Eliot himself was aware of his link to the Gothic; he incorporated it into his public persona.

Attending Bloomsbury parties, Eliot rubbed green makeup on his face to create the effect of a walking corpse, often adding eye shadow and rouge for further emphasis. In doing so, he performed a role which others had already ascribed to him: bloodless, lifeless, a stiff. Ottoline Morrell referred to him as “The Undertaker.” Virginia Woolf wrote: “if you are anaemic, as Tom is, there is glory in blood.”

The pose of vampire was not only a self-deprecating acknowledgement of his wooden public persona. It also projected his dual identity as predator and victim in a monstrous marriage. Insecure and virginal, Eliot had played Jonathan Harker to Vivienne

Haigh-Wood's vampire bride, at first fascinated by her New Woman bravado ("I confess to taking great pleasure in seeing women smoke," he wrote), but later repelled by her emotionality, her "female smell," and her menstrual blood. Yet if Eliot felt preyed on, he was also conscious of his role as predator. He had more or less deliberately "vamped" Vivienne, capitalizing on her for the utilitarian purpose of divesting himself of virginity, proving himself up to the macho standards implied in his banter with other male writers, and in so doing selling Vivienne a bill of fraudulent goods – the real live husband she thought she was getting turned out to be, in her own words, "impossible to stimulate." Eliot's well-known assessment of the marriage, that it produced "the state of mind out of which came *The Waste Land*" acknowledges another kind of vamping: that of life for art. Vivienne, by his own account, provided the sense of "reality" which Eliot had found lacking in the life of an academic philosopher; likewise, the suffering the marriage brought about provided the concrete "objective correlative" which had been missing from his earlier attempts to communicate a vision of suffering and redemption.

In addition, Eliot's self-Gothicization provided an apt metaphor for the overall condition of disguise, pretense, and simulation which characterized Eliot's life during the period that culminated in his conversion (1927). The vampire, after all, is potent because of his ability not only to invade mass culture, but to conceal himself within its system of representations; there is, as Moretti and others have suggested, no core of "authentic" identity beneath all the guises. Eliot would have had good reason to empathize with this figure, since he himself had come to inhabit and elaborate system of compartmentalizations and concealments, requiring him to alternately pass himself off as an English bank clerk and dutiful husband, and, as a peripheral member of Bloomsbury.

as an avant-garde *enfant terrible*. His avant-garde milieu was predominantly bisexual, his "normal" life governed by draconian anti-homosexual strictures that had been in place since the trial of Oscar Wilde. Yet Eliot often relished, rather than sought to be liberated from, this compartmentalization and closeting, and resisted attempts (by Pound and other well-wishers) to "free" him from strictures which he himself had imposed.

As an atavistic remnant of pre-Enlightenment, feudal Europe, the vampire is also allied with anti-liberalism and nostalgia for aristocracy – gestures which define themselves as subversive renunciations of capitalism, but at the same time are part of its systems of meaning production. Eliot, like the Marxist critic Franco Moretti, believed that "the old horror of the feudal world, the will of the individual master" was less dreadful than the limitless, insatiable, totalizing drive to possess which drives capitalism. But in assuming this position of antagonism towards commerce, and towards its mechanisms of currency, sexuality, and identity-construction, Eliot concealed his own bourgeois origins (he was the son of a brick manufacturer), assuming instead a simulated nobility affiliated with an imaginary monarchic, agrarian and Christian order. He thus participated in the "counterfeiting" which figures so importantly in the bourgeoisie's "always theatrical quest for selfhood in a world of simulations." Eliot extends the middle-class problem of identity which, as Baudrillard proposed, drives the creation of simulacra. In his many guises – simulated Englishman, as fake heterosexual, as advocate of an imaginary agrarian Christianity – he participated in this strategy for the production of meaning. Even as he commented, often derisively, on a modern way of life dominated and regulated by artificially created signs, he was himself deeply involved in their manufacture. Moreover, Eliot demonstrated a pragmatic, even calculating willingness to

commodify his own life, as well as those of his friends and lovers. His work exploits autobiography in precisely the opportunistic, market-savvy way later taken up by “confessional” writers such as Robert Lowell and Anne Sexton. As close friends and acquaintances such as Emily Hale, Mary Trevelyan and John Hayward discovered, Eliot did not hesitate to discard his “material” once he had exhausted its use.

By 1922, Eliot’s strategies of dissimulation had found their aesthetic equivalent in the cinematic montages of *The Waste Land*, a poem whose totalizing scope and promiscuity of allusion conceals the incoherence at its core. Eliot provides notes, ostensibly aids in interpretation, which are actually red herrings; instead of revealing “the meaning”, they draw the reader into further avenues of signification, association, and fabrication. A poem famously lacking a narrator, *The Waste Land* defines itself by generating an abundance of produced forms, “emptied-out recastings of figures from the past” such as Elizabeth and Leicester. Eliot’s original title for the poem, “He Do The Police in Different Voices,” as well as his claim that the women in the poem are all one woman in different guises, suggests copies of copies, simulations generating other simulations, always implying the existence of an original mould which, however, turns out to be elusive. Eliot later derided his most celebrated poem as “rhythmical grumbling,” a long poem about nothing

The process of reanimating the past, summoning partially apparent, hollowed-out figures, whose plausibility depends not on authenticity but on their ability to reference chains of connotation and association, allows the middle class subject to indulge a desire for autocratic power -- as well as for a “natural,” that is to say, authorized, hierarchical.

and stable order of meaning and identity which the autocrat dominates. This desire, simultaneously the logical extrapolation of middle class will-to-power and an outgrowth of the bourgeoisie's endemic uncertainty about identity, is evidenced not only by Eliot but by his modernist fellow travellers, including Pound (who perceived apparitions from the medieval past which he claimed were more "real" than real life) Pound, the author of faulty, idiosyncratic translations from troubadour poetry, and the "inventor of Chinese poetry in English," was, like Eliot, engaged in the marketing of false antiquities, as well as an outspoken pretender to imperial power (the cultural elite, Pound promised, were the "dictators of the future").

Gothic counterfeiting not only provides a venue for imperial dreams, but it also allows the manufacture of effigies who will absorb the burden of abjection: in other words, *The Waste Land's* carnival of hemophiliac aristocrats, proletarians, neurotic wives, abortionists, seduced secretaries, real estate clerks, merchants and immigrants. None of this is very kind to its chosen targets, who are not even granted authenticity; they exist not as real characters but, again, as simulated types, part of the process of "throwing off" anomalies, incoherencies, and self-contradictions in preparation for assuming a clean identity. Coherence begins to be recovered in *The Waste Land* immediately after Phlebas the Phoenician, is ritually drowned. As Gordon notes, the *Four Quartets* find their genesis in the last section of *The Waste Land*, where the Fisher King is found and revived, and with him the concentrated, coherent, exalted dialect of Eliot's later poetry -- an unbroken language, but one which requires opposite quantities -- filth, defilement and fragmentation -- in order to be brought into being.

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CHAPTER FOUR

VAMPIRE CULTURE: GIBSON AND THE GLOBAL AESTHETIC

That the U.S. underwent a cultural tectonic shift beginning in the 1980s is debatable; it remained a capitalist economic system governed by the two-party system and buttressed by the Pentagon. Nevertheless, it is plausible to argue that, within the overall equilibrium of American economic, political and cultural life, a paradigm shift did occur. For Paul Johnson, the conservative historian, the election of Reagan in 1980 initiated a turning away from the "collectivism" of the post-New Deal era, which in his view had reached its apex in the Great Society of the mid-1960s. In 1990, Elaine Showalter published *Sexual Anarchy*, which argued that culture in the late twentieth century was being shaped by a backlash against the sexual liberalism of the previous two decades. There were parallels, she suggested, between the British 1880s and 1990s and the corresponding period in America a century later. (Showalter, 4) The ideologues who felt at home in the Reagan administration favored, in education, a turn away from progressivism and back towards the anti-modern humanism which, according to Corelli Barnett, dominated British education at the end of the 19th century (Barnett, 201-233); while Gertrud Himmelfarb (and husband Irving Kristol) pointed Americans towards her own field of subject, the Victorian era, as though a purer, unbroken liberalism slept there, waiting to be revived. At the same time, the neoconservative movement also counted T.S. Eliot, in his role as social critic and advocate of a Christian society, among its mentors.

The political shift, as G. Scott Thomas has suggested, largely reflected the increasing dominance of the suburb and the comparative decline in the political influence of the city. Urban centers had been losing momentum throughout the postwar era; presidents Eisenhower through Reagan (and later Clinton) had pitched their message to middle-class constituencies that inhabited the peripheral suburb, the suburbanized town, and later the "technoburb." Viewing the cultural transformation in the eighties in terms of the shift in power from urban centers to decentralized suburbia helps account for some of the contradictory elements within the shift – the fact that it was in some ways a conservative reaction, but in other ways a foray into increased liberalization, especially in economic terms. While the goals of cultural conservatives have been a return to a "kinder, gentler nation" with a code of virtues and a sense of national unity, that agenda was undercut in some ways, and reinforced in others, by the market economics (and ethics) of globalism, the mechanisms of which tended to conflict with neoconservative moral, social or religious agenda, causing the latter to seem more like a rhetorical shell covering the inhumane or disorienting facets of the New Economy -- or, at best, a wishful, nostalgic fantasy of dime-store America, projecting the romanticized way in which suburbanites wanted to see themselves.

