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The Myth of Autism

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The Myth of Autism

by

Daniel J. Crofts

A thesis submitted to the Department of English of the State University of New York

College at Brockport, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

January 30, 2009

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by

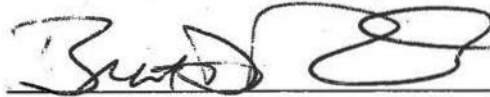
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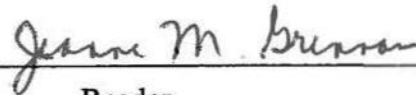
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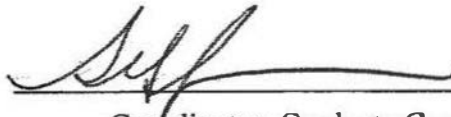
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Abstract

This thesis is a study of autism in and intimations thereof in various narrative works of different types and from different time periods. My interpretation of autism, upon which my literary analysis is based, is in accordance with the insights of a field of psychological theory known as metabletics, which studies various conditions (autism, for example) in light of the wider social, cultural, and historical contexts to which they belong. I interpret autism as an expression of a comprehensive cultural condition that affects Modern society (especially in the Western world) as a whole and finds its historical roots in the advent of linear perspective vision, which occurred in the 15th century. As I examine intimations and/or expressions of autism in the various narrative works I explore, I elaborate upon the ways in which autistic symptoms (as well as the narratives in question) are connected to the traits of linear-perspective-based consciousness. My goal is to inspire a more robust and sensitive understanding of and approach to autism than the traditional medical/diagnostic approach.

After supplying the necessary background information about linear perspective vision and its effects upon Modern, Western society as a whole and then briefly attending to the implications of what some have interpreted as intimations of autism in *pre-Modern* narratives, I explore the autistic impulses within popular narrative works from different stages of Modern history, beginning with Shakespeare's Hamlet and concluding with David Fincher's 1999 film, Fight Club.

In so doing, I trace the *development* of the autism phenomenon from within the concurrent (and enveloping) development of the condition of Modern man. After this, I devote a chapter to the portrayal of autism in contemporary children's fiction, which I argue to be our key to understanding and approaching the autism phenomenon in a manner that is beneficial to autistic children and to society as a whole.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: An Exploration of the Implications of Autistic Analogies in the Fairy Tale Genre.....	29
Chapter Three: Literary Analysis as an Exploration of the Historical Basis for a Metabletics of Autism.....	45
Chapter Four: Autism in Contemporary Children’s Literature.....	134
Chapter Five: A Brief Conclusion.....	178
Works Cited.....	183

Chapter One: Introduction

The representation and the study of autism—or any disability and/or medical/psychological condition—within the context of the humanities present significant difficulties. From a researcher’s perspective, the challenge subsists in the task of incorporating within his/her work an understanding of both aspects of the research (the literary as well as the scientific, psychological, and educational) without compromising the need to foreground the attention to his/her particular field of expertise. In my case, the challenge lies not only in this aspect of the research, but also in the fact that I am engaging with the topic of autism in literature in a way that ventures beyond what one might expect. In terms of focus, one might expect research on this subject to explore the statuses of autistic characters in the stories of which they are a part and how they differ in novels from different decades, thereby exploring how these literary works reflect changing social attitudes toward autistic individuals. Alternatively, a literary analyst might well study the autistic traits—or, perhaps more appropriately, the different *perceptions* thereof—that William Faulkner ascribes to Benjy in his 1929 novel The Sound and the Fury versus those to which Mark Haddon, a more recent author, attributes attention in the 2004 novel The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time. Quite rarely, however, will one find research on autism in literature that assumes the task of understanding autism itself as a phenomenon of greater, wider, and more profound significance than one may have previously supposed based on quasi-psychological analyses of characters. To do so

would be to venture beyond both literature and science in order to view autism as the expression of a phenomenon that transcends these disciplines, embracing not only the arts and sciences but also culture and life in general. Indeed, to attempt such an exploration while simultaneously engaging in the already tricky endeavor of researching a matter of psychological concern from within a broadly literary-critical context is ambitious and difficult; nevertheless, this is my intention. Succinctly stated, I believe such an approach to be necessary due to the highly complex nature of autism, which was only classified as a unified disorder quite recently in history (it was in 1994 (Frith 7) that it began to be treated as such). Autism encompasses so wide a spectrum that one affected individual's symptoms may differ drastically from those of another; furthermore, because of many of the characteristic symptoms, autism is considered related to a number of other conditions, some of which are mutually exclusive—for example, *obsessive-compulsive disorder* and “*depression*” (Grandin 40) (emphasis added). This, along with the fact that the “diagnostic reliability” of the DSM-IV (the American Psychiatric Association's standard manual for psychological diagnoses) has been known to suffer compromise by the agendas of those who manage the manual's revision (Kirk and Kutchins 1-16), suggests that the medical diagnosis of autism is potentially arbitrary. It is for this reason that a different approach is required.

Before I begin the literary analysis, I must devote some time to three introductory elements. This chapter will include a brief explanation of autism and its

basic characteristics, an elaboration upon the manner in which I propose autism should be viewed by society, and finally, in light of that, why I believe that the narrative (literature, film, myth, etc.) is the field within which the autism phenomenon is most appropriately explored. Once these have been established, a firm basis for my literary analysis will be in place.

Autism is a neurological condition that is characterized by social impairment, sensory and/or sensory-motor irregularities, and speech/language difficulties (Notbohm, Ten Things Every Child xvii-xviii). The autism spectrum is markedly broad and encompasses (within the aforementioned general framework) a wide variety of symptoms as well as considerable diversity among the autistic population, ranging from Kanner's autism to the higher-functioning Asperger syndrome¹; however, the three aforementioned characteristics are, generally speaking, common to all cases. The social impairment aspect often manifests itself as the apparent inability or unwillingness to engage with others in a social manner—what Frith calls “autistic aloneness” (8). Autistic individuals are commonly noted for their apparent self-seclusion and isolation, and even those who do not exhibit the stereotypical impression of someone *living in his/her own world* often interact with others in a manner that seems oblivious to standard social expectations and conventions (whether in terms of politeness or in terms of what is considered *cool*—for lack of a better word—within the social circles of primary and secondary school). However social difficulties manifest themselves, the difficulty arises not from indifference or

rudeness, but from the inability to relate to others *as* others. Frith elaborates considerably upon this concept in her discussion of “theory of mind” (158), meaning the innate ability of the average individual to take for granted that others have their own perspectives and subjective awareness. This ability is quite often lacking in autistic individuals. Social interaction so often depends upon one’s ability to *relate* to others (understanding their expectations, needs, feelings, thoughts, etc); if, therefore, autistic children cannot easily perceive the existence of subjective states in others, the compromise of their interpersonal abilities would seem to be a quite natural consequence. In any case, to varying degrees, interpersonal relationships constitute a significant difficulty for people with autism.

Sensory difficulty is another common trait in almost all cases of autism. This manifests itself in the form of both hyper-acute sensitivity to sensory experience and its opposite, *hypo*-acute sensitivity. In the former case, the child experiences sounds, colors, tastes, touches, scents, sights, and other sensory information in a much more intense, unpleasant, and/or painful fashion than most people, often leading to sensory “overload” (Notbohm, Ten Things Every Child xxi); in the latter, the child’s sensory processing is “under-responsive” (Notbohm, Ten Things Every Child 24). A given autistic child may, for instance, have extremely sensitive hearing while at the same time being numb to certain tactile experiences. Which senses are hyper-acute and which are hypo-acute depends upon the individual child, but both are common in the

autism spectrum. Each of these traits contributes to the social troubles that autistic children experience. Oftentimes, the autistic child's experience of the world is far too unpleasant, "uneven," and threatening for him/her to assume the courage to venture beyond his/her comfort zone in order to make connections with others (Notbohm, Ten Things Your Student 80-81). Additionally, hypo-sensitivity inhibits the ability of autistic children to empathize with—and therefore *relate to*—others. As human beings, our connections with other people are very much based upon embodied experience (Sardello 178-184 and Romanyshyn 142-143); and, as Grandin suggests, one must experience pleasant sensations and emotions for oneself in order to be able to perceive them in and extend them to others (84). Altogether, the sensory difficulties of an autistic person's life produce a profound effect upon the quality of his/her life.

In addition to the five senses, the autistic child's balance and movement are also affected. Notbohm states that the effect of autism upon a child's sense of balance may "caus[e] a dizzying [. . .] range of symptoms including but not limited to: loss of balance, chronic nausea, distorted hearing [. . .] visual disturbances [. . .] difficulty with memory and/or focus, chronic fatigue, acute anxiety and depression" (Ten Things Every Child 18). In reference to autism's effect on the sense of movement, Notbohm proceeds to cite "an odd, heavy gait, [. . .] trouble with tableware, pencils and other fine motor implements, [. . .] [and] forever running into or jumping off things [in the process of] seek[ing] deep pressure sensory input" (Ten

Things Every Child 18). The sensory problems that autistic children experience therefore extend beyond mere sensation into motor skills. Clearly, the way in which persons on the autism spectrum move within and experience the world is fraught with unpleasantness.

Difficulties with language are also highly common among autistic children, especially those with Kanner's autism. Many autistic children suffer delayed, impaired, and sometimes even entirely absent speech; additionally, they commonly interpret speech quite literally and are usually unable to appreciate even the most commonly employed figurative language, examples of which include "[i]dioms, puns, nuances, double entendres, inference, metaphors, allusions and sarcasm" (Notbohm, Ten Things Every Child xxiv). Among verbal autistics, one will quite often find individuals speaking in monotone, passionless voices that resemble the speech of robots and are limited to the communication of bare information. While linguistic difficulties such as these are not universal among the autistic population, they are common enough that language difficulty can be regarded as an earmark of autism.

Frith has theorized that some of the difficulties experienced by autistic people derive from the fact that their perception of the world is "fragmented" (103). In terms of sensory experience, Frith hypothesizes that the experience of certain phenomena as frightening and "unexpected" is due to the fact that these phenomena do not, in the mind of the autistic person, appear within the context of "a large coherent pattern" (104). An autistic individual may, for example, observe the side of

a person's face and then the back of that same person's head, and be frightened by the difference, as he/she is unable to conceive of two such different features being part of the same person. Examples of such fragmented consciousness do not appear exclusively in *negative* form, though. Autistic children are often highly adept at assembling puzzles, and in doing so their focus is typically on the shapes of individual pieces as opposed to any overall pattern (Frith 110-112). Fragmentation is a visible aspect of autism that will bear importance in light of subsequent analysis.

There are, of course, many other symptoms and traits that can be found within the autism spectrum, but for the moment the above information will suffice; I turn my attention now to the way in which contemporary society understands the autism phenomenon, which is primarily through the medical/diagnostic paradigm that in many ways characterizes the mode of thinking common to our age. Society's increased understanding in recent years is often accompanied by the *search for the cure* attitude, which entails people looking primarily to neurological, biological, and anatomical causes. This approach is well and good in and of itself, especially given the intentions behind it. To focus too intensely upon this approach to autism, however, risks the loss of an invaluable opportunity to engage with the condition as a significant cultural reality from which society, in working to help autistic individuals, may also benefit.

I found it necessary to establish a foundation for my study by introducing the topic of autism as understood in diagnostic terms, as the condition is so commonly

known in this manner that one cannot even begin to discuss autism without an understanding of it from the perspective of this particular paradigm; nevertheless, as my thesis will demonstrate, this understanding is rather limiting, and therefore it is not my primary focus. Rather, my concern with autism is based upon a little-known field of psychological theory known as *metabletics*. The term *metabletics* refers to a psychology of historical changes; according to the principles of *metabletics*, no phenomenon that exists within a particular era and/or time period—whether a psychological condition, a prevailing ideology, or even a concept of everyday experience that is taken for granted—can be properly or fully understood except in light of the wider social/historical/cultural context within which it is found. Most contemporary psychological approaches, in exploring specific conditions, focus upon *individual* factors (the patient's past home life, biological/neurological makeup, definitive traumatic moments, genetics, etc). *Metabletics* relies upon a significantly wider consideration of culture in general, venturing beyond strictly scientific considerations. Theorists in the field of *metabletics* take into account changes in the ways in which people understand and relate to the world, each other, and themselves, and in so doing draw upon the experience-based principles of phenomenological psychology. Because of its deep concern for the human condition and for the perspectives that underlie all aspects of culture, *metabletics* lends itself very comfortably to the humanities—philosophy in particular, but literary studies as well. When explored through the lens of *metabletics*, matters such as autism gain more

profound meaning than can be derived from mere diagnostic criteria. My proposition for a metabletics of autism is based in part upon my firm conviction that the way in which contemporary society perceives and thinks about autism is conditioned by *linear perspective vision*, which is a mode of perception that originated during the Renaissance and continues to influence modern thinking today. In exploring this topic, I will rely primarily upon the work of psychological theorist Robert D. Romanyshyn, whose treatment of this somewhat obscure research topic demonstrates considerable care, insight, reflection, and research ethic.

Linear perspective vision was invented by Filippo Brunelleschi in 1425, ten years before being “codified” by Leon Battista Alberti in “[his] treatise on painting” (Romanyshyn 35). Originally applied to artistic practice, this mathematical method of perception and drawing involves the convergence of multiple lines toward a single point known as the “vanishing point” (Edgerton 26) (emphases removed), which lies at the “horizon” and is precisely “identical with the viewer’s eye level” (Romanyshyn 39). All visible objects within one’s field of vision, including other people, also line up with the viewer’s eye level, thus occupying a single flat plane (Edgerton 26). This imposes no small degree of homogeneity upon all observable phenomena, each of which is distinguished chiefly—if not solely—by its “spatial distance from the viewer” (Romanyshyn 52). Having been established in the fifteenth century, this method would soon become the standard for the Modern perception of the world. As art historian Helen Gardner states, it “made possible scale drawings, maps, charts,

graphs, and diagrams—those means of exact representation without which modern science and technology would be impossible” (qtd. in Romanyshyn 33). Clearly, the phenomenon of linear perspective deserves attention.

Linear perspective vision intensely impacts the way in which people relate to others and to the world. A major consequence of linear perspective is what Romanyshyn refers to as “[t]he window and the camera” (32). Basically, this means that the linear perspective viewer observes the world as if from behind a window. This is a significant change from the pre-modern worldview (characteristic of medieval Europe as well as ancient cultures), in which the consciousness of human beings was saturated with awareness of the individual’s intimate connection with the wider world, with nature, and with other human beings. One would do well to consider, as an example, “the medieval artist[,]” who—in contradistinction to “the Renaissance painter”—“was absorbed within the visual world he was representing rather than, as with the perspective painter, standing without it, observing from a single, removed viewpoint” (Edgerton 21). Linear perspective, by imposing a “window as boundary of separation between viewer and [. . .] the world, out there, on the other side of the window, which has become primarily an object of vision” (Romanyshyn 74-75), marks the difference between these two styles of engagement with the world (of which painting is only one example). This radical disconnection renders the world a mere “spectacle” (Romanyshyn 176) that is deprived of meaning and reduced to a collection of mere measurable objects. As a result, “[n]ature

becomes dead, mechanical and iridifferent to human life” (Robbins, “Magic Tales” par. 11) and “can be known only to the degree that one is removed from it” (Robbins, “Magic Tales” par. 13). The individual self, meanwhile, becomes a disengaged “spectator” with “infinite vision [. . .] [characterized by] singular focus and fixed intensity” (Romanyshyn 65). This spectator self carefully analyzes what lies on the other side of the window so as to understand it in an objective fashion. Vision, then, is the most important sense for the linear perspective self. This infinite vision (corresponding with the infinite horizon of the linear perspective world) explains—or “ex-plain[s]”—everything, effectively “reduc[ing] [. . .] all things [. . .] to the same *plane* or level of reality” so that “regardless of what they are and [. . .] of the context to which they belong, [they] are equal and the same” (Romanyshyn 43) (emphasis added). Such a vision offers little opportunity for variation of any kind and deprives the viewer of the sense that objects and people possess any inherent value or meaning (as they have acquired a high degree of sameness).

Whether or not one realizes it, linear perspective² also greatly impacts the way in which one relates to oneself. Because the *eye* becomes the objective means of measuring/evaluating the world, the spectator “~~w~~[ies] to eliminate the distracting senses and feel of the body, and become pure mind” (Pope par. 18). All non-visual bodily senses become eclipsed and the individual’s intimate, sensuous ties to the world and to other people gradually diminish. This, in a subtle manner, causes the spectator to lose his/her identification with his/her physical body, which becomes a

mere container providing a vehicle by which the self may move through the world as a detached observer. Robbins alludes to this phenomenon in reminding the reader that the linear perspective eye is not to be confused with a person's physical eyes, but rather constitutes a "disincarnate eye" ("Magic Tales" par. 13). This disincarnate eye designates a self that perceives external phenomena from within the head (the area in which the sense of vision is located), and because of this the body is abandoned. As all other figures within the field of linear perspective vision exist on the same plane as the viewer and match his/her eye level, their bodies also diminish, as Samuel Y. Edgerton states, "from the foot up" (196). The human self retreats from the body into the head, "increasingly becom[ing] a matter [thereof]" (Romanyshyn 48). It is this aspect of linear perspective that would later influence René Descartes, founder of Cartesian dualism (mind vs. matter, etc) and, many have argued, of modern thought. Descartes characterized the individual human not as a living body, but as a "*nuclear self*, something self-defining and self-contained" (Guignon 43) (emphases included). In summary, with linear perspective vision comes an emphasis upon the disembodied eye, disassociation with one's bodily senses, and a radical distinction between inner and outer realities that brings about a shift not only in one's relationship with the world and with other people, but also with his/her own bodily existence.

Even in light of such a brief description of the modern worldview as influenced by linear perspective vision, connections with autism may be readily perceived. Both within the medical/psychological world and in common speech,

autistic children are described as being contained within their own *little worlds*. Parents often describe feeling as if there is an invisible wall separating them from their children, or as if the children are trapped in their own *minds*. Arguably, the ability to speak and think in this manner would not be possible without the rhetoric of a self *behind the window*, peering detachedly through his/her body with a disincarnate eye—nor, arguably, without the Cartesian notion of the immaterial, interior self. The implication of this connection is that our perspective on and response to autism is inextricable from the way in which linear perspective has influenced our conception of the nature of human existence.

There is, however, a far more complex and important connection between the linear perspective/Cartesian consciousness of the Modern world and autism than can be implied by a mere assertion of the obvious—namely, that people will view phenomena such as autism through the lens of this pervasively influential worldview. This tendency, like autism, is itself symptomatic of the wider implications of the Modern worldview. My sincere belief, based upon careful research of both autism and the effects of the Modern worldview upon human life in today's world (especially Western society), is that autism is a *shadow* of the Modern worldview to which linear perspective vision has given rise. Originally coined by C.G. Jung³ in reference to aspects of an individual's personality that he/she is unwilling to acknowledge (to him/herself or to others) (20), *shadow* is a term employed by more recent theorists to refer to the symptomatic reemergence of qualities that have been

repressed by society as a whole over a significant period of time; accordingly, the term refers also to groups and individuals who carry the burden of these qualities and characteristics that society has marginalized, shunned, and repressed. Society in general tends to suffer (as will be indicated in chapter 3) from the loss of these banished qualities, and can therefore benefit by engaging with the shadow in a constructive way so as to reincorporate these lost qualities into everyday life. In rigorously applying the diagnostic model to such conditions as autism, society oftentimes further suppresses this opportunity and thereby intensifies the loss of the abandoned qualities. Autism is typically understood and approached in the latter fashion, but I propose that it must be understood/approached in the former.

In order to make the connection with autism, more must be said about the Modern worldview. First, it must be noted that the development of linear perspective vision from its roots in the arts to a cultural vision of reality was gradual, as may be expected. Romanyshyn explores this development in the section of his book entitled “[t]ransformations of the window,” asserting that the initial appearance of the barrier separating the self from the world existed in the form of an “open window,” which, while not enabling an individual to walk out into “the world on the other side” as through an open door, still permitted the non-visual sensory qualities of the world to reach his/her senses (71-72). However, this window soon became ““closed””—as early, in fact, as “Alberti himself and his early successors”—thereby imposing a solid barrier and, by implication, a “distance,” between the observer and the observed”

(Romanyshyn 72). From there, the transformation of the window was affected by yet another aspect of Alberti's window, which he himself describes as "a *veil* loosely woven of fine thread, dyed whatever color you please" (qtd. in Romanyshyn 74) (emphasis added). Elaborating upon the nature of the window as veil, Romanyshyn states that the character thereof is "peculiar" in that it "is not one which is given but a *self-chosen* one, a veiling which the self has itself created" (76) (emphasis added). The implication of this is that the observer may, via the imposition of the veil, determine for himself/herself the nature of what lies on the other side of the window, perceiving the object of vision in whatever manner he/she pleases. The window next becomes "a grid which arranges the world into parallel squares and [. . .] *divide[s]* and *sub-divide[s]* into parts" (Romanyshyn 77) (emphases included). This mathematical vision of the world allows the artist to depict whatever he/she observes in a meticulously precise fashion, and in turn provides for the manifestation of yet another trait of linear perspective vision: the depiction of the world in the form of a *map*. The map, according to Romanyshyn, is a visible incarnation of the window of linear perspective vision and, moreover, one in which "what originated with Alberti and his times as a way of seeing [. . .] become[s] for us a world that is seen" (82). Stated differently, the objectification of the visible world and the quantification of the phenomena therein have become, for us, the measure of reality as a result of linear perspective vision.

There are a number of implications of the window and its transformation.

First, the changing nature of what is perceived reflects the changing nature of the perceiver (namely, the human being). In order to view the world in a fragmented fashion, one must possess fragmented consciousness, or what Romanyshyn calls “an analytical vision which decomposes the whole into parts, a vision whose power lies in its ability to isolate, decontextualize and anatomize the world” (77). Because the human body becomes an object along with the world, it also is subjected to this type of vision—specifically, via the anatomical experiments of medical science. In addition to being divided into his/her various bodily organs, the human being is (eventually) also divided into “analyzable [. . .] attitudes, emotions, and beliefs” (Romanyshyn 77). What this implies, albeit perhaps subtly, is a loss of *integrity*. Meaning—whether in reference to a human being, nature, animals, or other entities/objects—comes to reside not in any inherent and/or holistic importance or purpose, but rather in the conglomeration of various component parts (very much like a machine). This isolation is, in turn, projected upon the world and others via the window as grid, and as a result each object—including other human beings—becomes isolated from any wider context. Such isolation is reflected in the way in which the linear perspective self has come to view the world and himself/herself. The isolated, fragmented human is a disembodied self encased in a mechanical body, traversing an isolating, fragmented, mechanical world devoid of meaning among other isolated, disembodied selves trapped within mechanical bodies.

Another crucial implication of the window and its transformation is the domination of the objective, rationalistic eye (as suggested by the fact that the window as veil allows people to determine for themselves the nature of what they see). For example, the Modern experiment, which depends upon the ability to focus intensely upon a given subject in an objective, analytical manner (often dividing the subject into its component parts), is born as a result of linear perspective perception. The medical/diagnostic model often put to use in psychiatry—which seeks to analyze behavior, symptoms, feelings, etc. by fragmenting them into isolated components and then formulating a precise diagnosis (much like the aforementioned map) based thereon—is only one example. In his comprehensive study of the effects of linear perspective upon society, Romanyshyn draws attention to anatomical experiments on corpses, which became popular near the end of the fifteenth century. No longer a “dead body,” which in earlier ages was treated with care and respect and recognized as a human being whose connections to the living still remained (Romanyshyn 122-123), the corpse is now a “spectacle” (Romanyshyn 115) for the human eye, to be observed as it is dissected and “dis-membered” into its various fragments so as to be more easily reconstructed in anatomical sketches (Romanyshyn 116). This rather violent method of experimentation was also (and has since been) applied to nature, upon which the linear perspective person “fully imposes itself,” having “realize[d] itself as its master and *creator*” (Romanyshyn 80) (emphasis added). Because nature is now merely a mathematical space of measurable, analyzable objects subjugated to

the piercing gaze of a detached spectator, it comes to be understood in a far different manner. In the eyes of the linear perspective self, nature is essentially a dead, mechanistic object whose “secrets are extracted [. . .] under duress” (Morris Berman, qtd. in Robbins, “Magic Tales” par. 10). Under these circumstances, human enterprises, progress, and technological development may operate at the expense of nature. Creation is, after all, no longer considered sacred or important.⁴ Pope hints at this in the following observation he offers regarding the effects of linear perspective vision: “[L]inear perspective vision [. . .] promote[s] thought processes which become more focused, linear, rational, reductive. Such a mind becomes fixated on calculation and loses an openness and receptivity to the truths of the world as they might otherwise reveal themselves” (par. 19). While this is by no means an exhaustive examination of the consequences of Modern thinking, it clearly demonstrates the extent of the scrutiny and domination of the detached spectator self of linear perspective vision, the effects of which continue to this day.

Although we have become so accustomed to it that we are unable to perceive its effects, the linear perspective, Cartesian, experimental, rationalistic consciousness of modernity has affected the psychological well-being of Western society and, to a degree, the world as a whole. For us (meaning humankind), the flesh is no longer our connection with the sensorial world and with others; rather, it is “a sheet of metallic flesh” in which each individual is “metaphorically encased” and which “cleav[es] the self from the world” (Robbins, “Magic Tales” par. 14). As theorist Robert Sardello

suggests, our ambitions, desires, and feelings rightly belong in a relationship with the wider world (137); linear perspective consciousness, however, prohibits this type of relationship with the wider world. As Robbins states, “[v]alue and meaning [are] no longer ascribed to the world, but retreat[] into the interior of the human being” (“Magic Tales” par. 9). As a consequence of this, the individual body is forced to bear the weight of its feelings, values, reflections, and desires “alone, apart from the world” (Romanyshyn 142). Unable to bear in solitude the weight of what is meant to exist within the context of a relationship with the wider world, the human body falls into the grip of *fear*. Fear, in this case, does not refer to *fear* as the term is commonly understood. In exploring the modern phenomenon of fear, Sardello characterizes it as that which causes “contraction of the soul” (xxiii), which consists precisely in man’s continual inward retreat into self-based existence apart from others and from the world. What we might think of as fear actually constitutes the physiological effects thereof, but fear itself, according to Sardello, may (and does) exist within a person independently of those (13). The Modern human falls into the grip of this type of fear because of the self-isolation inherent within the concept of the withdrawn self of linear perspective vision, and also because of the loss of coherence in consciousness due the fragmentation of the self, the body, and the world (the potentially fearful effect of which has already been noted in reference to autism). Also, however, it occurs because the objective, mathematical, experimental model we have applied to the world and to the human person (including both the body and the supposed interior

self) is one that we have also applied to the manufacturing of new technologies.