Another important factor in the cultural paradigm shift was the perception that the U.S. was in decline; it was this spectre which not only made it possible for "latter-day Nordaus like Allan Bloom, William Bennett, or John Silber to preach against a new American dusk," (Showalter, 1) but also for their ideas to be validated and circulated, to acquire currency. As Kirby Farrell and others have argued, the driving issues included the

need to escape the stigma of failure in the Vietnam war and the stigma of cultural malaise, and economic stagnation. A hit song released by the Kinks at the peak of the oil crisis summed up the perceived situation: "Captain America" was down on its knees, pleading for help from the "nations all over the world." As the blame was placed on national complacency, cultural decadence, a bloated welfare state, and, more generally on a "collectivist" ethos, the stage was set for an ideological turn. As a result, if an "eighties" culture can be said to exist, that culture is defined by contrast to the preceding era.

The perception of a national decline -- whether accurate or an example of cultural hysteria -- provided a justification for national rearmoring, both literally and metaphorically. That rearmoring took place simultaneously with a new emphasis on technology: the personal computer made its debut in 1977 with the Apple II-E; IBM entered the market in 1981, and in 1982 Time Magazine named the computer Man of the Year. In pop culture, meanwhile, "new wave" emphasized coolness (over the fleshly warmth of seventies disco culture), impersonality, the glamour of machines, gadgets and leather, and a predatory brand of eroticism. The new wave sound was mechanized and deliberately affectless or emotionally attenuated. It came into existence partly because synthesizers and other electronic musical equipment had left the rarefied world of the laboratory or university institute and were now accessible to consumers, much as personal computers were appearing on desktops. In other words, the development of affordable consumer technology had an at times nearly revolutionary effect on culture. The proliferation of tech meshed with the general cultural emphasis on armoring: machines were perceived as an antidote to the dangerous slackness of America in decline;

technology, furthermore, was to be the spearhead of American resurgence. It was, in other words, a fetish.

Technological transformation also had a symbiotic relationship to politics: the Reagan candidacy, in 1980, was highly innovative in its use of media. Going beyond simply packaging the candidate to look good on television, it created a full-fledged product with a repertoire of images (cowboys, flags, small town America) and accompanying soundbites. Presidents Carter, Nixon, Johnson and Kennedy had all also made exploitation of the media integral to their campaign strategies, but the Reagan campaign was arguably the first to offer a totalizing experience, one that utilized the full panoply of sensory and emotional stimulation found in advertising. One byproduct of this approach to politics was that Reagan also came across as synthetic – a characteristic which Doonesbury cartoonist Garry Trudeau seized on when he conflated Reagan with media construct Max Headroom. Reagan's official biographer would later confide that he found his subject impenetrable. Yet his packaged quality was part of his appeal; it fit in with a more general emphasis on the constructed, the cosmetic, and the mediated.

Despite the Reaganite (and England, the Thatcherite) bid to reinstate a Victorian-style system of virtues and proprieties as a means of regulating the volatile economic and cultural forces which liberalization unleashed, the net effect of globalization was not conservative. Apart from rhetoric, actual policy was directed at building the intermodal transport network, expanding ports and gateways, deregulating industries and removing various "protections," transforming labor in the name of mobility and flexibility, and arming for technical, economic and military dominance. (Leach, 31-57). For its boosters,

globalization was a force capable of accomplishing a "Future Perfect" by subverting not only the nation-state but also traditional cultures and even the family. (Anthony Giddens, cited in Ferguson, 292). Such optimism depended on the underlying assumption that business promoted peace, whereas "tradition," especially as reflected in nationalist or tribalist agendas, was the source of war. Whether or not this dichotomy was sustainable, it provided a powerful justification for transnationalism. In 1990, meanwhile, an internal IBM document alleged that "for business purposes, the boundaries that separate one nation from another are no more real than the equator. They are merely convenient demarcations of ethnic, linguistic and cultural entities. They do not define business requirements or consumer trends."

Globalism's strength, however, lay not only in its subversion of the past, but also in its promise to repackage memory, continuity and identity within its own terms; thus, in popular music, the borrowing and resampling of cultural traditions, from Voix Bulgares to Ladysmith Black Mambazo, a process mirrored in fashion and advertising. Even such oppositional stances as environmentalism, feminism, or multiculturalism could be co-opted by marketing – hence the discomfort felt by Donna Haraway and others with "the evacuation of histories of domination and resistance" by an evasive liberalism. (Claudia Castaneda, quoted in Haraway, 264). Morley and Robbins, meanwhile see transnational Benneton culture as harboring Kristevan melancholy and abjection: melancholy as a result of mourning for lost or vacated identities; abjection as a byproduct of boundary erasures and threats to the subject's integrity. For Morley and Robbins, as for "panic theorists" of the eighties, the besieged subject may respond by adopting paranoid, schizophrenic or maniacal stances: deciding it is under attack by the network; locating

itself outside the world of systems and unable to communicate with it; or fabricating a reality in which has power over the network. Or the subject may stave off existential unease through obsessive-compulsive workaholism, the "one disorder society can least afford not to have."

Meyrowitz (1985), updating McLuhan (1964) analyzes the proliferation of media in terms of its effect on private and public spaces and on social boundaries. While architecture regulates flow through, and access to, spaces. electronic media are capable of bypassing or penetrating architectural barriers; consequently they reorder social life, unveiling the private and making the public intimate ("up close and personal") – a process which reached an apex (or nadir) of sorts with the Clinton-Lewinsky scandals. McLuhan had already proposed in the sixties that the net effect was to undermine hierarchies, while Ong (1982) saw an equivalent disruption of the linearity and syntactical imperatives of writing – a point further taken up by Sven Birkerts, who predicts a "flattening of historical perspectives" as the network's perpetual present supplants the archival depth of the library. (Birkerts, 203-213). For Meyerowitz, a "cool" or neutral emotional stance becomes the cultural default because of a need to adapt to simultaneously distressing and exciting information – Britney Spears followed by slaughter. In such an environment, every moment there are "things happening someplace that would upset us, that would involve us, that would drain our energies and engage our feelings." Turning on and tuning in also requires us to "drop out" emotionally; the "passionate, overpowering loves, the massive unrelenting hates, the dramatic curses and flowery praises" of previous eras are neither feasible nor desirable in a global context.

"Biz here was the constant subliminal hum, and death the accepted punishment for laziness, carelessness, lack of grace..." Gibson writes of his fictional cybernetic metropolis, the Sprawl. Gibson's fiction incorporated much of the New Wave aesthetic (metal, leather) and the genre he helped create, cyberpunk, combined high tech with a Social Darwinist, survival-of-the-toughest ethos which was in keeping with the overall mood of its era. In his introduction to Gibson's short story collection, *Burning Chrome*, Bruce Sterling described seventies culture as a morass and suggested that its pop culture genres were also stuck in the doldrums. Popular genres, he insisted, "catch cold when society sneezes. If science fiction in the late seventies was confused, self-involved and stale, it was scarcely a cause for wonder." Gibson's stories appeared in *Omni* magazine, which itself was conceived (by *Penthouse's* Bob Guccione) as a "new breed" of science journalism, challenging staid institutions such as *Scientific American* and mixing science fact with fiction and promoting, among other things, the emergent scientific discourses of genetic engineering and cybernetics. Gibson was credited with inventing the term cyberspace – "a graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system" -- as well as anticipating a number of specific technologies, including anti-hacker and anti-viral security systems.

Most significantly, at a time when all possible worlds seemed to have been opened and explored, Gibson created a new terrain for discovery, conquest and exploration. As David Brande notes, Gibson's fictional invention – the console cowboy – transfers "the ideological work done by the myth of the old West onto the infinite country of cyberspace--from the cowboy on his horse to the hacker at his deck." (Brande, 531) The idea that cyberspace was a realm, of sorts, played an instrumental role in boosting its

appeal. From the point of view of the science fiction writer, information technology was the miracle that saved the genre, because physical, technological and financial limits had robbed fantasies of outer space conquest or intergalactic travel of much of their plausibility. Gibson's invented future was not only sharp and mean, but also credible. And it was credible in no small part because it extrapolated from the zeitgeist of the eighties.