While this statement may seem strange and perhaps even irrelevant, we must consider that the equal application of the same model to technology—which was primarily *mechanical* for most of the Modern era, prior to the advent of digital technology—and to ourselves reflects and implies the mechanization of the human being.

Romanyshyn alludes to this in informing the reader that in the pre-Modern world, the human heart and the movement of blood throughout the body were believed to operate in a manner that was in accord with the natural rhythms of the world, one that is “leisurely [. . .], rhythmical, periodic, and quite organic” (136); in 1628, William Harvey, by employing the experimental method alluded to previously, determined that the heart was a mechanical “pump” and that the movement of the blood was “more or less circular [. . .] [and] generated by an engine” (Romanyshyn 136). This is only one example of how the modern human body has become viewed in terms of autonomous machinery, and the problem has only worsened in more recent history as we have come to surround ourselves with more (and more numerous types of) technology. As Sardello states, our bodies have adopted a rhythm that is unnatural to us—more specifically, we have compromised “[t]he organic tempo that [. . .] balances us with the world” and assumed “the mechanical pace of the machine and the fitful rhythm of the electronic world” in our normal, everyday lives (71). This can only have an unfavorable effect upon the human soul, which “requires duration of time—rich, thick, deep, velvety time—and [. . .] thrives on rhythm,” but is instead “hurried

[and] harried” and “bombarded with a rapid sequence of events that have little depth” (Sardello 71). Inevitably, anxiousness—whether acknowledged or unacknowledged—results. In short, Modern man is withdrawn, fragmented, and, for all intents and purposes, *fearful*.

As is often the case with shadows, autistic individuals are both carriers of returning symptoms *and* exaggerated expressions of the condition of the rest of society (I have a theory as to why this is the case, which I will discuss in chapter 3). If members of contemporary society were to look closely enough, they would see what society itself is becoming in the symptoms of autism. In the motor difficulties of the condition—especially as applies to movement and balance—one will easily see a reflection of “The Body in Fear” (Sardello 31), which refers to the effects of the dilemma of modern humanity alluded to in the previous paragraph. There is also, of course, the obvious connection between the self behind the window and the perceived withdrawnness of autistic children, which is especially intriguing in light of the fact that vision, the dominant faculty of the linear perspective self, is quite often an autistic person’s most acute sense (Notbohm, Ten Things Every Child xxii). Additionally, the connection between hypo-acute sensory perceptions and Modern man’s lack of alertness to particular sensory qualities cannot be ignored. In these and in other manners (which will be identified and discussed more thoroughly in light of subsequent literary analysis), autism is an intensified expression of what the remainder of society has, at least metaphorically, become.

Once again, it is imperative to note that autism is also, as a shadow, a return of repressed qualities, which reemerge in symptomatic forms. While the auditory, tactile, and olfactory awareness (to name only a few) of Modern man has (according to the observations of a number of theorists in the fields of phenomenology and metabletics) been significantly compromised, autistic children often experience such awareness in the polar opposite manner. Sensory information of which most may never take notice causes them extreme pain and discomfort, often driving them to tantrums (Notbohm, Ten Thing's Every Child xxix). This problem is exacerbated by the fact that autistic children often experience “[s]ensory [m]ixing” (Grandin 71), which entails the confusion and intermingling of various senses and, by implication, the accompanying difficulties. A positive aspect of hyper-acute sensory alertness in autistic people is that they are able to perceive and be attentive to subtle sensory qualities that most people would either ignore or remain unaware of (perhaps both). When interacting with autistic people, then, society must be open to the recovery of perceptive qualities that society as a whole has lost, which now seemingly attempt to force themselves back into Modern consciousness through the symptoms of autism.

Society's relationship to the autism phenomenon must be an even exchange. In other words, our response should not be based solely, or even chiefly, upon the prospect of *curing* autistic people. Certainly, we must attempt to help assuage their symptoms and to draw them, as much as possible, into an engaged relationship with the world around them. Simultaneously, however, we must allow them to instruct us.

First, to appropriate a phrase from the Gospel, we must “first take the log out of [our] own eye[s], [so that we may] see clearly to take the speck out of [our] neighbor’s eye” (New Oxford Annotated Bible, Matthew 7:5). We must acknowledge the fact that their problems and sufferings mirror our own (of which we may be unaware at any conscious level), which means that if we want to truly help them we must examine and understand our own collective condition more carefully. Secondly, we must be open to the possibility of reincorporating qualities we lack that may be found in autism (for example, the aforementioned attention to sensory details). Society has certainly taken great strides toward understanding autism; my hope is that by gaining an understanding of autism from the standpoint of metabletics, constructive engagement with the phenomenon may become even more effective.

The aforementioned approach to autism necessitates our willingness to operate independently of the medical/diagnostic paradigm. Many of Western society’s methods of evaluating, diagnosing, and treating illnesses and disorders are inspired by linear perspective vision, as previously indicated by the citation of its influence upon modern science. Oftentimes, by taking this approach, the scientific and psychological communities unintentionally dehumanize patients by turning them into specimens. Notbohm expresses an awareness of this tendency—which is often readily adopted by people who operate outside of the medical profession—when she states that one should not approach an autistic child with the attitude of “‘fixing’ the child” (Ten Things Every Child xviii). A deeper understanding of autism for the

purpose of better engagement is made possible only by a more holistic approach, which is where metabletics becomes helpful.

Now, at last, I am able to explain why I believe that autism should be explored through narrative analysis. The narrative, as a general rule, bypasses any scientific codification of reality and focuses upon involving readers, viewers, and/or listeners in a representation of the human experience with all of its many depths and complexities. Furthermore, more often than not, works of art and literature reflect the psychological makeup of the cultures in which they are produced; as such, their stories tend to incorporate the various tensions, concerns, ideologies, and other matters of significance within the wider culture. I believe that Romanyshyn, as a phenomenological theorist, is probably very much aware of the potential importance of the narrative as such; he argues, after all, that science and the arts often “converge” in order to represent and “envision a common reality” from alternate points of view (Romanyshyn 5), and even cites literary critic Frederick Turner’s assertion that “the arts and humanities *are* higher physics” (qtd. in Romanyshyn 5) (emphasis included). The study of the phenomenon of autism through narrative analysis is not only desirable, but also necessary in order to understand the condition as an experience and, essentially, as a *story*, rather than simply as an illness that must be eradicated by further application of the Modern medical paradigm. The forthcoming analyses will be dedicated not only to understanding the condition of autism itself, but also the context within which it is embedded—including, among other aspects of a

comprehensive worldview, narrative reflections of how autism is recognized and responded to by society.

I conclude by offering an explanation, in advance, for the diverse variety of narratives to be employed in my overall literary analysis. The works I am studying not only encompass different genres and modes of narrative form, but also possess temporal variation ranging from antiquity to modernity. While the juxtaposition of vastly different types of fiction may appear somewhat arbitrary at the outset, the examination of the autism phenomenon through the analysis of a complex accumulation of different types of literature from different time periods is both appropriate and necessary in order to approach a better understanding thereof. The complexity of the autism phenomenon is quite apparent from the perspective of metaleptics, given the fact that its role as a shadow includes both the mirroring of society's collective condition in an exaggerated form *and* the symptomatic presence of abandoned qualities. As mentioned in the first paragraph, this complexity is also perceivable from a scientific-diagnostic perspective. According to Grandin, "the behavioral criteria [for autism] are constantly being changed" (35). Accordingly, the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual has expanded its categorization of autism as a recognized disorder (Robbins, Personal Interview, 8 Oct. 2007). Clearly, autism presents a challenge to the scientific community, which would seek to achieve certainty via the application of labels and reliable criteria to what they encounter. It is quite apparent that autism, in a sense, eludes this attempt.

Autism, as a whole, constitutes a case in which the qualities that have been abandoned since the advent of linear perspective vision can no longer be “safely disguised beneath [the medical paradigm]” (Romanyshyn 167). Given the significant complexity of the condition, the study of autism in literature must necessarily involve a complex variety of narratives in which odd juxtapositions are included (i.e. the examination of Moby-Dick and Fight Club in chapter 3). Hopefully, the study of these literary works in light of this chapter’s introductory information will facilitate a more robust and profound appreciation for the autism phenomenon than has previously been available to society.

NOTES

¹ *Kanner's syndrome* is the label applied to the type of autism that typically comes to mind. At the earliest stage, the Kanner's child "lack[s] both social relatedness and speech or ha[s] abnormal speech" and "remain[s] very severely handicapped because of extremely rigid thinking, poor ability to generalize, and no common sense" (Grandin 36). The term *Asperger syndrome* describes a subset of autism applied to children "who tend to be far less handicapped than people with Kanner-type autism" (Grandin 37) but nevertheless suffer from autistic symptoms. One distinction that Grandin cites between Kanner's Children and "Asperger children" is that the latter "are often clumsy [indicating motor deficiencies]" (37).

² In no way do I mean to disparage linear perspective itself. Many important scientific and technological advances have derived from this vision. I simply insist that we must be aware of the accompanying consequences of this change in mankind's perception of the world.

³ I am not suggesting that society should better understand autism by turning to Jungian psychology, which is fraught with difficulties from both a pragmatic viewpoint and a qualitative viewpoint; however, the notion of the shadow is a mark of wisdom on Jung's part that has been adopted and elaborated upon by theorists who are influenced by his thinking, and in light of Romanyshyn's insights I am convinced that it is highly useful in understanding autism.

⁴The results of this particular aspect of linear-perspective-based consciousness are readily apparent in our time in the destruction of the environment, pollution, deforestation, etc., an observation to which many will attest.

Chapter Two: An Exploration of the Implications of Autistic Analogies in the Fairy Tale Genre

Given my previous insistence that autism should be understood in light of the Modern worldview, I must admit that it would appear as though I were challenging my own argument in the act of writing this chapter. This is, however, by no means the case. First, because connections between specific fairy tales and autism have already been made, these tales are so important that no honest study of autism in literature can progress without taking account of them. Secondly, the examination of narrative works from the Modern era of which autism is a symptom, though certainly meaningful and important in and of itself, will be greatly enriched and rendered more meaningful if the reader is able to contrast the Modern worldview to which these works belong with the *pre-Modern* worldview (i.e. before the advent of linear perspective vision) to which myth and folklore belong. In the cases of both autism and its wider context, the analysis of myth/folklore is fitting; in particular, the tales of *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty* bear significance with regard to autism.

By way of introduction, I will first devote some consideration to the interpretation of the Snow White/Sleeping Beauty myth in light of Uta Frith's reading thereof from the viewpoint of cognitive/developmental psychology. Frith notes that in both stories, the title character is in a state that is between life and death, and therefore comparable to "the beautiful [autistic] child [who] is tantalizingly near, yet

so far. The hedge of thorns or the glass coffin [encasing Sleeping Beauty and Snow White, respectively] are perfect for representing the impossibility of reaching the child” (Frith 36). If one approaches the fairy tale in general in this light, he/she will likely detect the isolative aspect of autism also in such tales as *Rapunzel* and *Princess Rosette*, which involve the familiar motif of a young, innocent girl concealed within a tower and powerless to come out into the world, despite her earnest desire to do so. In any case, as Frith suggests, the “chilling and fascinating combination of childhood innocence and madness” (36) that characterizes the “haunting and somehow other-worldly beauty” of the distant autistic child (1) lends itself quite comfortably to folkloric analogies such as these. Frith’s observations in this matter are fascinating and thoughtful, and certainly her suggestion that the people who first told these stories were responding to encounters with autistic traits is understandable.