Gibson's universe is competitive and amoral – or, as Richard Lehan puts it, "humans simply are their environment." They are not only simply their environment; they are also simply their technology. After Gibson's protagonist in *Neuromancer*, has been forcibly separated from computer technology (by means of brain surgery carried out by a customer he has swindled), he lacks identity, a problem brought home by the fact that he sleeps in a "coffin." The reduction of self to a set of functions and devices links Gibson's storytelling to a phenomenon that was occurring around the same time that his career took off: the development of video games, which themselves had been anticipated by role-playing adventure games of the late seventies. (Computers would provide a physical "home" for these forms of interaction). Unexpectedly, despite its highly visual and tactile quality, Gibson's fiction did not translate well into cinema: movies made from his stories "Johnny Mnemonic" and "New Rose Hotel" both flopped; a film of *Neuromancer* has yet to be released, and Gibson himself experienced only mixed success as a screenwriter.

In *Neuromancer* and the Sprawl stories in *Burning Chrome*, Gibson combined hi-tech with *noir* sensibility and attitudes; his characters are lowlifes, schemers, drug addicts, petty criminals and killers. Divested of humanist illusions, their lives are

stripped down to their "game" (hacking, theft, killing). When not on the job, they are stimulating themselves artificially; they are creatures capable of adapting and surviving in an environment where profit, desire gratification and competitiveness are the dominant issues. Admirers saw this "low-life" slant as a welcome contrast to the heroics of traditional science fiction – its white-coated scientists and muscular protagonists – and the mean-streets ambience of his fiction proved appealing to a demographic which was predominantly suburban, computer-literate, adolescent and male. Not only did the computer-literate readership that adhered to Gibsonian cyberspace grow up on middle class cul-de-sacs, but when it grew up it often went to work in the "nerdistans" – that is, self-contained suburban concentrations of techies and other high-skill workers who provided the backbone of the information economy. On the occasions when this generation proclaimed itself as a political or social force, it often did so in terms that were libertarian – stressing independence from social or governmental institutions and advocating individuality in terms that were alternatively utopian, contrarian and pragmatic.

In an afterword written more than a decade after its original publication, Gibson describes his original draft of what became *Neuromancer* as "some five single-spaced pages of fairly hysterical free association, steamy character description, and almost nothing in the way of, well, narrative." (276). In fact, Gibson's finished products still show an ambiguous interest in the demands of "story" in the traditional sense. Or, more accurately, they provide the shell of a plot but not what is usually taken to be the purpose of plot: to reveal the story's meaning. If Gibson's protagonist, Case, has any overall aim, it is simply to remain "jacked in" to cyberspace, a fact which makes *Neuromancer* self-

referential. There is no grand mission – no saving the world, making it a better place, or surviving the assault of a monstrous enemy. Nor are the relationships between the characters intimate enough to allow true psychological conflict. Case and his female partner, Molly, part casually at the novel's end, without so much as a goodbye (she leaves him a cursory note), and Gibson coolly informs us that "he never saw her again."

In Gibson, narrative structures function less as revelation of meaning than as organizing devices – gateways which the story passes through, barriers that direct movement. When crises occur, they tend to be episodic: police from a regulatory agency appear, out to stop the novel's twin Artificial Intelligences from combining into a new super-entity, but they are quickly dispatched by a computer-controlled miniature aircraft. Much is made at the outset about some enzymes which Case's employers have planted into his brain, but so many other episodes intervene that before long the enzymes have been forgotten, and Gibson too seems almost to lose sight of them, intersposing a cursory resolution towards the end of the novel. What propels the story along, absent the traditional sources of tension, is often the jazzy, aesthetically and allusively loaded quality of Gibson's sentences, which again and again reiterate the blending of machinery with the fetishizing of race and culture – that is, their transformation into cosmetic objects which can then evoke states of enchantment.

One type of cybernetic enchantment is "flow," described by pop psychologist Mikhail Csikszentmihalyi as a pleasurable, dreamy receptivity – a creative state of mind accessible by artists, musicians and web surfers. The web's defining feature was the hyperlink, which freed the reader (surfer) from the hierarchical logic of traditional writing. Technically speaking, what actually happened on the internet was a flow of data

(bits, bytes) between machines – servers, routers. Thus, flow became a primary metaphor for describing the cybernetic experience; at the same time, it was also useful for describing the political economy of globalization. The specific transformations which corporations enacted starting in the late seventies – mass hirings followed by mass layoffs, the increased use of part-time workers and temps, the relocation of plants overseas – were all designed to make the workforce less static and to generate more flexibility and flow. Such an environment was not only flexible, it was also at all times uncertain; and uncertainty brought with it a repertoire of emotional attitudes and stances: the "cool of the post-industrial work situation." (Rosenthal). The desired tactic for survival – psychological as well as emotional – was to go with the flow.

With its highly visual and tactile prose – writing as commodity, so to speak – its multiple locations which not only spanned the globe but extended urban structures into space, and its labyrinthine architectures, provided an aesthetic counterpart to these processes. "I knew that it was slick and essentially hollow and that I would have to fill it up with meaning." Gibson has said of cyberspace, though arguably what he filled it up with was not so much meaning as clutter. The real-time clutter of the new economy, meanwhile, was being facilitated through intermodal transport, while the development of suburban sprawl, fostered by the real estate boom, in turn heightened the sense of decentering which Frederic Jameson attributes to postmodernity. For Jameson, "cyberspace" is interpretable as a strategy for representing "the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects." As Tony Myers notes, not only do spatial motifs abound in *Neuromancer*, but its topographical content mirrors the form of the novel itself: "the

postmodern building's impediments to entry and its rebarbative exterior are realized formally by the novel's opening, as it were, in media res. Furthermore, the reader's difficulty in coordinating her/himself in the reading space of *Neuromancer* is exacerbated by the genuinely forbidding nomenclature and technical innovations it portrays. The novel is, in effect, a total space that repels the cyberspace ingénue," so that the reader who gains entry to and successfully navigates its maze of neologisms and references becomes a member of an elite. (Myers, 896). That cyberspace is a privileged domain is emphasized by the problem which sets the story in motion: Case's desire to be admitted back in into it. Indeed, a common feature shared by many of Gibson's stories and novels is that his characters are typically climbers – people wishing to gain entrance into a "good life" of tech, money and drugs.

At the same time, cybernetic disorientation updates a view of the "dark city" found also in film noir and in nineteenth century popular fiction, both of which Gibson explicitly references. (In "Johnny Mnemonic," the precursor to *Neuromancer*, Gibson's characters speak in a campy, Chandleresque dialect; *Neuromancer* alludes to Poe). As notes, the "impenetrable fogs of Dickens and the dark and dizzying streets of Conrad." In Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories there is

a recurrent image of the penetration by an isolated rational intelligence of a dark area of crime which is to be found in the otherwise (for specific physical reasons, as in the London fogs, but also for social reasons, in that teeming, mazelike, often alien area) impenetrable city. This figure has persisted in the urban "private eye" (as it happens, an exact idiom for the basic position in consciousness) in cities without the fogs. (42)

Bukatman writes that "[t]he new urban space is directionless--coordinates are literally *valueless* when all directions lead to more of the same," but modernist urban space was also directionless and valueless, at least according to Eliot, and the hysteria that grips the heroic band in Stoker's *Dracula* is driven by apprehension of a moral abyss. What qualifies Gibson as "postmodern" is the refusal or abrogation of the urge to reimpose order. In Gibson, what readers get is neither the return of hierarchical meaning, nor Eliot's fragments shored against ruin, but rather the shell of meaning – virtual meaning, meaning as commodity. *Neuromancer*, like its successor novels, wraps up with a grandiose dream sequence in which the presence of divinity is strongly intimated, but the very fact that these bids for transcendence are fantasies generated through the help of technology converts them simply into more high-voltage versions of aesthetic and sensory experience – upgrades, as it were.

The idea of synthetically generating and manipulating the elements of identity or meaning carries over into Gibson's treatment of race, which in the *Sprawl* is purchaseable and exchangeable, a product of cosmetics technology. Now fully integrated into the market, it retains its fetishistic allure, while becoming divested of its Fascism, which Gibson invokes in the form of "race rock" and its superstar, Christian White, departs from the political arena and returns to the realm of the aesthetic, where (according to Walter Benjamin, it originated). The defusing of race through technology was a preoccupation of the eighties, which, it could be suggested, produced an actual Gibsonesque cyborg in the form of pop culture icon Michael Jackson. The "King of Pop" underwent a transformation of race and gender, becoming an androgynous, ambiguously sexual figure

of indefinite ethnicity whose song lyrics consisted almost entirely of global-utopian clichés about togetherness, harmony, and saving the children. At the same time, Jackson's apparent fascination with totalitarian, even overtly fascist, imagery was expressed in music videos in which he starred alternately as a Pied Piper figure and as a leader endowed with mystical and mesmerizing power.

Gibson's interest in the re-construction of race as a commodity within a technology economy also anticipated *Time* magazine's 1993 attempt to synthesize an ideal woman for the global era using computer imaging. In a reversal of late nineteenth century uses of composite photography to identify supposed criminal or primitive types, *Time* attempted to digitally generate the product of liberal multiculturalism, a blend of ethnic and racial identities: 15% Anglo-Saxon, 17.5% Middle Eastern, 17.5% African, 7.5% Asian, 35% Southern European and 7.5% Hispanic. SimEve, as Donna Haraway has named her, becomes a kind of totem figure for the New Economy, visible and beautiful proof of its ameliorative aims. As a digital product, she confirms that "the human family seems naturally to be the story of the progress of technology." (Haraway, 263); as a multiethnic figure, she exorcises America's historical legacy of race discrimination; as an ideal woman, she resuscitates 19th century liberal eugenics; and as "the new face of America" (*Time*'s epithet for her) she replaces the troubled epic of historical continuity with the eternal present of the market economy. Finally, as a virtual reality construct, she asserts the primacy of data over flesh, and of cybernetics over biological essentialism.

Cyberpunk fiction -- not only Gibson, but other writers such as Sterling and Kathy Acker -- tended to establish, and play with, the distinction between flesh ("meat").

as the characters refer to it) and data; in Gibson, the physicality of the body is a taint, a risk of corruption, something which inspires horror among the characters. Sex is brief, businesslike and fetishistic (see 32-33); in the hierarchy of pleasures, it's ranked below technology-mediated experiences. (Arguably, one context for this privileging of the virtual over the physical was AIDS.) If the vampire was the archetypal figure of bodily contamination, boundary penetration and category transformation, then the cyborg was its digital alter ego. Yet the distinction between the two often collapses, as does the physical-virtual dichotomy on which it is based.

Vampires haunt Gibson's fiction, acting as a permutation, an alter ego, and sometimes as the antithesis of the cyborg. In *Neuromancer*, the global multinational merges with Poe's House of Usher to produce Tessier-Ashpool, Inc; its initials, at first unknown and mysterious to Case (and to the reader) appear everywhere, the sign of an insidious and predatory influence. The members of the Tessier-Ashpool family are suitably mad, diseased, and morbid. It's all pretty campy, as postmodern vampires tend to be, though the genre's preoccupation with morbidity is replicated elsewhere in more plausible guises. Molly's transformation into a cyborg assassin, we find, developed out of the trauma of a sadomasochistic sexual encounter; Case suffers from feelings of self-loathing that recur when he is not "jacked in" to the network. In summoning the vampire, a figure out of pop culture's past, *Neuromancer* also invokes the states of abjection which accompany the category transformations and boundary erasures that the Gothic is fascinated with. Gibson evidently considers the vampire-cyborg pairing interesting; he references the vampire more overtly in *Count Zero*, the sequel to *Neuromancer*: "The Count" hibernates in a kind of cybernetic coffin, hooked up to his "aleph" (cyberspace

deck) which keeps his functions running. Finally, the narrative of race which contributes to the vampire genre's sinister eroticism becomes morphed, in Gibson's updating of it, into a group of combat-wearing punks who call themselves Jack Draculas, after their apparently dead (but perhaps undead?) leader.

Again, much of this vampirism is cosmetic, tending if anything to reinforce the exhaustion of the body (along with its narratives) and the privileging of the digital. But Gibson did arguably write a bonafide vampire tale in his short story collection, *Burning Chrome*. In "The Belonging Kind," one of these early stories, the protagonist seeks entry into a loop of perpetual gratification. At the heart of the story is an erotic displacement: gill-like slits open up in the flesh of people who have mysteriously evolved, not simply into desiring machines, but into completely equipped desire-and-gratification units. The protagonist, a fatigued adjunct instructor, becomes obsessed with an alluring, but eerily distant, woman he meets in a bar. Her conversation consists of rote clichés or parrot-like mimicry of his efforts at small talk. His efforts to gain access to her world are initially frustrated. He develops an obsession which ultimately leads to losing his job and receiving an eviction notice, but his loss is more than compensated for by gain: as he drops out of normal life, he transmutes into a new kind of creature, capable of producing dollar bills that emerge from a slit in his upper body. With the ability to produce currency, he is no longer trapped within the logic of desire and elusive gratification which drives the capitalist economy (in which he has failed to succeed). Instead, he can take his seat at the bar, next to the strange woman with whom he silently mates, by means of a gill on his left leg, while paying for his drinks with the cash he "made" himself; he has entered an infinite loop of intake and outlay.

This blissed-out state, a permutation of 19th century morbidity, prefigures the "girls strung out on their Walkman-like Simstim Decks and young men who get their kicks from Microsofts plugged into sockets behind their ears" that inhabit Gibson's later fiction. (Elmer-Dewitt, 346). Such a condition could be seen as dystopian or as paradisiacal. On the one hand, it allegorizes the addiction-and-recovery culture of the eighties and nineties – the psychological equivalent of the stock market's cycles of boom-and-bust; on the other, it represents a slightly tongue-in-cheek example of the "free-flowing designer reality" (Rushkoff, 39) which Timothy Leary and his successor, Terence McKenna, thought could be achieved through a combination of drugs and virtual reality: "the PC is the LSD of the 1990s." A common interest in manipulating brain chemistry in order to construct an optimal experience united both legal and illegal, medical and recreational, pharmacological practice – this dichotomy remained important throughout the era, partly as a way of containing the risk of anarchy, yet the line was inevitably crossed: some users took the new serotonin-enhancing designer drugs less to cure a diagnosable psychological disorder and more to attain the self-transcending experiences promised by Peter Kramer's *Listening to Prozac* (1993); meanwhile, a "recreational" drug, marijuana, became recast as a legitimate therapy for relieving pain. When the legal drugs were prescribed to patients suffering from brain chemistry problems induced by the illegal ones, a self-perpetuating loop was created. At the same time, pharmacology was allied with the new cognitive psychology, which borrowed from computer science as a way of modeling human systems, while virtual reality, meanwhile, was subject to debates about potential abuse and about the need or lack of need for regulation – debates which echoed similar ones concerning genetic

engineering and biotech; potential monstrosities included internet predators, unscrupulous scientist-profiteers, human cloners, and toxic foods. Cyberia still had its vampires.

Then again, vampires have not always been simply the personification of dangers lurking within a free-flowing system; nineteenth century treatments of the genre show an ambiguity about questions of flow and regulation which resemble post-modern ones. As Nina Auerbach has suggested, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is preoccupied with control and the reimposition of authority; it is "in love less with death or sexuality than with hierarchies, erecting barriers...the gulf between male and female, antiquity and newness, class and class, England and England, vampire and mortal, homoerotic and heterosexual love, infuses its genre with a new fear: fear of the hated unknown." (Auerbach, 146) But Stoker's is a comparatively late re-writing of a genre which, Auerbach, had characteristically celebrated, rather than recoiled from, boundary erasures. Like the cyborg, the vampire had the ability to play a double role as liberator and insidious enemy, and thus embodies an ambiguity which roils at the heart of liberalism in general. As Haraway remarks, the vampire is simultaneously "the immigrants, the dislocated ones," the less *sympatico* figure of "unnaturally breeding capital," the multilingual cosmopolitan, the Jew accused of blood crime, the diseased prostitute, the gender pervert, an alien or traveler who casts doubt on "the certainties of the self-identical and well-rooted ones who have natural rights and stable homes." (Haraway, 215) American culture is populated by "stable and well-rooted ones" who fear the infection of wholesome life and nature, but who themselves are participants in, and products of, economic mobility and cultural category transformation.

Although cinematic renditions of Gibson's fiction have mostly failed, an example of a convincing film representation of a Gibsonesque aesthetic does exist, and that is Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. Produced in 1982, Scott's film envisaged a global metropolis of the future, dominated militarily by the United States and economically by transnational corporations – which have merged with military forces in order to expand into space. A similar geopolitical situation is found in Scott's earlier *Alien* (1979), and both movies mine the emotional effects of combining hi tech with fluids, viscera, grime, and other elements of the imaginative vocabulary of abjection. The cyborg monster in *Blade Runner* is the "replicant," the engineered, physically and mentally superior, emotionally stunted designer human with a predetermined expiration date. As in Philip Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, the novel on which it was loosely based, Scott's movie chips away at the natural/artificial, human/replicant, good/monstrous dichotomies, suggesting finally that the protagonist is himself a replicant, and in any case strongly intimating that the "natural: humans are as monstrous as the engineered ones.

However, *Blade Runner* has features which give it more of an affinity to Gibson's fiction than Philip Dick's. To begin with, *Do Androids Dream* mourns (post)modern disengagement and "flatness of affect," while Scott's film celebrates the triumph of surface. Dick's novel, like much of his fiction, was undergirded by an overt, moral critique of technological capitalism; the emotional lack which is the fatal flaw of the replicants was related, by Dick, to twentieth century dehumanization and, more specifically, to the Nazis. While Dick's novel blurred the distinction between human and cyborg, it remained, fundamentally, a humanist text. The Nazi theme is picked up by Scott, but in a way that seems the exact opposite of Dick's intentions: Baty, the Aryan

superman, is glamorized, turned into a sort of postmodern Siegfried done in by the corruption of secular capitalism. Another innovative feature of Scott's film is its fixation on race, a preoccupation – not found in Dick's novel – which locates the film in its historical moment. It exploits the mystique of Asian languages, alphabets, and products, introducing them as signifiers of a reality which is both alluring and contaminated. The setting is California sometime in the future – that is, at the Pacific Rim border of the United States.