Frith’s arguments are persuasive, but it is important to bear in mind that whenever anyone designates such stories as “Snow White” and “Sleeping Beauty” as being *about autism*, he/she is automatically misreading them. *Autism* is, after all, a Modern category, and the origins of these tales are pre-Modern. As this is the case, contemporary readers must recognize these stories as related to the autism phenomenon in a different way. Frith is quite perceptive in her discovery of the autistic connections in “Snow White” and “Sleeping Beauty,” but she falls prey to the error of taking these connections *literally*. This is precisely what allows her to reduce the value of these stories to expressions of “half-truths [. . .] [that] can give only

short-lived comfort” (Frith 50) via the naïve presentation of the fabled “happy ending” (Frith 36). While her study is admirable and doubtlessly well intentioned, she imposes upon these tales a framework that is both inappropriate and anachronistic. The criteria according to which she evaluates these well known myths are in accordance with the linear-perspective-based medical/diagnostic model, which is the framework to which the diagnosis of autism belongs (as mentioned in the previous chapter). Indeed, when viewed through this perspective, the tales do appear overly fanciful. If one’s goal is to *cure* an autistic child of her withdrawnness, certainly it *will* take far more than a prince’s kiss; similarly, it is highly unlikely that the so-called *cause* of autism may be attributed to an evil fairy’s curse or a poisoned apple. Once again, however, one must be aware that this reading of the tales is an imposition of the Modern perspective, which seeks to approach phenomena such as autism with the objective, diagnostic, conquering (in searching for a cure in order to *eradicate* the condition), and literalistic (seeking to understand in a meticulously precise, *mapped-out* manner) eye of linear perspective vision. Generally speaking, Frith’s reading is unhelpful in understanding these stories as they are meant to be understood, and is therefore incomplete in its exploration of the autistic elements thereof.

Like Frith, I believe that these tales may—even if only in the broadest sense—be thought of as involving autism; unlike Frith, I do not believe that they are concerned with autism as we understand it. One of the inherent traits of myths and

fairy tales is that they are multivalent. In exploring basic aspects of general human experience, they are open to numerous interpretations. For example, “Snow White” and “Sleeping Beauty” may be read as stories about nature and the wider world.¹ As Robbins has stated, the Modern fairy tale has its “origin in oral folk tales [. . .] [that] assisted the community in developing explanations for natural occurrences, such as changes in the seasons or weather, and served as ways to structure the meanings of communal events” (“Magic Tales” par. 3). Insisting that these tales are specifically about the condition of autism as understood within the Modern diagnostic paradigm signifies the reductionism towards which the Modern worldview can sometimes tend, and insisting that they are naïve tales about curing autism is anachronistic.

Significantly, the origins of such reductive readings as this may be traced back to the sixteenth century, during which time folktales became appropriated to suit ideologies inspired by linear perspective vision. During this time period, the fairy tale underwent a significant alteration, becoming linked to “the concerns, tastes, and functions of court society” (Jack Zipes, qtd. in Robbins, “Magic Tales” par. 4). No longer open to interpretations in accordance with the multifaceted nature of human experience (and precluding interpretation in accord with connections to the wider world), these stories became “tool[s] to socialize [. . .] child[ren] by cultivating “feelings of shame” and by arousing anxiety in children ‘when they did not conform to more inhibiting ways of social conduct’ [quoted from Jack Zipes]” (Robbins, “Magic Tales” par. 5). Children’s literature professors Lee Galda and Bernice E.

Cullinan allude to this same phenomenon in stating that during the following centuries, “[t]he few books available to children were moralistic, didactic, and riddled with sanctions” (414). Additionally, whereas stories were told orally in earlier centuries, they were written down in the sixteenth century; in the wake of the invention of printing, literacy became far more common among the masses than in pre-Modern times. The placement of fairy tales within the context of literacy is important, as literacy is more conducive to the aims of the Modern worldview than oral storytelling. In exploring the psychological effects of literacy upon Western culture, Simms states that “[w]hile oral reading is participatory [. . .] silent reading is an invisible activity of the individual mind” (395). Additionally, as W.J. Ong argues, literary and oral cultures differ in that while the latter engage with “the phenomenology of sound[,] [which] enters deeply into human beings’ feel for existence,” the former is consistent with the Modern conception of the world “primarily [as] something laid out before [our] eyes” (qtd. in Simms 392). Stories were made to resemble the way in which people were to view the world—namely, as something from which to distance themselves and toward which to maintain an objective stance. In essence, society began to make the tales fit into the framework of the newly emerging Modern worldview and then instructed children that they were to interpret the tales in accordance with this framework. The fact that Modern readers such as Frith are more apt to read such stories as explicitly concerned with autism bears the mark of this alteration (as the medical/diagnostic framework is also

characteristic of the Modern worldview). It is quite possible that the significance of these pre-Modern tales lies not so much in any purposeful interpretation of autism, but rather in the coinciding imposition of both autism and the Modern diagnostic framework upon them.

There is, however, another consideration that must be taken into account with regard to myth and fairy tale. As Frith correctly states, “relatives of an autistic child often undergo a harrowing experience” and “may obtain [. . .] comfort from [fairy tales such as *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty*]” (50). There is a specific reason for this, even though people may be unaware of it. The value of myth resides in the fact that it is concerned with perennial aspects and universal truths of the human experience. In dealing with human relationships with others and with the world around them, myths lend themselves to the provision of comfort, encouragement, and, more importantly, *meaning*, in any situation. Indeed, it is through myths that people come to realize that they are not alone in their struggles and triumphs. Archetypal psychology theorist James Hillman alludes to this aspect of myth in stating that “we illustrate [myths] with our lives” (102), meaning that our many struggles, triumphs, dilemmas, and experiences each bear resemblance to a particular myth (given the perennial nature of the concerns that lie at the core of mythology). For that reason, I believe that it is potentially helpful to pay attention to analogies to autism in myth and folklore, even if they are not *explicitly* concerned with autism. Any connection will, of course, be metaphorical and analogical rather than literal. While I do not consider

the myth and fairy tale genres to constitute the most important aspect of my narrative-based study of autism, I do believe in their ability to provide steady ground for thinking metaphorically about the condition. As the deficiency in metaphorical thinking is symptomatic of both autism (as mentioned in the previous chapter) and Western culture as impacted by linear perspective vision (Romanyshyn 183), the opportunity for cultivation of this capacity must be allotted a place within this study.

In light of the previous paragraph, let us operate under the assumption that these stories are about autism—albeit in a different manner from Frith’s interpretation. The most crucial observation that the astute reader should make is that the way in which the autism is *framed* differs markedly from Modern conceptions. In order to explain this assertion, it is necessary to first point out that in spite of the changes wrought in the presentation of fairy tales in the sixteenth century (alluded to above), remnants of the pre-Modern worldview still linger within them. That is why I would argue that an examination of these stories provides an important groundwork for subsequent analysis. After all, a deeper understanding of autism in light of the context of the Modern era must include an understanding of how our *approach* to autism fits within the Modern worldview; in order to gain such an understanding, we must be able to contrast it with how it would have been approached in the *pre-Modern* world. Because of their intimation of the considerable difference between the pre-Modern understanding/approach—not only to autism but also to human life

and its many complexities—and that of the Modern day, linear-perspective-driven, diagnostic paradigm, the tales in question bear importance.

I have elected to analyze the tales of Snow White and Sleeping Beauty as told by the Brother Grimm and Charles Perrault (in the case of the latter tale only, in Perrault's case; his collection does not include a retelling of "Snow White"). Because most contemporary familiarity with many popular fairy tales derives from the renditions of these particular individuals, their versions of "Snow White" and "Sleeping Beauty" lend themselves most comfortably to a scholarly analysis of these tales. While I am only able to present the Grimm brothers' version of "Snow White," I will include Perrault's version of "Sleeping Beauty" as well as theirs. I believe that the opportunity to do so is important whenever possible, as the suggestion of significant intimations of the oral/pre-Modern roots of these stories is more credible if the said intimations may be found in more than one literary rendition.

In observing the plight of the title characters of each story (the *autistic* characters), what Modern readers should find most striking is the communal response to their afflictions. When Snow White lies in her slumber, the seven dwarves keep a perpetual vigil (one at a time) beside her glass coffin, unwilling to depart from her even in her comatose state. Along with the dwarves, the creatures of the forest "mourn[] for Snow White" (Grimm and Grimm 228). When Sleeping Beauty pricks her finger on the spinning wheel, everyone else in the castle goes to sleep along with her; this includes not only all of the people, but also "[t]he horses in their stalls, and

dogs in the yard, the pigeons on the roof, the flies on the wall, [and even] the very *fire* that flickered on the hearth” (Grimm and Grimm 148) (emphasis added). The trees surrounding the castle gather to shelter it so that no one may enter until the one hundred years of the curse have transpired. As soon as the time comes and the heroic prince arrives, “the tall trees, the brambles and the thorns, separated of themselves and made a path for him” (Perrault 8). It is precisely in this manner that the residue of the pre-Modern worldview, “a world of things and human beings that emerge as mattering within a concentric order and towards a higher purpose” (Robbins, “Magic Tales” par. 21), makes itself visible. The circumstances surrounding the slumbers of both characters display the characteristics of a *sympathetic* relationship existing within a world in which humans are connected with each other and even with animals and nature. In neither tale, therefore, is the sleeping maiden left to bear her curse alone, nor is she “diagnosed” and institutionalized (Romanyshyn 170). If Sleeping Beauty and Snow White are autistic, one might surmise that the absence of the more extreme symptoms is owed (metaphorically/symbolically speaking, of course) to the support of a sense of community and collective meaning that is largely absent in the Modern era.² The introversion, deficit in communal skills, and extreme sensory difficulties (whether in terms of *under-stimulated* or *over-stimulated* senses) common to the autism spectrum reflect the conditions that are specific to the Modern era and to the Modern spectator self behind the window of linear perspective vision (in the next chapter, I will explore this in great detail). Arguably, the stories of the sleeping

princesses demonstrate the important distinctions between the pre-Modern era and the Modern era—particularly, in terms of personal vs. interpersonal connections.

The manner in which the characters' interior slumber is alleviated is also important. Each maiden is awakened by a handsome young prince who falls in love with her. Sleeping Beauty (along with all who lost consciousness along with her) is awakened by her prince's kiss while Snow White's prince, in carrying her coffin away with him, accidentally effects the removal of the poisoned apple that caused her slumber. As indicated previously, Frith reads these endings as literary devices that conform to the purposes of the fairy tale genre without concern for the true mechanics of autism. Once again, however, I beg to differ. I would instead argue the primary implication of this device to be that all is well for Snow White and Sleeping Beauty because, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, they are not alone. More specifically, it is *love* that gives them life (even if love is depicted in rather fancifully/sentimentally). In both stories, the prince falls in love with the maiden as soon as he lays eyes upon her and desires a closer connection with her. In so doing, he expresses a critical feature of love—namely, that it “is a force of connection and attraction” enabling people to be drawn out of the isolation of fear³ (Sardello 20). One must bear in mind that this does not apply exclusively to *romantic* love; the word *love*, after all, applies to a much broader framework than that categorization is able to offer. This is apparent even in the case of Snow White, who, as stated, is mourned by seven devoted dwarves and by the animals of the forest. If the reader may take away

anything valuable from these two tales in relation to autism, it is an assertion of the value of sympathetic suffering. Common sense dictates that if one truly loves another, he/she will be willing to share in that person's sufferings and/or maladies. Sardello asserts that another's sympathetic willingness to do so is what allows someone who is isolated by pain, grief, and/or fear to rejoin communal existence (115). The presence of so interpersonal a response to a personal anomaly is, arguably, what allows Snow White and Sleeping Beauty to wake from their respective slumbers.

Parents of autistic children may certainly benefit from reading the tales of these sleeping princesses in this light, as the ability to connect with these children—and, indeed, with *anyone*—depends greatly upon one's capacity to understand their experiences (at least as much as possible). Such an understanding will not only provide a better idea of how to help these children, but it will also afford them the dignity that is owed to them as human beings and, potentially, help them to engage more meaningfully with others, thereby gaining more confidence; Notbohm's observations certainly suggest that this is the case (Ten Things Every Child 95-102). It is this mode of interaction that is typically precluded by the Modern diagnostic model as traditionally understood and implemented.

Finally, the issue of cause and effect is important in these stories. Frith perceives the poisoned apple and the fairy's curse as corresponding with "biological

and psychogenic explanations” of autism (36). It is certainly consistent with Modern rationality to view reality through the lens of strict cause-and-effects relationships, and I would propose that Frith is making that very mistake (without being aware of it) in reading the Snow White/Sleeping Beauty myth. A proper understanding of myth and fairy tale must always be open to a symbolic, metaphorical thinking that, as Sardello might suggest, “does not follow the logic of cause and effect as we think of it in the [everyday] world” (xi). The sleeping maidens’ supposedly autistic sleep is presented within a context that, ironically (due to the presence of fanciful elements), more closely resembles the human experience than a mechanical, causal sequence of events. On the surface, Snow White’s stepmother does indeed use a magically tainted apple to send her into a deep sleep; this, however, is of secondary importance. What takes precedence is the fact that her action is motivated by a savage, hateful envy of her stepdaughter’s beauty (Grimm and Grimm 218-219). Likewise, the curse that the wicked fairy places upon Sleeping Beauty must be read in light of her self-pitying consternation at not having been invited to the child’s christening ceremony. In each case, envy, anger, spite, and selfishness—on the part of another, no less—lie behind the maiden’s malady. As Saint John Cassian suggests (referring primarily to anger, but implicitly to the other vices mentioned here as well), these are the forces that “blind[] the eyes of the heart” (82). They lead to disconnection, separation, and the dissolution of community by making the *self* one’s primary focus. The expressions of

connection and self-giving that appear later in the stories, though perhaps overly sentimentalized in translation into a Modern framework,⁴ contrast with the selfishness and bitterness of the evil fairy and the wicked stepmother, thereby constituting what we might think of as the cure. If we read these stories with a sufficient degree of sophistication, what we find is not an issue of cause and effect, but rather an artistic/poetical expression of what is inimical and what is conducive to human life and society. If we read these stories in an analogical fashion with regard to the autism phenomenon, we should obtain a sense of how the pre-Modern worldview contrasts with the Modern worldview, which, when examining autism and other conditions, too often tends to subjugate matters of wider significance (the aforementioned, for example) for the sake of detached and purely formal analysis and diagnosis. The issue here, then, is not so much one of cause and effect, but rather of a deeper understanding of conditions such as autism that makes for a more robust and harmonious engagement therewith.⁵

Suggestions of autism in *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty* are significant for three reasons: they demonstrate the Modern tendency to impose medical/diagnostic criteria onto pre-Modern contexts, they encourage people to adopt a metaphorical understanding that has been compromised in Western society as a whole since the advent of linear perspective vision, and they illustrate a meaning-laden, communal, and sympathetic worldview that stands in contrast with the diagnostic, cause-and-effect-based criteria of the Modern age. Parents, teachers, psychologists, and others

may indeed gain a more meaningful understanding of autism through fairy tales, regardless of whether or not there is, speaking in a purely practical sense, any direct connection between them. More importantly, if the stories are examined closely enough, a better comprehension of the differences between the pre-Modern worldview and the Modern worldview of which autism is a shadow begins to emerge.