In fact, one of the era's favorite cinematic images – reprised and permuted by advertising and music videos – came from *Blade Runner*: an Asian woman in geisha dress winks from a supersized video screen high above a polluted city. America's Japan fetish had a specifically political and economic context: the "decline" of the United States in the seventies was overtly contrasted with the apparent rise of Japan to the status of an economic power – one which not only threatened American dominance, but also seemed capable of "invasion" by means of electronics and cars. One reason why Gibson's imagined future seemed so precisely delineated and specific was because he based it on what seemed like the characteristic features of eighties-era Japan: governance by corporations run like traditional *zaibatsu*; a hypertrophy of gadgets, devices and media; a highly synthetic pop culture which borrowed and repackaged Western media; and urban landscapes that featured ever more dense accumulations of people packed into cramped areas. By *Idoru* (1996) Gibson had abandoned the more distant cybernetic future to capitalize on Japan fantasies more overtly. Yet by that time, "Japanorama" was already well on its way to becoming an outdated cliché.

In the process, Gibson repeated a phenomenon which he observed and commented on as a characteristic, and paradoxical feature of the sci-fi genre: the problem of the outdated future, the future with an expiry date. For example, his early story, "The Gernsback Continuum" contrasts the actual eighties with an idealized eighties dreamed up by science fiction in the thirties and forties. Items from the idealized future – a prop-driven airplane in the shape of a boomerang; a grandiose Tucson filled with neon spires, ziggurats, blimps and spaceships – intrude on the daily reality of a bored architectural photographer. Blaming "amphetamine psychosis," he finds himself parked behind a space-age couple whose car is "an aluminum avocado with a central shark-fin jutting up from its spine...He was saying something wise and strong, and she was nodding, and suddenly I was frightened, frightened in an entirely different way." They are "semiotic ghosts," the narrator's shrink explains later, counseling immersal in soaps and game shows. The story both satirizes and elegizes the utopia of winged cars and food pills, which reflected the desires and biases of American culture during the thirties (as Gibson's narrator observes, real rockets falling on London during World War II lessened the appeal of Gernsbackian imagery). At the same time, the story offers an implicit warning to citizens of the real eighties, demonstrating the power of a cultural "consensual illusion" to mediate perception and expectation.

In 2002, the experience of reading a story like "The Gernsback Continuum" is doubly jarring. Gibson's signature traits – the irony-laden, jaded dialogue; lavish pop culture referencing; the prevailing emotion of weary cynicism; and the repertoire of Orientalist imagery – now risk seeming as dated as the heartland fascism satirized in his short story, while Gernback now becomes so far removed as to seem almost novel. Such

obsolescence, it could even be said, was built into Gibson's fiction, like the self-destructing mechanism he employed in his electronic text, *Agrippa* – a virus contained within the "book" (actually a 12-inch floppy disk) erased the story as it was being read, as though to increase the speed with which a text dates to the point where it has always already expired.

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CHAPTER FIVE

BABES IN THE GARDEN: THE SUBURBAN IDYLL

The arcades and labyrinths of Gibson's video-game metropolis represent one take on a globalization-era aesthetic. Another is the densely textured, visually overloaded, highly allusive yet narratively vacant Neverland of commercial artist Thomas Kinkade. A born-again Christian, Kinkade seeks to "produce a re-creation of the past without the hard edges," a world without the Fall. This quasi-religious idyll is furnished with gently arcing bridges, English gaslamps, and chapels ensconced in mysterious woods.

The admission that his paintings are pleasurable reveries unbounded by the reality principle allows Kinkade considerable license with the laws of physics. Mansions are tucked into tiny, flowered lots; cottages dwarf clock towers; animals are disproportionately large or small; a fisherman is tacked stiffly onto a log, without much attempt to render movement. As one viewer has commented,

In almost all of his paintings the parts do not fit together naturally, as they would in three-dimensional reality, but seem to come from different places and to be forced together in the scene: buildings stand firmly on river beds, stable light sources shift all over, otherwise immutable horizon lines disappear, historical eras collide and compete, dark colors appear where bright ones would naturally and vice versa. This general mismatching is patched over with the stippled points of light and deliberately brilliant

colors to create an artificially uniform effect. (Anonymous posting,
"Hollywood Jesus Newsletter #27")

These paintings rarely include people, and when they do, the people are stick-like, non-specific, faceless or resemble dolls. This is intentional, Kinkade has explained in interviews. The lack of people and narratives in his art is intended to avoid interference with the viewer's own reverie, which projects his or her own subjectivity into the Kinkadean dream. Meanwhile, a Kinkade painting also comments on and, ideally, structures the experience of "living" (in the Martha Stewart sense) within the home of its purchaser, whose residents might be "stretched out in front of the of the fireplace, a favorite novel in one hand and a mug of steaming cider in the other, a yellow Lab at their feet and a Brandenburg Concerto playing softly in the background." (Balmer) If this isn't enough, it may also soon be possible to live in a full scale Kinkade "village" – a licensing arrangement with Taylor Woods Row Homes may bring into being a 100-unit residential development in California, "entirely themed" from Kinkade and featuring his stock-in-trade symbols – the lamppost, the garden, and the gazebo.

Kinkade's disinterest in creating a plausibly representational visual field is allied with his stated concern: that of presenting Eden before the Fall. His paintings promise not only a return to the Garden but also to the estate – that imaginary, organic pre-industrial realm of defined ties and norms, religious certitude and preserved traditions which the city destroyed and which the bourgeoisie, in one of its guiding narratives, hopes to reconstruct using technology. At the same time, the spatial and physical incoherence of Kinkade's paintings, their reliance on borrowed images and allusions,

recalls not only postmodern pastiche but the Gothic. If Gothic genres "posited and reproduced a legion of partial, disjointed, or decomposed body parts, which by their very existence accuse the waking world of fundamental illegitimacy," (Potter, 14) Kinkade's visions may be likewise described as "partial" or "disjointed," but the monster is missing. The Gothic monster functions in part as avenger of the estate, come to torment and punish the middle class which destroyed it; the suburban idyll promises to reassemble the lost order and its meanings, but without the aristocratic/feudal political economy which liberalism has overthrown (and must keep overthrowing in order to retain its vitality).

Fear and loathing of the city has remained a constant in the development of suburbia starting from its origins in eighteenth century Britain and continuing with the transfer of the English model into the U.S. in the middle and late nineteenth century. If the English had Reverend Wilberforce, America had Henry Ford and his credo: "we shall solve the city problem by leaving the city." Ford's privileging of the endlessly possible present – or, to use Reagan's take on it, eternal "morning in America" – over the burdens of history and intellect; his view of crowds as primitive and degraded; and his wish to rationalize and organize labor and lifestyles, especially with an eye to controlling proletarian or immigrant groups, were allied with the evangelical mission of moral betterment, which suburbia promised to achieve through its structures, regulations and landscaping. To this day, the promise made by the New Town is that a "community can improve the life of its citizens" – a way of restating the Fordist prescription for

...a healthier race of workingmen, toiling in cheerful and sanitary factories...who, in the late afternoon, glide away in their own comfortable vehicles to their little farms and houses in the country or by the sea twenty or thirty miles distant! They will be happier, more intelligent and self-respecting citizens because of the chance to live among the meadows and flowers of the country instead of the crowded city streets. (William F. Dix, quoted in Lazare, 143).

Suburbia burgeoned as the English middle class discovered that it both had the funds and the technology – first the private carriage, then the car – to effect a separation from the city. In so doing, it constituted urban centers as sites of pollution and ugliness, filled with foul puddles and stench, as well as immoral or licentious people. In fact, the eighteenth century city was pretty dirty, especially in poorer districts, but what is more to the point is that pollution and contamination became a metaphor for the collectivism of the city – the medley of neighborhoods which juxtaposed social strata:

Here lives a personage of high distinction; next door a butcher with his stinking shambles! A Tallow-chandler shall be seen from my Lord's nice Venetian window; and two or three brawny naked Curriers in their Pits shall face a fine Lady in her back Closet, and disturb her spiritual Thoughts. (Fishman, 8)

The image of the naked Curriers disturbing the spirituality of the fine Lady, it almost goes without saying, hints both at the Wilberforcean indictment of the city as a

licentious place and at a certain conception of femininity which played into the segregation of the suburban wife in her sealed-off home. As Constance Perin notes, exclusion of whatever it is the bourgeoisie considers undesirable at any given historical juncture – the proletariat during the nineteenth century; immigrants and Jews in early twentieth century America; blacks during the sixties – has remained integral to the way suburbia is constructed. Resistance to the medley of a socially integrated neighborhood was the driving force between "bourgeois flight" in the late eighteenth century, and a similar process is at work in the post-suburban or exurban landscape of post-millennium America.

But what drives this resistance? Arguably, the urge to distance and compartmentalize results from ambivalences which the middle class feels about its own identity, as the product of the commercial and political dynamics at work in the city; "getting away," first to the country villa and later the suburban home, provided literal, physical distance from the perceived canker at the heart of identity. Separating urban and suburban realms necessitated, of course, separating the world of the home from that of work, and in turn segregating husband and wife into sharply differentiated roles, with the Victorian "angel of the home" cleansing and healing the husband whose business took him into the perilous urban labyrinth. On a more general level, the integrated community, the urban medley, troubled the middle class with its potential for boundary erasures. This is a perennial theme in Victorian popular literature, with its seductive monsters and flawed protagonists, its fine lines between the normal and the perverse, the moral and the debased; as I have argued in previous chapters, the emotions of abasement, abjection and disgust which middle class discourses project onto the city reflect the middle class

subject's instability of identity and a corresponding need to protect itself through moral, intellectual, social, and spatial barriers.

Suburban design expresses what Robert Fishman calls "a complex and compelling vision of the modern family, freed from the corruption of the city, restored to nature, endowed with wealth and independence, yet protected by a stable, close-knit community." (Fishman, 10). In the United States, suburbia is often depicted as the epitome of American-ness, the demographic, topographic and architectural product of the fabled American dream; while in Britain, planned towns such as Milton Keynes, as well as the proliferation of the cul-de-sac suburban model, often attract derision as evidence of "Americanization." Yet the American model is actually a development of the British model, with many, if not most, of its defining features traceable back to the English garden city. Both, meanwhile, are defined by the central idea that a combination of technology and middle class economic and social mobility can create a simultaneously natural, uncorrupted, sexy, comfortable and exclusive wonderland; free for all yet at the same time bounded; individualistic yet relentlessly normal.

Many of these attributes are epitomized by the suburban lawn, which is at once natural (it grows), and synthetic. This oxymoronic construct is maintained through technologies which are continually being updated: automatic sprinkler systems, electric fences, ground warmers, video cameras, ultrasonic pest repellents, insect electrocuters and automatic pond feeders and, in some cases, remote-controlled robot lawn mowers, are among the machines and devices which help care for the lawn and its most important ideological purpose: that of manufacturing "aristocratic English pleasure gardens" out of

technology, even though it was technology that had put an end to the estate. (Veder, 358). To borrow a phrase from *Man of La Mancha*, suburbia is about dreaming the impossible dream, with the expectation that technology can realize and then preserve it.

The United States made an important contribution to this quest in the middle-to-late nineteenth century, when it introduced standards, in planning for new suburban communities, that disallowed fencing around front yards. (Jenkins, 21). Uninterrupted lawn creates, for each individual homeowner, the visual illusion of owning a larger tract of land: it permits "borrowed views" and "imaginary lines." At the same time, the suburban landscape fosters two simultaneous, incompatible illusions: one is that of an open, democratic community of neighbors, but the other is that of individual control of private property – the king on his estate putting his army of machines and devices to work. While the word "suburban" often connotes oppression, suburbs – and later the exoburbs – gained dominance in part because they were seen as liberating. In Frank Capra's *Life is Beautiful*, for example, it is George Bailey who sells tract houses to immigrants and proletarians making their entry into the lower middle class; it is mean Mr. Potter who wants to keep them stuck in urban-style tenements.

Suburban layouts are uniform partly in order to foster the sense of a democratic community – thus regulations usually prohibit mixtures of housing types (mansions, row houses, apartments), which would call attention to social and economic strata and recreate the undesirable urban medley. (Duany, 48). Moreover, uniformity helps create a timeless time, a non-geographical place; the citizens of this zone have the sense of living outside or beyond history and thus remaining, as Russell Potter suggests, somehow uncontaminated by it. With their swaths of monotone – grass, pavement, swimming pools

– suburban space often seems colored in (or "colorized"); the elements of home, garage and yard recur again and again, as though in an Andy Warhol silkscreen. At its most extreme, this synthetic, made quality recalls Deleuze and Guattari's nightmare/fantasy of the schizoid inhabitant in a world where "everything is a machine. Celestial machines, the stars or rainbows in the sky, alpine machines – all of them connected to those of the body," which itself has become an apparatus. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 2).

Paradoxically, in the suburban aesthetic uniformity is often, if not invariably, paired with *bricolage*. In the fantasized suburb presented in Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands*, for instance, commodities from different decades and generations (baby boomer, yuppie, slacker), "drift about in their own free play of signification. 90s appliances, such as CD players, exist side-by-side with 50s fixtures such as boomerang tables and lava lamps." (Potter, 22). The *bricolage* of mass-produced items, meanwhile, is analogous to the proliferation of information and images which traverse the home through electronic media; and advertising creates a direct link between both. But in addition to being an outgrowth of the commodity economy, *bricolage*, or clutter, is representative of a basic characteristic of the bourgeois utopia – specifically, that it is a manufactured, assembled place, a site constructed from the "best of" other epochs and social orders, all governed by the overarching idea of the country seat or estate.

Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) is often termed a novel about suburbia, a description which raises the question: what, at the end of the American century, can we now call a suburb? Technically speaking, a suburb exists on the perimeter of a city, involved in a symbiotic relationship with the urban core. But *White Noise* is set in small-

town, middle-America – a college town, to be more precise, with congregational churches and a historic center featuring wood-frame houses and porch swings. The town, with its traditional-sounding name – Blacksmith – is nowhere near a large city, as the protagonist, Gladney, likes to point out. It is far from the "contaminations" that flow from the center; it is exactly this attribute which he finds appealing. So does his colleague Murray, who wants

to be free of cities and sexual entanglements. Heat...you get off the train and walk out of the station and are hit with the full blast. The heat of air, traffic and people. The heat of food and sex. The heat of tall buildings. The heat that floats out of the subways and the tunnels. (10)

Like the college which furnishes Gladney's identity and income, Blacksmith is serene. "semidetached, more or less scenic, suspended in political calm." Yet it is this almost total separation from the city which makes it the ultimate fulfillment of the suburban dream – that is, it is a self-contained, fully autonomous, almost hermetically sealed paradise or idyll, providing a commodified authenticity. Well before the mid-eighties, suburbia had transcended its literal meaning and come to function as a signifier for a complex of demographic trends: the cul-de-sac, the front lawn, the nearby and accessible expressway, and perhaps most importantly the shaping of daily life by technology and commodification. It is the attention DeLillo's novel pays to these two latter quantities that identifies it as a suburban text.

"White noise" in its denotative sense - the combination of all sound frequencies -- was marketed during the eighties as a means to achieve relaxation and sleep; special, inexpensive devices soothed insomniacs by neutralizing distracting sounds from outside or within the home, absorbing their frequencies into the blend. Thus, white noise is a metonym for envelopment. The term connotes other things, including the racial homogeneity which still operates beneath postmodern reconceptions of the suburb. The novel consists of the anxious, ironic chatter of white people caught up in their own homeostasis – a totalizing and entropic system which is structured by electronics, advertising and consumer goods.

Although not blind to the standard interpretation of commodity fetishism as a perceptual disorder that conceals the social and economic relations driving the system of production, DeLillo is perhaps more immediately interested in the fetish in its primitive, magical sense, as an inanimate object endowed with power. It is this sense that defines the relationship between the characters and their fetishes: the vivid lettering of family package designs; the evocative yet incomprehensible names of car models; Gladney's appreciation of the academic robes he gets to wear as a department head ("I like clearing my arm from the folds of the garment to look at my watch"); his perusal of college students arranged in library chairs as in a "Far Eastern dream." To a degree, it is likewise the enchanting capability of the fetishized object which moulds DeLillo's prose style, with its precisely observed, shimmering yet oddly depthless surfaces, its representation that reproduces while falling short of traditional mimesis. Not only in the novel's famous opening, with its drawn-out itemization of products that accompany students to campus ("the hairdryers and styling irons; the tennis rackets; soccer balls, hockey and lacrosse

sticks...the controlled substances, the birth control pills") but in similar passages elsewhere in the text, DeLillo allows commodities to pile up in lists until they begin to acquire a rhythmic, incantatory quality, as though being spoken in the service of some ritual, summoning some protective magic. But the sense of a protective web or force field created by the proliferation of commodities can also transform into paranoid apprehensions of a threat that seems to be coming from everywhere at once:

Investigators said it could be the ventilating system, the paint or varnish, the foam insulation, the electrical insulation, the cafeteria food, the rays emitted by microcomputers, the asbestos fireproofing, the adhesive on shipping containers, the fumes from the chlorinated pool... (35)

The invocation of a magical primitivism within the corrupted commercial structures and neutered emotional stances of the po-mo suburb establishes a link to the phantasmagoric aesthetic of fascism, opening the way for Gladney's transition from "dier to killer" and his seizure of the commodity-par-excellence, the loaded gun. Nineteenth century Gothic tales used to picture a giant, medieval figure looming over some bustling, mercantile town, and Blacksmith, at least from Gladney's perspective, is similarly loomed over by the occluded (hooded) figure of Hitler, whose ideology combined elements of the machine-made idyll with the fantasy of race-based identity. Hitler, the urban planner whose ideas on labor organization, the role of the automobile, the consumer economy and the racially pure suburb were influenced by, and may have also influenced, Henry Ford, functions in *White Noise* both as a Gothic monster and as Blacksmith's repudiated father. For his part,

Gladney distances himself from Naziism by boxing it off as scholarship; yet, as an unanchored white male fixated on his own (lack of) identity, remains entranced by Hitler's "solidity." By re-writing the Nazi era as "Hitler studies," meanwhile – that is, by packaging it as an intellectual or, more to the point, aesthetic phenomenon, Gladney also commodifies it – diverting attention away from its historical reality. At the same time, the novel's references to fascism draw out the partially hidden ethic of racial homogeneity which governed the Anglo-American suburb in its original guise, and remains latent within the sealed enclosures of the new suburb.