NOTES

¹ Perrault's rendition of "Sleeping Beauty" certainly suggests such roots, as the title character begets two children named "Dawn" and "Day" (11); what this suggests is that perhaps the princess may be read as symbolic of the Spring, which awakes from its winter slumber every year.

² As was indicated in chapter 1 and as will be demonstrated in chapters 3 and 4, the extreme symptoms of autism are manifestations of the effects of linear perspective vision—namely, Modern man's self-alienation from sensory experience and from any sense of meaningful relationship with the wider world and with other people. I do want to reiterate that if the stories in question here are about autism, then it is a different *type* of autism from the kind that we know. Nevertheless, because of the strong analogies that do exist, and because of the fact that autism fits within the wider frameworks such as isolation, immobility, etc., I do feel that it deserves to be included in the thesis.

³ See note #4 of chapter 1.

⁴ Romanyshyn identifies sentimentality as another expression of the fragmented consciousness of linear perspective vision (93). The immediate intensity of sentimental feelings results from the fact that the feelings themselves are, like so much else in the Modern worldview, isolated from any

wider context, and therefore the spectator's attention to them is all the more intense and focused.

⁵ Once again, this is a case where my words could be misinterpreted. It is not my intention to romanticize pre-Modern life. Certainly, the pre-Modern world was not one in which people were *nice* to each other all the time. Some will even point to evidence that members of given communities were ostracized as a result of being different from the rest of the community. My point is simply to stress the fact that *community* and meaningful relationship with the wider world were important to these people—more so than in our time. In fact, I would argue that autism as we understand it could not have existed prior to the Modern era, because interpersonal communication, engagement with sensory experience, and a sense of belonging within the cosmos might have precluded many of its symptoms (as discussed in chapter 1). What I hope to demonstrate in this chapter is that the Modern approach is flawed in two respects: it tries to *isolate* causes of particular conditions rather than to place them within a wider context (in the case of the fairy tales, those extra-personal vices that are inimical to community; in the case of the Modern era, the worldview occasioned by linear perspective vision), and it assumes an exclusively diagnostic approach to treating them rather than a communal, humane approach.

Chapter Three: Literary Analysis as an Exploration of the Historical Basis for a

Metabletics of Autism

Studying the myths of earlier cultures and time periods may prove helpful, but if we are to properly comprehend autism we must become acquainted with our *own* mythology,¹ that of which the autism phenomenon is a part. It is not impossible that autism existed in some form in earlier ages as well; in speaking of the relationship between linear perspective vision and autism, one does not speak in terms of cause/effect logic. However, I believe it is fair to claim that never before has autism been such a widespread *cultural* phenomenon as during recent history. Furthermore, it is arguable that the more extreme autistic traits are particular to the Modern Era. Frith examines intimations of autism in history and literature, citing the earliest reported symptoms corresponding to autism to have existed in Medieval Europe in the form of “Brother Juniper,” a Franciscan monk who supposedly demonstrated the autistic traits of simple- and literal-mindedness, fascination with a repetitive activity, and “utter guilelessness” (40-43). Intimations of the more severe autistic symptoms (mentioned in chapter 1) appear to be more *contemporary* developments.

In evaluating, through narrative analysis, the historical background from which autism emerges, I will place my analysis of autism in literature against the background of three primary issues—presented in no particular order, but interlocking to comprise a general framework. The first issue is that of isolation. The term *autism* is derived from the Greek word “*autos*[,] meaning ‘self’” (Frith 7)

(emphasis included). Inherent within the label itself is an allusion to a form of existence that is characterized by a radical restriction to individual consciousness, which brings to mind the language of the linear perspective self that observes the world in a detached manner from behind a barrier. In his reflection upon Modern psychiatric diagnoses, Dutch psychiatrist J.H. van den Berg suggests that all psychopathological conditions have, as a common basis, “loneliness” (105); he supports this by noting that aloneness—in terms of mood, personal constitution, external relationships, and unique perceptions of the world—is conspicuously apparent as a general rule in “[t]he psychiatric patient” (van den Berg 105). In many ways, autism reflects the conditions of Modern culture (especially in the West), which, as mentioned in chapter 1, has long suffered from a sort of psychological isolation. In discussing the narratives featured in this chapter’s overall analysis, I will attend to the connection between autistic aloneness² and the isolation of Modern man, who has lost connection with the wider world. Theorist Rollo May, whose focus in the book Psychology and the Human Dilemma is related to the latter point, explores the condition of contemporary man by using the apt analogy of “The Man Who Was Put in a Cage” (161); the way in which he describes what happens to the man confined to a cage after time passes bears startling similarities to autism. In evaluating the *autistic-ness* of the characters in the forthcoming analysis, I will describe the ways in which each character (with the exception of Frankenstein’s monster, who embodies a different—but still related—aspect of the autism

phenomenon) demonstrates traits of the man in the cage as described by May; the condition of each central character I examine in this chapter—Hamlet, Ahab and Ishmael, and finally the main character of Fight Club—will progressively assume greater resemblance to the autistic condition and to the condition of the hypothetical man in the cage. The second issue is the reemergence—whether in healthy or symptomatic form—of repressed qualities (as discussed in chapter 1), and how the autism phenomenon is related to this occurrence in Western culture as a whole. The third is the domination of the modern self as influenced by linear perspective vision and Enlightenment Rationalism, discussion of which will include the practical and ideological implications of this domination (including, to an extent, its dire effect upon the meaningfulness of anything subject to its gaze), how it has been applied in the medical paradigm to autism, and why autism (along with other shadows) poses a challenge to it. While the significance of each work will certainly be different, my overall analysis is to be viewed through the lens of these three concerns.

I. Hamlet: An Early Spectator Self

As the reader might have gathered while reading the first chapter of this thesis, the most conspicuous link between autism and the phenomenon of linear perspective vision is the concept of the spectator self, the isolated self viewing the world in seclusion behind a window/barrier. If we travel back in time, as it were, to the early years of linear perspective vision, we will find, in this respect, an early autistic in Hamlet, Shakespeare's brooding Danish prince. Of all characters in early Modern literature, Hamlet has proven to be among the most important and the most enduring; in particular, he is famous for his isolation, introspection, and subjectivity, traits that were virtually unseen in prior literature and thought (Knowles 1063).³ Knowles explicitly states that "Shakespeare's discovery of subjectivity in Hamlet is as momentous as the Renaissance discovery of perspective in art" (1063), thereby offering an implicit recognition of the link between Hamlet's character and linear perspective vision. If a reader will study Hamlet in light of the connection between linear perspective vision and autism, he/she will be able to intuit, if not autism, then at least the *seeds* of autism in the prince's character and behavior. Throughout the play, Hamlet frequently alludes to his own interior states, thoughts, and feelings, to which he oftentimes attributes attention at the expense of external conditions and customs, much as the autistic child will often fixate upon his/her own preferences, customs, and idiosyncrasies at the expense of social propriety. One of the most explicit examples of this inclination in Hamlet occurs early in the play, when he makes the

following declaration: “I have that within which passes show, These [meaning the visible signs of mourning] but the trappings and the suits of woe” (Shakespeare I. ii. 85-86). He is speaking of his subjective, personal state of mind and emotion, which prompts him to persist in his grief and lamentation even when everyone around him has moved on. It is for this reason that his mother, Queen Gertrude, chides him by reminding him that “all lives must die” and by asking him, “Why seems it so particular with thee?” (Shakespeare I. ii. 75). More than any other character in this particular narrative, Hamlet is attentive to and fixated with his own interior existence at the expense of his surrounding environment. He is an early spectator self and, by extension, an early foreshadowing of autism.

When reading Hamlet, one must bear in mind that *outward* spectatorship and a particular relationship to one’s body are as characteristic of both linear perspective vision and autism as is inwardness. Outward spectatorship is most definitely present in Hamlet. The scene in which he observes Claudius while he views the play—more specifically, the scene that Hamlet himself contrived (depicting the murder of the king)—is a prime example. As a detached spectator, he offers annotative observations upon the spectacle of the performance. He is, as Romanyshyn states, “a spectator of others *and* himself” (70) (emphasis added). Many individuals on the autism spectrum are similar in that they are known for their adeptness at engaging with phenomena in an objective, logical, quantitative fashion; it is for this reason that people on the autism spectrum gravitate more often toward mathematics, science, and

technology than toward imaginative or social vocations/areas of interest. It is also worth noting that Hamlet's status as a linear perspective spectator is apparent in the way in which he regards his own body. The passage cited in the previous paragraph implies a dualistic conception, on Hamlet's part, with regard to his physical body and his inner, personal being; later in the play, he refers to his body as a "machine" (Shakespeare II. ii. 124), thereby complying with the linear perspective understanding of the body as a mechanistic object. Significantly, Hamlet's use of the word *machine* to describe the body is the "first recorded instance" thereof in literature (Knowles 1064). To understand oneself in this fashion is to be immersed in the style of consciousness that accompanies linear perspective, one that severs the self from its intimate relations with others and with the wider world—what Guignon calls the "*extended self*" of pre-modernity (18) (emphases included)—and entraps it within the body, which is no longer considered one's connection with the wider world but rather a work of machinery (which is impersonal, unfeeling, unnatural to human consciousness, and inimical to the depths of human experience—replacing, as Romanyshyn suggests, human "[a]ctivity" with "function" (Romanyshyn 17)). Hamlet's reflections upon his body may be argued to communicate the novelty and discomfiture of this new style of existence.

If Hamlet does not embody autism itself in this fashion, then at the very least he foreshadows the condition. In describing the tactile sensitivities of autistic children, Notbohm makes the following statements: "The child with autism is literally

trapped in her own skin, unable to regulate unwanted sensations that rain upon her in the form of uncomfortable clothes, unwelcome touches from other people [. . .] and unpleasant textures of things she is confronted with touching or eating” (Ten Things Every Child 12) (emphases added). In this particular autistic trait one witnesses the abandoned, devitalized body *screaming*, as it were, to become recognized again after having been abandoned for so long. Hamlet’s conception of the body prefigures this shadow phenomenon. In the character of Hamlet, one of the earliest literary representations of the Modern self influenced by linear perspective vision and some of the earliest intimations of the Modern phenomenon of autism find a place.