In order to keep the idyll idyllic, Blacksmith's suburbanites go shopping – an experience which brings, again and again, the feeling of replenishment, well-being, security and contentment "to some snug home in our souls." Simultaneously, they are stroked and caressed by advertising, while the car and airplane crashes, the gun violence, and serial killers that figure in televised nightmares function as stand-ins for the continuing problem of unpredictable death. These are relieved by more ads, and also drive Gladney repeatedly into his wife Babette's "bosom" for comfort. Violence and death mark the outer limits of the protected garden; they are also associated by the suburban characters with the implied urban antithesis. Television and the suburb are mutually reinforcing; each can be a metaphor for the other, and both create a "sealed-off, timeless, self-contained, self-referring world." (51) Gladney, meanwhile, uses Babette, as a personification of the suburb's idyllic qualities. She is described, like marketing and consumer goods, in terms of an enveloping solace; even though the Gladneys are ultramodern, he needs her in a familiarly atavistic, almost pastoral way, as the embodiment of material prosperity - like a farmer who has acquired sheep and a wife.

Their relationship is comfortable, intimate, more tranquil than passionate; their nuzzling and grazing, so to speak, on each other replicates the plenitude of commodities.

Eventually Babette *becomes* television:

We were being shot through with Babette. Her image was projected on our bodies, swam in us and through us. Babette of electrons and photons, of whatever forces produced that gray light we took to be her face. (105)

Gladney will repeatedly invoke the equivalence between Babette and the plotless, prosperous idyll, especially as the idyll turns into a fearful nightmare, the white noise disrupted by an "airborne toxic event." Babette is supposed to be joyous, open, honest, healthy and fun, not morbid, deceptive or afraid. That is "the whole point of Babette," as Gladney protests when he discovers that she has been deceiving him sexually and taking a mysterious medication.

DeLillo has been faulted for his overstylized dialogue - a product of his writing's promiscuous referentiality, the need for every phrase the characters speak to allude to a cultural cliché. Yet this kind of DeLillo-speak is also present in popular culture, in Joss Wheedon's scripts for television's "Buffy the Vampire Slayer", in Baz Luhrmann's movie *Moulin Rouge*, and, with less overt irony, in sitcoms. With real life speech imitating television or movie speech, which then updates itself to imitate the most recent version of real life speech, nature and artifice become more and more a function of what culture will buy as plausible at any given moment. And this is of course part of what the characters in DeLillo are doing, along with similar (if less overtly post-modern) characters in the "K-

mart realism" of contemporaries such as Ann Beattie or Frederick Barthelme: that is, they are continually testing the plausibility, the purchasability so to speak, of what they are saying.

Like these authors, though with a more consciously theoretical intent, DeLillo presents characters whose speech habits, gestures and stances are "mediated," that is, determined by reference not only to specific media events, but to an assumption of media omnipresence, of television that is on all the time, even though particular subjects may turn away at intervals. DeLilleian irony is the irony of being watched, as though each character is measuring his or her utterances with respect to an implied audience. It is also the irony of déjà vu, the sense that all gestures, attitudes and sentiments have been acted out before, or by too many other people to constitute anything novel, original or meaningful. Among Gladney's milieu, objects (flavorless packaging, a jar of "irregular peanuts") are made the subject of weighty discussion, and given historical, aesthetic, or moral significance; or they become the catalysts, the heroes and villains, in the anecdotes and stories the characters are continually telling each other. The quantities which in another setting would make up history - a world war, an avant-garde movement - become conversational clip art, put on the same level as the packaging and the peanuts; the end product of these equivalences is flatness of affect.

With their TV on in the background, Gladney and Babette read aloud from pornography; Gladney feels an erection, which he finds inappropriate, and meanwhile the TV announces something about Florida surgeons attaching an artificial flipper. When the characters want to talk "straight", if that is indeed possible, it involves negotiating for the right emotional stance, the appropriate diction from somewhere

between all of these competing discourses. What happens more often than not, in *White Noise*, is that the characters seem to be speaking in lines, performing when they are ostensibly conversing, being contrived in situations that are ostensibly natural. They use the terms, phrases and references from the surrounding Babel, deploying them for personal purposes. Within this allusive surround, the simple, disarming, apparently natural phrase is really another kind of device.

Who will die first? (15)

Death can be seen as the last "undesirable," the last threatening element which has not been successfully distanced, cordoned off, made ironic. Pharmaceutical intervention meant to "speed relief" to the sector of the brain which controls fear of death represents perhaps the ultimate quality-of-life optimization; it is an extension of the logic which created the suburb, which justifies its proliferation of goods, mediates its emotional and intellectual stances, and regulates interaction. For Gladney, who is already fully compromised by ethical relativism and loss of historical depth, the prospect of brain chemists being able to "trace everything you do, say and feel to the number of molecules in a certain regions" threatens his last, vestigial sense of being human in the old-fashioned, meaningful sense; it is the road to total cyborgization.

As the personification of the idyll, Babette can be seen as DeLillo's take on the suburban Eve, a character who is more typically represented by the adolescent Barbie or Lolita. In Nabokov's 1955 novel, Dolores Haze transforms the fifties suburban landscape,

revealing it as a place of enchantment. The supposed reincarnation of Humbert Humbert's adolescent love, Lolita's presence seems to offer a transcendence of time, her eternal prolongation and revisiting of the moment in which he – and we, the readers – first glimpse her, sunning herself on the back patio. With her strident voice, her slang ("revolting," "super," "luscious", "goon," "drip"), her pragmatic sexual mores, her heart-shaped sunglasses and cherry-red nail polish, Dolores – who lives at 342 Lawn Street, is the antithesis to Humbert Humbert's obsession with the past, with literature, with memory and time. The natural inhabitant of the suburban/exurban Eden, she moves among the synthetic landscaping – its lawns and poolsides – which she blesses with her erotic energy.

Eve is of course the original transgressor, the biblical source of impurity; in *Lolita*, the key issue is not virginity (Dolores has already lost it by the time Humbert gets to her) but pregnancy, which forces entry into time and consequence. More generally, the suburban nymphette is a potent symbol because she embodies the quest to find the generative, rejuvenatory source of the American dream, prior to its contamination. For this reason, she remains blonde, even within the increasingly blended ethnic context of the nineties suburb. It is as though in order for her to retain her symbolic power, she must embody the idea of homogeneity based on racial exclusion which defined the suburb in its earlier, Fordist version. (see Haraway, 260, for a discussion of a late twentieth century effort to construct a multiracial Eve for the information-age technoburb).

In *American Beauty* (1999), tired-out and demoralized Lester Burnham is in search of just such an *ur*-moment, one which will re-eroticize the suburban fantasy and put him in touch with the source of eternal rejuvenation. The film locates this

regenerative quest within the context of what critics have generally described as an overambitious, though well-intentioned critique of the construction of suburban identity through media images and cultural meta-narratives. As screenwriter Alan Ball tells it, the original inspiration for the film came from a comic book retelling of the real-life saga of Amy Fisher, the "Long Island Lolita":

One cover had an...evil-looking Joey with a virginal Amy, and then you flip it over and the other cover was just the reverse. He looked like a good, nice, Catholic husband and she a scary, little psycho tramp. (Cohen, 60)

Ball further explains that the particular fascination the saga had for him was the impossibility of knowing what exactly happened, given the degree to which his own "experience" of the Amy Fisher saga was highly mediated. *American Beauty* borrows the Lolita theme and the murder plot, though it deploys them differently, and it also is infused with the sense of doubleness that Ball saw in the Fisher story, or the comic book rendering of it.