In light of Hamlet, the reader should recall Temple Grandin’s designation of *depression* as a part of the autism continuum.⁴ Anyone familiar with Shakespeare’s play will understand depression to be an obvious component of Hamlet’s ailment. In Hamlet’s case, the reader perceives that this symptom is connected to the *world-as-spectacle* aspect of linear perspective vision, which is present both in the play as a whole and in Hamlet’s character. Before this is explained, we must understand that Hamlet is situated rather early in the history of linear perspective. In discussing Hamlet’s initial mourning (quoted two paragraphs previous), Kirsch notes that he is undergoing “the early stages of grief, of its shock, of its inner and still hidden sense of loss” (19). Kirsch speaks of Hamlet’s grief on the literal level, in terms of the loss of his father; but as all narrative works, Hamlet being no exception, speak to a wider cultural context, I would argue that these *early stages* possess significance insofar as

they constitute an early reaction to the novelty of linear perspective vision and the resulting worldview. Hamlet's speech to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern draws attention to the effects of the newly-emerging Modern worldview upon him: "I have of late--but/wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, forgone all/custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with/my disposition, that this goodly frame, the earth,/seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent/canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging/firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire,/why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent/congregation of vapors. What [a] piece of work is a/man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in/form and moving, how express and admirable in/action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a/god! the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals;/and yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?" (Shakespeare II. ii. 295-308). In his study of Hamlet in relation the humanistic movements of this period in history, Knowles reads this speech as a "conscious rejection of Renaissance humanism" (1049). I believe that this assumption is partly correct, as linear perspective vision established *man* as the measure of reality and as dominator of the world and sensory experience (as discussed in chapter 1, and as will be discussed further in the next section of this chapter); this, arguably, was instrumental in the inspiration of Renaissance humanism, which is known for having celebrated human intellect and imagination. This demonstrates the latent hubris of Modern man (also to be discussed in the next section), which is very much connected to the reduction of experiential

and phenomenological meaning in the world. While this is an important observation on Knowles' part, and one that will prove useful in subsequent analysis, I would argue that to limit the importance of this passage to a mere disenchantment with mankind's newfound powers (of observation, measurement, etc) would be sadly reductive, given the scope of linear perspective vision and its effects upon man's experience of the world. Hamlet's words, when read in light of their historical context, communicate the "novelty and [. . .] surprise" (Romanyshyn 65) of the linear-perspective-based worldview that we now take for granted. The earliness of this worldview in Hamlet is intimated by hints of the vanishing pre-Modern worldview within Hamlet's speech—for example, his reference to the sky as a *majestical roof fretted with golden fire*. Such elaborate and poetic representations of the physical world communicate the "participatory and sensuous engagement" (Robbins, "Magic Tales" par. 20) on the part of the human being in relation thereto. Hamlet's unease reminds the reader that the "warm[,] [. . .] plural, [and] multisensory" world of the medieval era has been newly displaced by a "private[,] [. . .] singular space which is visual [at the expense of the other senses] and fragmented" (Romanyshyn 66). Indeed, the *sterile promontory* may be taken as a reference to a world reduced to a single, mathematical plain of measurable objects; the *pestilent congregation of vapors* may be understood in reference to the reduction of sensory phenomena (in this case, the visual experience of the sky) to quantifiable, scientific processes and laws. Hamlet's lamentation of man's condition reminds us of the

intimate connection between mankind and the surrounding world by indicating that changes in our perception of the world are accompanied by changes in the way in which we conceive of ourselves (which brings to mind the implicit link between man's conception of himself and the alteration in his conception of the world evinced Knowles' observation). Furthermore, and even more fundamental to our understanding of the effect of linear perspective vision upon human consciousness, we come to realize that with the advent of linear perspective vision and the Modern worldview, humankind loses the feeling of being able to function in the world. The reduction of affective meaning in the world and its displacement by the *world as spectacle* find clear expression in Hamlet's lament, and the similarity between Hamlet's depression and autistic behavior compels us to consider the autism phenomenon in light of this comprehensive cultural context.

Before proceeding to specify Hamlet's depressive behavior and to address its similarities to autistic behavior, I must devote a small portion of further attention to the worldview that has gained dominance during the last several centuries, beginning during the Renaissance era. Although the fundamental elements of the new Renaissance worldview have been established, more must be said about its effects if the significance of Hamlet's grief and of the depressive traits within which autism is to be appreciated. The poetic, metaphorical, multivalent, intrinsic meaningfulness of the world for pre-Modern people, which corresponded with the phenomenological experience of nature and of life, withdrew precisely because linear perspective vision

had the effect of challenging sensory perception. Fundamentally, at the most basic level, it was because mankind, with his newly acquired vision characterized by intense focus and the relative absence of sensory interruptions, began to see himself as removed from the world that he could attain the objectivity necessary in order to measure the laws of science and physics, determining that no natural or astronomical occurrence was imbued with any real significance. In other words, nothing happened for any particular reason; every occurrence and every characteristic of everything in existence was determined by mechanical laws that, for lack of a better term, *were the way they were* simply because that was *the way it was*. This marks a notable difference from earlier ages, during which people's perception of the world was in accordance with "Aristotelian physics," which held that "the movement of a thing was inseparable from its character and its place" (Romanyshyn 137). Romanyshyn explores the alteration in man's perception of the surrounding world very effectively by alluding to what pre-Modern individuals believed about objects of the surrounding world:

"Heavy objects, like stones, fell because they possessed the character of *gravitas* (gravity), just as lighter objects, like fire, moved upward because of their character of *levitas* (levity). Moreover, the movement of such bodies was said to reflect a desire to return to their natural places, heavy objects below with the earth and lighter ones above or higher up near the heavens. But when Galileo finally succeeds in subjecting the movement of things to the

rule of numbers, [. . .] movement becomes mechanism [. . .] [and] things lose their character, desire, and place”

(137) (emphases included).

As mentioned in chapter 2, the pre-Modern world was one in which every object, person, and phenomenon existed within the context of a sympathetic universe in which everything was imbued with meaning and purpose. In the wake of the advent of linear perspective, everything became subject to mechanical laws that function in a manner that is seemingly independent of any underlying meaning and/or purpose; such things as meaning, desire, purpose, character, and place became subjective. It is in light of this wider context of the devaluation of phenomenological experience and the deprivation of the character of the world and all that exists within it that Hamlet’s sorrow must be read.

While the mere fact of depression’s place within the context of the autism phenomenon renders the connections between Hamlet’s depressiveness and linear perspective vision thought-provoking, there is another aspect of his behavior that bears resemblance to autism. Unlike his mother and stepfather, Hamlet insists upon sustaining the memory of his father. Reading his grief within the wider context of the linear perspective worldview will suggest that it is expressive of early Modern man’s desperation to hold onto the past and to resist the *progressive* change (based on *linear* movement) initiated by the advent of Modern thought. A number of other instances in Shakespeare’s play, some of which will be discussed in greater detail shortly,

demonstrate this. Before examining these examples, though, it will be helpful to draw the analogy with autism so as to provide a lens through which to interpret their significance. One of Kanner's defining criteria for autism is the "obsessive insistence on sameness" (cited in Frith 11) (emphases excluded). This means that oftentimes an autistic child will require strict consistency in his/her environment, to the extent that he/she will be deeply troubled whenever even a slight detail or object is taken out of place. For precisely this reason, it is not at all uncommon for an autistic child to maintain, of his/her own accord, an exceptionally tidy room. Additionally, autistic children typically adhere to strict, precise schedules and routines, deviation from which can be a source of great anxiety for them if imposed too quickly. This may have the appearance of a relatively weak connection to Hamlet, but the common thread between this aspect of autism and Hamlet's behavior (or at least much of the impetus behind that behavior) is resistance to change. It would be misleading to speak of pre-Modern history as uniform, static, and without any change, progression, or adjustment; however, as I have suggested already, the advent of linear perspective produced a remarkable and unprecedented change not merely in social, cultural, political, or economic conditions, but in the way in which people perceived and related to the world around them.

In terms of the desire of autistic children for the consistency of their material surroundings, one is well advised to take account of what happens to the "things" (Romanyshyn 191) of the world within the field of linear perspective. Romanyshyn

comments that we, as human beings, often rely upon the objects in our immediate environment for stability and assurance; specifically, he states that “[w]e count on things to keep their place” and that “[t]hey have always been faithful sentinels in this way, always silent witnesses to our presence and to our needs” (Romanyshyn 193). Granted, most do not regard things (for instance, the items in one’s bedroom) in this fashion—at least not in a conscious manner. Unconsciously, however, it may be argued that we possess an intuition of the manner in which things provide an underlying security in our lives, as well as a certain testament to our identity (as the reliability of one’s environment leads one to feel at home therein, and since the ability to maintain a stable sense of identity depends upon being grounded in and belonging to a home). As I made clear in chapter 1, however, the linear perspective field is a homogenous field in which all things are deprived of qualitative meaning and are therefore distinguishable not in terms of any intrinsic value to the spectator self, but only in terms of their spatial distance from the self’s point of view. If the reader thinks of this in terms of the aforementioned allusion to the relationship between things and the notion of home, then he/she will take interest in an important theme within the history of the Modern worldview: the homelessness of man. I will not delve too deeply into this subject at the moment, as I will discuss it more carefully (and with reference to my sources in this matter) in the next section of this chapter; for the moment, it will suffice to state that the homogeneity of the linear perspective field, which includes human beings as well as other phenomena, renders all within it

qualitatively equal. Everyone and everything within this field may be located anywhere, and therefore truly belongs *nowhere*. In the years following the advent of linear perspective, Western society would be increasingly characterized by shiftlessness and expansion (also to be discussed in more detail in the next section). It may well be that the decline in the importance of *things* is intimately bound to the gradual decline in a feeling of being at home in the world. As for Hamlet, while he remains mostly in Elsinore castle throughout the play, he is clearly, as has been demonstrated, not at home in his surroundings. His own rebellion against change and loss is a reaction against his loss of a sense of being at home in the world, just as the autistic person's strong desire for sameness may be understood as a reaction against our collective cultural homelessness/shiftlessness.

At this point, it would be helpful to devote attention to the specific ways in which Hamlet demonstrates resistance to change. Specifically, Hamlet's resistance is based upon his yearning for the past. In a certain sense, Hamlet's lament for his murdered father may be interpreted as symbolic of early Modern man's lament for the older worldview displaced by linear perspective. This may appear to be a rather far-fetched claim, but my analogy is inspired by the *pervasiveness* of the deceased king's memory upon the psychology of Hamlet, to which Kirsch alludes by stating that Hamlet's "world [. . .] is essentially defined—generically, psychically, spiritually—by a ghost whose very countenance [. . .] binds Hamlet to a course of grief which is deeper and wider than any in our literature" (31). He appears to be making the

general argument that the memory of the king and the grievous condition of his soul is what troubles Hamlet, and moreover he relates this to Freud's statement that depression is partly characterized by "an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object [in this case, the king]" (qtd. in Kirsch 24) (emphasis included). Once again, one must remember that nearly all great narrative works speak both to and from a wider social/cultural/historical context. Having studied the history of linear perspective vision, I believe that the relationship between Hamlet and his father (more precisely, his father's memory and ghost) may be read as a symbolic expression of man's loss of a worldview that was imbued with meaning and belonging, as opposed to the objectifying and isolating worldview of linear perspective. At one point, Hamlet speaks of his deceased father in an idealized fashion, remembering him as having "Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,/An eye like Mars, to threaten and command,/A station like the herald Mercury" (Shakespeare III. iv. 56-58). In light of the blatantly mythological language attributed to his character, Hamlet's lament for his father may be said to embody early Modern man's lament for a glorified past that has now been lost. In reference to Claudius, the king's murderer and usurper, Kirsch notes that the world in which Hamlet now finds himself is "a diseased world, poisoned at the root by a truly guilty King" (27). Claudius, then, is emblematic of the newly established ideal (if not worldview, as this takes place quite early in the history of Modern perspective) of modernity. Indication of this is apparent in his initial criticism of Hamlet's grief, which constitutes a

“blunt[] and unsympathetic[] [. . .] [exhortation] to control [. . .] [his emotions/feelings] by employing *reason*” (Knowles 1057) (emphasis added). Knowles’ statement designates Claudius as a representative of the Modern worldview’s elevation of reason (detached, objective speculation) over feeling (which, when properly nourished, is a form of engagement with life, the world, and others). Gertrude follows suit, as I have demonstrated, in her attempt persuade him to simply accept the inevitability of death. It is as if Hamlet alone recognizes what has been lost, and he alone bears the weight of what is forgotten. As bearer of the memory of what has been lost, he decries the fact that his mother so hastily married Claudius after the death of his father (Shakespeare I. ii. 147-53); certainly, one might read this as allegorical of Western society’s all-too-eager embrace of the new worldview at the expense of the old. This is the nature of the shadow—namely, to serve as a reminder, by its very presence, of the dangers that the wider culture faces but refuses to acknowledge. The unease inherent within the transition from the pre-Modern worldview to that of the Modern era is detectable in Hamlet’s persistent mourning of his father.

The scene between Hamlet and the gravediggers is equally important in terms of Hamlet’s resistance to the linear perspective worldview. In this scene, he conveys to the reader a sense of lamentation for society’s lack of respect for the dead (Shakespeare V. i. 75-80); this is yet another trait of linear perspective consciousness: man’s ambition of distancing himself from death. This, according to Romanyshyn, is

what drives Modern man to distance himself from the body and from its sensuous connections with matter, which inevitably becomes associated with death and decay (125-126). Knowles indirectly (and probably unintentionally) alludes to this by describing Hamlet's words in this particular scene to express "pessimism influenced by the philosophical skepticism [. . .] which severely challenged the optimism of Renaissance humanism" (1048). Within the context of the graveyard scene, this amounts to the lamentation of mankind's proneness to "vainglory" (Knowles 1047), which is disappointed when all men meet with death. In this particular case, I disagree with Knowles, because his proposition suggests that Hamlet's laments death itself (in the sense that it disappoints the ambitions of mankind). Considering the context of linear perspective consciousness, I believe this to be a far too simplistic interpretation of what is a deeply meaningful and important moment. In expressing his concern for the way in which the bones of the deceased are treated and in speaking to the skull of Yorick, Hamlet demonstrates his distaste for what Romanyshyn refers to as Modern culture's "unrecognized and implicit" desire "to cut [it]sel[f] free of the past, to live without tradition, to overcome the pain of remembrance" (125). The neglect of death constitutes a means of suppressing emotions (thereby engaging with the devaluation of feelings—negative as well as positive—in linear perspective thought) as well as a method of forgetting the past. As the Modern worldview took hold, the latter began to be perceived as inimical to the ideal of *progress* which always strove to focus upon development for the sake of the

future (Romanyshyn 180). As implied by his persistent fixation with his deceased father, Hamlet resists this ideal and continues to attribute value to the past. It is precisely this personal trait that prompts him to speak reverently of his recollection of Yorick, a court jester he knew as a child. Hamlet's respect for Yorick's memory and for the dead in general betrays his connection to the pre-Modern worldview and his resistance to linear perspective consciousness. Clearly, when thinking of Hamlet in light of autism, one may intuit that the autism phenomenon is part of a much more comprehensive and important context that he/she might have supposed.

Returning to the subject of autism, I suggest that in Hamlet one sees not only early intimations of autism, but also early intimations of the *context* within which the autism phenomenon is understood and by which it is treated. In addition to being spectator, Hamlet is also a specimen. In the actions of Claudius and Polonius, the reader sees an early literary representation of the Modern experiment, which consists of the objectification and unseen observation of a subject in order to determine the mechanics of the subject's behavior, symptoms, or functions. At the beginning of the third act, Claudius "sen[ds] for Hamlet [. . .]/That he, as 'twere by accident, may here/Affront Ophelia. Her father and myself,/We'll so bestow ourselves that, *seeing unseen*,/We may of their encounter frankly judge,/And gather by him, as he is behaved,/If't be th' affliction of his love or no/That thus he suffers for" (Shakespeare III. i. 29-36) (emphases added). Polonius later hides behind a curtain in order to observe Hamlet's prearranged meeting with his mother for just the same purpose—

namely, to study his behavior so as to discover its underlying cause (Shakespeare III. iv. 6-7). Also, Gertrude implores Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to study Hamlet's behaviors and to attempt to cure him of his malady; when Hamlet learns of this, he expresses indignation at having been "play'd on [like] a pipe" (Shakespeare III. ii. 370). Briefly stated, the spectator and specimen of the linear perspective world are both embodied by Hamlet. With that established, it is well to remember that the observations and diagnostic speculations of Claudius, Polonius, and Gertrude bear resemblance to (and perhaps foreshadow) the Modern experiment—the origins of which, as will be discussed subsequently, are in the Renaissance. Indeed, contemporary psychological/medical experiments in which clinicians observe—completely detached and engaged in rationalistic speculation/analysis—the behaviors of a patient and/or subject from behind a window bear a number of visible similarities to Polonius' hidden observations of Hamlet; such observation is typical of the paradigm that is applied to autism, and certainly these types of observations have been applied to autistic individuals. In the past, it has also been the case that autistics and others with diagnosed conditions have been, in a sense, *played on like a pipe*—in other words, they have been placed on display for the purposes of a given researcher's experimentation. The symptoms of autism and intimations of the context within which autism is studied—and, moreover, *situated*—are both suggested in Hamlet.

Arguably, Hamlet is not as conspicuously *autistic* as many who have been classified under that diagnosis in more recent history; he does, however, embody and foreshadow autistic inclinations and symptoms, and it is within the context of the new linear-perspective-based worldview that this must be understood. It is here that the analogy with May's man in a cage becomes helpful. In May's scenario, the man in the cage is initially "bewildered" at having been "placed therein" (162), and thereby removed and isolated from the life he previously knew. Based upon Hamlet's speech to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, one might easily assume *bewilderment* to be a strong component of his reaction to the early onset of the linear perspective worldview. What is perhaps more interesting, though, is the next stage in the experience of the caged individual:

"But later in the afternoon the man began soberly to realize what was up, and then he protested vehemently, 'The king [of the imaginary land in which May situates this individual] can't do this to me! It is unjust! It's against the law.' His voice was strong, and his eyes full of anger."

(May 162)

The scenario then involves the man "continu[ing] his vehement protests [. . .] [d]uring the rest of the week[,]" only to have his objections met with the king's insistence that he should accept his condition and be grateful for the care he continues to receive from his government (May 163). Perhaps the astute reader will be reminded of (*king*) Claudius and Gertrude, who urge Hamlet to cease lamenting his situation and to

accept his lot as is. More importantly, the reader will be reminded of the prince's active rebellion against Claudius and against the forgetting of the past (most demonstrably, the memory of the deceased king). Through this rebellion, Hamlet shows himself to be situated within the early phase of Modern man's entrapment within the cage of the linear-perspective-based worldview.

The tragedy of Shakespeare's play consists in Hamlet's inability to successfully resist the emergent worldview of linear perspective vision, just as the tragedy of May's fable resides in the inability of the subject to fight his way out of the cage. Hamlet's decision, in response to the promptings of his father's ghost, to take action against his traitorous uncle suggests itself as symbolic of a militant attempt at overcoming the new worldview that has rendered the world—more specifically (in the case of this narrative), *Denmark*—"a prison" (Shakespeare II. ii. 242). Knowles supports this notion by asserting that his response to the ghost's visitation (which appears at the end of the first act) constitutes a resolution to embrace "unalloyed *feeling*" at the expense of the type of Rationalism that has come to condition his thinking, "not realiz[ing] that this is impossible" (1064) (emphasis added). I would apply this assertion to the fact that, as mentioned in chapter one, the window-as-map view of the outer world started to become the normative experience for the linear perspective viewer once instituted. Although Hamlet was written quite early in the history of linear perspective vision, this new mode of perception had been in place long enough (well over a century, in fact) that it was then able to exert significant

influence upon the consciousness of people in Western society. This influence would become much stronger in subsequent centuries, as I shall demonstrate in the next two sections of this chapter. When Hamlet reacts against the Modern worldview, he is able to do so only by becoming a spectator himself; the reason for this is simply that the spectator/spectacle/specimen consciousness of the newly emerging Modern worldview comes to embrace not only his view of the world, but also his conception of his own *place* in the world (even if he remains unaware of this particular effect upon his thinking). As the narrative progresses, he actively seeks to regain what has been lost in the process of appropriating linear perspective vision, but in doing so he becomes guilty, arguably, of what Romanyshyn calls a “desire to return [that] is too sharp” (202). He reacts to the novelty of the new worldview too hastily and with neither the capacity nor intuition of the need to *transcend* what it imposes upon him, and therefore he aids in the destruction it occasions. It is conceivable that perhaps he recognizes this, to some degree, when he discovers that he has killed Polonius. His assessment of the situation is as follows: “but heaven hath pleas’d it so/To punish me with this, and this with me” (Shakespeare III. iv. 173-74). Both Hamlet and Polonius represent the dominating spectator self of linear perspective vision (as Polonius assumes the position of objectively observing/studying Hamlet unseen), and in persisting in their respective roles they have both reaped the unfortunate consequences of appropriating the role of the self behind the window (detached, objective, and imposing). While there is no available means of proving this, one

might easily assume that Shakespeare was, at some level (even if only subconsciously), aware of the potentially harmful effects of the new worldview that had been brought about during the past century-and-a-half by linear perspective vision. At the end of this play, Hamlet and nearly all other prominent characters meet with unpleasant demises. Upon arrival at Elsinore, one of the English ambassadors laments the scene that lies before him, declaring that “[t]he *ears* are senseless that should give us hearing” (Shakespeare V. ii. 369) (emphasis added). On a literal level, of course, this statement refers to the deaths of the characters; on a metaphorical level, however, in light of the effects of linear perspective vision, it brings to mind the decline of sensory capabilities that increasingly become secondary due to the dominance of the eye of the spectator self. With this and Hamlet’s misguided resistance in mind, one might argue that the strength of the newly emergent Modern worldview is too much for these early spectators to overcome; its hold upon them, at this point in history, is too strong. Reaction against it would subsequently need to assume increasingly symptomatic expression, eventually surfacing in the shadow of autism.

II. Romanticism and the Re-Emergence of Secondary Qualities

My goal in analyzing Hamlet was to draw attention to Shakespeare's illustration of the early effects of linear perspective vision and, in doing so, to clarify the connections between this style of perception and autism in light of Hamlet's behaviors and inclinations. As I demonstrated through the allegory of the man in the cage, however, Hamlet represented only the beginning stages of the cultural/historical framework within which autism was to emerge, thereby offering mere intimations thereof. As such, Hamlet's experience represented the initial bewilderment and protestation of the man in the cage, and his struggle represented the latter's determined but ineffectual attempt to escape from the cage. With the progression of time, though, Modern man's condition—trapped, as he is, within the figurative cage of linear perspective vision—would come to resemble the gradual change in the condition of May's encaged subject, which in turn gradually comes to bear greater resemblance to the autistic condition. Autism itself, however, does not crystallize as an acknowledged condition until the twentieth century. My goal in the current section is to examine the development of linear perspective vision and autism in the intermediate time period—namely, the centuries between the Renaissance and the twentieth century. My overall analysis will include a brief allusion to the *Faust* story (mostly based upon Guignon's study thereof), followed by a lengthier discussion of the Romantic movement, its conflict with Modern Rationalism, and the expressions thereof in two important literary works of the nineteenth-century (the allegory of the

man in the cage will be applied to the character of Ishmael in Moby-Dick). While much attention will need to be devoted to this comprehensive cultural context, I will also attempt to clarify the place of autism *within* this context.

Roughly around the time during which Hamlet was written, Christopher Marlowe, a contemporary of Shakespeare, produced a tragic play entitled “The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus.” This play’s title character, who seeks knowledge as a means of gaining power and loses his soul as a result, has been cited as having “in many ways exemplifie[d] the new sort of individual then appearing in Europe” (Guignon 36), to which the Renaissance invention of linear perspective gave birth. If Hamlet represents the unhappy, isolated spectator who struggles within and against the new linear perspective worldview, Faustus embodies the spectator who eagerly embraces his position of dominance over the world on the other side of the veil.⁵ Guignon states that Faustus, in his quest for power and pleasure, “is contemptuous of the idea of any limits[,] [. . .] defiantly rejects all limits and feels no reverence for anything beyond himself” (36 and 38). As the play opens, he exhorts himself to “be a divine in show” (Marlowe 992) and to “try [his] brains to gain a deity” (Marlowe 994). Guignon cites the latter line (37) in order to demonstrate Faustus’ self-elevation to a god-like status, which in turn reflects his conception of his capacity for power—which reflects “the Renaissance quest for knowledge and power” (Guignon 37)—as unlimited and, perhaps, as approaching divinity. He desires to know the deepest secrets of the universe as well as to attain divine powers

(Guignon 37). With all of his prideful ambitions, he pledges his soul to the demon Mephistopheles in order to attain “twenty years of sumptuous living in which he can satisfy every desire” (Guignon 36), and only after those twenty years have transpired does he begin to realize his aloneness, his pitiful spiritual state, and the severity of the fate that lies before him as his death approaches. This realization prompts him to address himself in the following manner: “Wretch, what hast thou done!/Damned art thou, Faustus, damned; despair and die! [. . .] Accurséd Faustus [. . .]/I do repent, and yet I do despair” (Marlowe 1019). Faustus represents the strong, self-interested ambitions of Renaissance man, but also serves as a warning of the dangers of man’s pride.

I mention the story of Faustus because his character serves to embody the ethos that drove human progress from the seventeenth-to nineteenth-centuries. Van Cromphout has even gone so far as to “regard ‘Faustian’ as almost synonymous with ‘*Western*,’ in that Faust represents what is most characteristic of the Western psyche: its boundless aspirations, its expansionism, its identification of knowledge with power, its attempt to subdue nature, its yearning for control over its own destiny” (18) (emphasis added). It is for this reason that he explicitly refers to the Modern worldview of Western culture as “The Faustian ethos” (Van Cromphout 18). The germinations of this ideology were apparent, as mentioned, in the Renaissance era. Linear perspective made possible the mapmaking and maritime navigation of the

fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,⁶ which in turn allowed for expansion into foreign regions as well as the conquest of these regions and their inhabitants. This attitude was also heavily inspired by the infinite vision inspired by the infinite horizon of linear perspective vision (alluded to in chapter 1), which, because the spectacle on the other side of the window necessarily reflects changes in the self observing from behind the window (another observation made in chapter 1), led humans to conceive of their own vision, capabilities, and ambitions as limitless (much like Faustus' conception of his own powers). As Romanyshyn states, the Modern self is "a self which knows no bounds" (51). Additionally, the newfound capacity for detachment and for "reductive and analytic" thinking (Romanyshyn 97) brought about an experimental relationship between man and the world; under the new conditions, "the phenomena of nature no longer matter as they are given [. . .] [but] only as they are placed under the conditions of mind, that is, under the experimental arrangements established in advance of their appearance" (Romanyshyn 80). Man, as the detached, isolated spectator with infinite vision behind the linear perspective window, was now able to determine not only his own individual destiny, but also the value and meaning of phenomena external to himself (including nature and the human body). Descartes, as codifier of the relationship between the spectator self and the world, stated plainly that we, as human beings, should aim to "make ourselves masters and possessors of nature" (qtd. in Guignon 33). Through the objective knowledge, ingenuity, and other

capacities made possible by linear perspective vision, mankind began to realize his goal of basically overpowering the world.