American Beauty occupies an ambiguous middle ground between art-house and shlock: it contains elements that mark it as a "serious" film, but also elements of camp and farce. It also often threatens to evolve into a tabloid drama or "true life" story; Ball deliberately constructs the relationship between Jane Burnham and Ricky Fitts, the two angsty teens whose developing relationship forms an important subplot, so that it echoes sensational stories of teen psychos and school shootings. The community interpellates

Ricky as a psycho; as viewers we hover between the film's revelation of his sensitivity and kindness towards Jane and the suspicion that he might after all be dangerous. The film opens with Jane speaking into Ricky's video camera; she is proposing to hire Ricky to kill her father, Lester. In the original script for *American Beauty*, the videotape becomes the means by which Jane and Ricky are (falsely) incriminated: what they had thought was private language becomes public, and in so doing takes on the meanings which electronic culture ascribes to them. In the absence of the specific context – that which is left out of the filming -- tabloid mythologies rush in to fill the requirement for interpretability and meaning.

RICKY Want me to kill him for you?

JANE Yeah, would you?

RICKY It'll cost you.

JANE I've been baby-sitting since I was ten, I've got almost three thousand dollars. I was saving it for a boob job.

If Ricky and Jane are the innocent kids who are labeled as dangerous, Angela is the apparent bad girl who turns out to be fragile, insecure and virginal. In *American Beauty's* transposition of the Amy Fisher narrative, Angela plays the role of temptress or tramp; she boasts that she plans to "fuck him 'til his eyes roll back in his head." But as the film progresses towards the eventual encounter between Lester and Angela, it becomes evident that she is not only playing a role, but playing one that has been specifically

defined by television, the movies and fashion:

If people I don't even know look at me and want to fuck me, it means I really have a shot at being a model. Which is great, because there's nothing worse in life than being ordinary.

On the surface, the film appears to be a fairly standard suburban critique, leveling the usual complaints: while claiming to enthrone the individual, the suburb actually subjugates the private self; its design, topography and social relations supposedly promote better living but actually fosters vacuity. "I'm dead," Burnham says early in the film, feeding our suspicion that suburban life has killed him. Carolyn, meanwhile avers that "my business is selling an image. And part of my job is to live that image." The misery of the Burnham family situation, exemplified by laborious family dinners, demonstrates their inability to embody the Fordist dream of a functional, happy family that is suggested by a framed photograph of the Burnhams during a trip to an amusement park.

At the same time, though, *American Beauty* can be seen as a suburban rhapsody, one which constructs its setting as a place of mystery, concealment and hidden beauty. After all, the movie's central moment is Lester's reverie concerning Angela, which allows him to graft longings for youth, energy and mystery onto a specific embodiment. And that reverie takes place within the banal setting of the local high school, as the cheerleading squad first performs a failed stunt and then begins twirling their batons to "On Broadway." It is in fact the setting which Lester has derided only moments earlier. Angela's Barbie-doll looks and the cartoonishly all-American spectacle of cheerleading

illuminate the driving force behind Lester's discontent: it results not so much from a deeply-seated objection to the suburban "American dream", but rather from his frustration at being unable to grasp it more fully.

Angela – who thinks her classmates are "pampered suburban chicks" – considers herself bound for Broadway or, more probably, Hollywood or Madison Avenue. Her friend Jane, meanwhile, wants to have her breasts augmented; and in a sense, augmentation is what the movie is about. Carolyn Burnham's discontent cannot be read simply as the toxic product of suburban values; it's not suburbia that bothers her, it's Lester. When she has an affair, it's with the "King of Real Estate," Buddy Kane, whose dogma of success she shares with an almost religious fervor. Ordinariness and boredom are invoked by most of the principal characters as that which they want to avoid; thus, they seem to be indicting suburbia. But suburbia itself, as a demographic, geographic and economic entity, is the representation of the desire for something "better" which motivates the characters, each in his or her own way. As a result, the film presents the suburb as a homeostatic system that keeps looping back on itself. When the Burnhams try to break free of suburbia's constraints, they do so in ways which are prototypically suburban. And Lester's rebellion "loops back" to what amounts to a suburban youth, smoking the pot he buys from Ricky Fitts and lifting weights in order to build up the physique which, he hopes, Angela will respond to. As in *White Noise*, it takes an intrusion from outside the self-contained idyll in order to force events into a denouement. Colonel Fitts, Burnham's killer, resides within the idyll while being estranged from its mores. As a war veteran, his identity has been shaped by a traumatic knowledge which the innocents of Robin Hood Drive remain oblivious to, and this knowledge has brutalized him.

Similar territory is covered in Alexander Payne's *Election* (1999), but with some important reversals. Again, the plot concerns suburbia, male fantasy, and an adolescent blonde, played by Reese Witherspoon. But whereas Mendes presents *American Beauty's* Angela primarily as the projection of Lester Burnham's desires, finally unveiling her as a scared, confused and virginal adolescent (an identity which allows Burnham to play the more guilt-free role of fatherly confidant), *Election* invokes the Barbie ideal only to puncture the daydreams of the movie's male protagonist, teacher Jim McAllister (Matthew Broderick). From McAllister's perspective, the Nietzschean overachiever Tracy Flick is the anti-Lolita, the castrating female wearing the mask of the seductive nymphette – Carolyn Burnham with Angela's face.

Tracy's ambition and sexual drive contribute to McAllister's defining characteristic: his demasculation, a problem which Payne associates, as *American Beauty* does, with the inescapable entropy of suburban life. In contrast to Tracey, McAllister suffers from apparent infertility and erotic ennui, and from a more general languor. If Nabokov's Humbert Humbert is trapped in the dream of the past, McAllister's problem is that he is caught in a present which has taken on the static qualities of a remembered moment, a reverie which Tracy Flick threatens to penetrate and dismantle. The conflict between McAllister's reveries and the reality principle is driven home in one scene after another, as his pretensions as husband, friend, citizen and educator are undercut by the objective evidence. A montage shows him teaching the same banal lecture on the three government branches year after year; the silences in the McAllister marriage undermine his cheerful belief that he and his wife have "good communication," and despite his belief

that he is a caring and involved "influence" on his student's lives, what he really amounts to is a stolid defender of the status quo. He considers himself an expert on morals and ethics, regaling both students and friends with the conceptual distinction between the two, yet in the real-life civics environment of the school election, he resorts first to cheap political strategy and then to deliberate rigging of the results. The "affectionate joshing" of his students and, more broadly, the comfortable, cocoon like way in which he is enveloped by the interpenellations of the community, are what McAllister lives for. The film as a whole, meanwhile, engages in a kind of sustained dialogue with an earlier film, the eighties comedy *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, which starred a younger Broderick. The implication that Bueller has grown up into McAllister is borne out by the two characters' common interest in reverie; Bueller is the teen hero who happily rejects consequence in favor of the eternal present, the endlessly regenerative dream; he is the poster-boy for what Loren Glass terms "the new pleasure regime of American adolescence (Glass, 561).

Tracy, meanwhile, is an underprivileged outsider; she comes from a single family household, and her ambitions for social and academic success are driven in part by the sense of exclusion and injustice which is felt both by her and her mother. Flick's outsider status makes her unable to enjoy the idyll; she seeks, instead to dominate it and bend it to her ambition. The film entertains, simultaneously, the cultural connotations of the "blonde bombshell" figure, McAllister's perception of her as a castrating monster; and the more complicated facts of her loneliness and vulnerability as well as her legitimate sense of injustice, which she translates into a lofty narrative of the American Dream:

You see, I believe in the voters. They understand that elections aren't just popularity contests. They know this country was built by people just like me who work very hard and don't have everything handed to them on a silver spoon. Not like some rich kids who everybody likes because their fathers own Metzler Cement... They don't ever have to work for anything.

McAllister, meanwhile, makes his cynical bet that, given the choice between the football hero and the grating overachiever, cultural symbolism will trump merit every time.

Both *American Beauty* and *Election* succeed in plausibly representing the suburb as a walled garden. Mendes' film tends to skirt the problems it raises, either defusing them through farce, or invoking a plane of transcendence which it may not have fully earned. Burnham's moment of tranquility and acceptance lets him off a little too easily; a lot is made to depend on a paper bag blowing around a sidewalk, in what has become one of the film's most well-known moments. *Election*, by contrast, presents fully-rounded characters and investigates fantasies and consequences with equal interest; it refuses either to sentimentalize or to allow easy condemnation. The effort at a kind of Flaubertian objectivity makes the film more provoking and disturbing than *American Beauty*, and also sharpens what could otherwise have been a clumsy political allegory. Both films, meanwhile, fail to go beyond, or even to inquire into, the Anglo-American homogeneity which still dominates treatments of the suburb. Though the U.S. has ostensibly made the transition into becoming a multiethnic society, when literature and cinema address multiethnicity, it tends to be within an urban context. The American suburb – even in its

latest guise as technoburb or New Town – remains eerily detached from the rest of the globe, even though the mechanisms of globalization are the same ones that build and maintain the bourgeois utopia.

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