Although perhaps not immediately apparent, the consequences of this Faustian ethos mirror the fate that Marlowe's (and later Goethe's) tragic character suffers—more specifically, the spectator self is left empty, abandoned, and mirthless. In observing Faustus' despair, one of his fellow scholars surmises that “he is grown into some sickness by being over-/solitary” (Marlowe 1021) (emphasis added). One must remember that in order for human beings to come to dominate, control, and *know* (in a strictly and deeply rational manner) the world, they needed to *disengage* themselves from the experience of the world, thereby isolating themselves (at least to a degree). Linear perspective vision was both an inspiration for and a means of doing this. The challenges that linear perspective vision presented to phenomenological, sensory, imaginative experience became codified in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Modern experimentation (inspired by the objective stance of the linear perspective spectator) and its accompanying sensibilities allowed Isaac Newton to experiment with sunlight and to determine that there is no color in anything, but that color “belongs [. . .] to the light” and “yield[s] to the laws of refraction” (Romanyshyn 83). Additionally, all of the “things” that were previously regarded as possessing character and, perhaps for that reason, had the capacity to provide meaning and comfort in people's lives, became, within the context of the linear perspective plain, deprived of their value and reduced to quantitative—as opposed to qualitative—worth

(Romanyshyn 191-198). One might wonder why such matters are important, but he/she must realize the extent of the change this produces in human perception. Regardless of what scientific observation insists upon, people will never *experience* rainbows, sunsets, and the colors of flowers in a purely objective, scientific, quantifiable fashion (Romanyshyn 68). The world, generally speaking, is never experienced as an apparatus of measurable, mathematical, mechanical processes, equations, and objects; rather, it is a world imbued with meaning, purpose, and affective qualities. Because the ideology of linear perspective Rationalism rendered the world in such a way, the human body—previously, as I have mentioned, one's connection with others and with the sensory world—needed to be reconfigured in order to fit within this new world. Initially, the body became a corpse—more specifically, the corpse on the experimenter's "dissecting table" (Romanyshyn 135)—thereby embodying mankind's desire to distance himself from the physical body in order to achieve infinite vision. In time, the body would become mechanized (as mentioned in chapter 1) and "reanimated via the reflex" (Romanyshyn 138), which Descartes characterized as the automatic response of a "depersonalized body [. . .] [that] has nothing to do with [the individual's] own reaction" (Romanyshyn 139). This assertion furthers the dichotomy of body and self while at the same time rendering the human body impersonal and without organic connections to the wider world.⁷ In tandem with Modern conception of the self behind the window and the anatomical vision of the body and its various fragments and processes, this leads

people to conceive of themselves as isolated beings who lead fragmented existences within mechanical bodies that separate them from others (as well as from the world, which has itself been subjugated to the mechanistic worldview). The human experience of life has become “disenchanted [. . .] [and] a primal unity and wholeness in life has been lost” (Guignon 50). Taken altogether, the effects of Modern man’s Faustian ambitions upon his perception of the world and his place within it deprive him of a sense of belonging, depth of purpose/meaning, and connection. Arguably, it is because the things of the world are bereft of intrinsic meaning that Modern man found himself able to *further* manipulate them for his purposes.

The connection between the cultural condition I have described above and autism is perhaps not readily apparent, but in fact autism is very much a part of this same phenomenon. Autistic people certainly do not appear to represent man’s Faustian ambitions of fierce domination and control; their condition, one might argue, resembles the *consequences* of Modern man’s Faustian dream. The isolation and introversion of an autistic child in many ways mirrors the isolation and interiority of the linear perspective self. The emotional deficit that is often found in autistic individuals is likewise a reflection of the Modern subjugation of affective qualities to pure intellect and reason. Finally, autistic sensory experiences, which include both over-sensitivity and under-sensitivity, reflect man’s self-seclusion from the sensory qualities of the world and the symptomatic reemergence thereof (to which I have already alluded and which will be discussed in relation to the literary works I will

present). Autism is in many ways a symptom and a shadow of the Faustian ethos of linear perspective vision.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is perhaps the most telling commentary on the ethos of Rationalism (the Faustian ethos). Victor Frankenstein is clearly a Faustian, Rationalist figure, as he seeks "to penetrate the secrets of nature" (Shelley 28) so that he may eventually conquer death and human suffering. In his insatiable quest for knowledge of the workings of the world and of life, he comes to seek and discover the ability to "bestow[] animation upon lifeless matter" (Shelley 42). He has, as Romanyshyn states, "usurp[ed] the power of divine creation" (76), thereby elevating himself to the status that during the pre-Modern era would have been attributed to God (recall Marlowe's Faustus). Modern man, in his quest for knowledge and domination, may be convicted of the same hubris.⁸ As his endeavors progress, Victor increasingly resembles the Modern self behind the window. Having become thoroughly absorbed in the act of animating his creature, he finds that "[his] eyes [are] insensible to the charms of nature. And the same feelings which made [him] neglect the scenes around [him] caused [him] also to forget those friends who [are] so many miles absent, and whom [he] ha[s] not seen for so long a time" (Shelley 45). He is clearly engaged in the pursuits of Modern Rationalism, which is characterized by the danger of separation from the world and from other people. As those who are familiar with this timeless story are aware, Victor's creation proves to be a disaster; in the end, he will not even take responsibility for his creature, but rather shuns him and

allows him to feel abandoned and unloved. As a result, all of Victor's loved ones die, his life is completely destroyed, he himself dies without friends or family to comfort him, and his creature ends up abandoned and alone in the solitary, icy reaches of the Arctic (Shelley 233). The novel serves as a warning sign to human beings of the Modern era by demonstrating the destructive and alienating potential of the Faustian dream.

If indeed Shelley's narrative embodies the cultural situation of the Western world at the time in which it was written, the autistic nature of Frankenstein's creature carries weight. In the same chapter in which she explores autism in fairy tales, Frith briefly cites Frankenstein's creature as a possible illustration of autism in literature (47); certainly, the creature's mechanical qualities and awkward gait suggest autistic movements, which have been compared to those of robots. Additionally, the creature describes his initial experience of the world in this fashion: "A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses" (Shelley 99). Even as the days progressed, "[t]he light became more and more oppressive to [him]" (Shelley 99). This, arguably, intimates the sensory confusion and sensitivity characteristic of autism. Finally, as I have already mentioned, he is a heavily *fragmented* creature. In making the creature, Victor gathers a conglomeration of body parts from different corpses, "stitch[e]s [them] together, [. . .] [and] reanimate[s]" this haphazardly constructed body "through

electricity, and in this respect the monster is the shadow of the reflex body with its circuitry of action” (Romanyshyn 162). The creature is a living manifestation of the fragmented body of Modern perception. Arguably, this (coupled with his awkward and robot-like movements) also mirrors the fragmented consciousness of autistic people alluded to in chapter 1. Furthermore, of all the shadows to which Romanyshyn attributes attention, the monster is the only *male* shadow. The other shadows he mentions are female, as those who bear society’s shadow qualities are typically marginalized figures; Romanyshyn reminds his reader that “we [Western society of the Modern era] have traditionally bound the woman to the material earth” from which we would escape in our Faustian dream (172). The Modern worldview itself—specifically, in its Faustian aspects—is primarily masculine in its pursuit of domination, conquest (whether by force or by diagnostic efforts geared toward understanding a given phenomenon objectively and fully), transcendence, reason, and “flight from matter” (Romanyshyn 148). In the case of the monster, however, the shadow itself is a conspicuously masculine figure. Frankenstein’s creature is not only male, but also exclusively “*manmade*” (Romanyshyn 161) (emphasis included), and therefore symbolic of the exclusion of the feminine⁹ principle altogether.

Romanyshyn explains this by asserting that Frankenstein’s creature, as an agent of destruction, mirrors the self-destructive capacities of the Modern masculine ethos (161). Apart from this, Joyce Carol Oates refers to this tendency in Modern humanity in her assertion that “[t]he monsters we create by way of an advanced

technological civilization are ourselves as we cannot hope to see ourselves – incomplete, blind, blighted, and, most of all, self destructive” (qtd. in Romanyshyn 162). The relevance of this in relation to the autism phenomenon subsists in the fact that autism may also be considered a male shadow, as the autistic population is predominantly—though by no means *exclusively*—male. While autistic individuals are certainly not agents of *destruction*, they do reflect what Modern society as a whole is becoming as a result of its dangerous ambitions driven by a masculine ethos. Romanyshyn characterizes Frankenstein’s creature as a shadow of Modern man’s Faustian dream. He is “the other side [. . .] of his creator’s dreams of creation, a disturbing reminder of the hubris of a reason which would distance itself too much from nature” (Romanyshyn 161), just as autism, as a shadow of the Modern worldview, is the other side of our collective hubris.

Before moving forward, there are two additional points that need to be considered regarding the relationship between Shelley’s Frankenstein and the phenomenon of autism. First, it is significant that this creature longs to experience and share in more meaningful **human** qualities such as love, compassion, and belonging, but is ultimately doomed to serve as a caricature of what Modern Man would deny about himself (as alluded to in the previous paragraph). In much the same way, one might argue, autistic individuals find themselves in a similar situation: they possess a desire for interpersonal sensitivity and connection (Notbohm, Ten Things Every Child 23), but are encumbered by the symptoms of their condition,

which in turn reflect the symptoms of Modern society. Second, one must recognize the fact that the consequences of Faustian ambition prove to be dire for both Victor and his creature. What this signifies is the necessity of the ego—which is defined as the conscious component of the self (individually and culturally) that is presented to the world and associated with the self's identity (Robbins, Personal Interview, 8 Oct. 2007)—to take responsibility for its shadows, to perceive its own shortcomings in them, and to interact with them in a manner that is mutually beneficial and constructive. In chapter 4, I will explore the possibility of such an interaction between society and autism.

Shelley's Frankenstein is a novel belonging to the *Romantic Movement*, which is the obverse of seventeenth and eighteenth century Rationalism. Romanticism, in many ways, constituted an attempt of the marginalized qualities abandoned by man in his Faustian quest for knowledge and power through the use of cold, objective reason, to reemerge. The movement began in the late eighteenth century in response to the rationalistic thinking of the Enlightenment. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in comparison with whom Guignon states that “[n]o one in history contributed more to the development of Romanticism” (55), insisted upon the necessity of turning away from the rationalistic thinking of society—indeed, from society in general—and going inward to access one's most natural, primal feelings (Guignon 57-58). Whereas Rationalism sought to abandon feelings for the sake of reason—employed, moreover, in accurately understanding the mechanisms of the

world beyond the linear perspective window—Romanticism abandoned reason and turned inward, to the *other* side of the window, to the self and to the feelings and imaginative/affective qualities that had been relegated to subjectivity. The Romantics sought meaning, but could not find it in an increasingly indifferent and mechanistic universe. The goal of the Romantic is best characterized as the determination to “raise himself out of the machinery of nature and become conscious of the inner, active, self-determining reality in himself” (Thilly 112). There were, of course, certain Romantic figures who recognized that not all feelings are positive; Edgar Allen Poe, for instance, portrayed the intense pain, anguish, and fearfulness that often accompany strong emotional sensations in his writings. As Wolfson and Manning correctly state, “Romance is not only the genre of enchanted dreams and inspired visions, but also of superstitions and spells, delusions and nightmares” (7). Still, in all Romantic works, there is focus upon the qualities of feeling/sensation, imagination, and intuition, as opposed to the cold, objective ideology of Rationalism.

At first glance, Romanticism appears to be a favorable alternative to the deadening ideology of Faustian Rationalism; however, in a sense, Romanticism is guilty of the very same errors. Like Rationalism, Romanticism professes a belief in the radical dualism and separation between human beings and nature, spirit and matter, and reason and feeling. Likewise, Romantic belief professes the Rationalist assertion that emotion, feeling, imagination, and other affective, meaningful qualities are interior and subjective to the human person. Therefore, the “divisiveness and

fragmentation created by the Enlightenment [Rationalist] outlook” (Guignon 50) still survive within Romanticism. Also, Romantic philosophy agrees with the Rationalist belief in man as the *measure of all things*. In fact, the early Romantics considered the self to be the truest reality and “the highest and most all-encompassing of all that is found in reality” (Guignon 51). The only difference is that while the Rationalist extracts meaning from nature through the employment of reason, calculation, and objectivity, the Romantic uses creativity and human imagination in order to do so. As Guignon writes, “the [Romantic] mind becomes aware that its own imagination is the ultimate source of the meaning and order of nature” (62). Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge even ventured so far as to characterize the imagination in such a way as to render it “analogous to [. . .] *divine creation*” (cited in Wolfson and Manning 5) (emphases added). The self, for the Romantic, is still the ultimate determiner and shaper of reality. Fundamentally, Romanticism is part of the Faustian worldview. More specifically, in its intense focus upon feeling, imagination, and other abandoned qualities, Romanticism is merely another shadow of the Modern worldview—and the shadow is always a *symptom* rather than a solution in and of itself.

Among the many Romantic writers, one of the most apt to use Romanticism as a vehicle for the exploration of the wider psychological conflict within the Western world was Herman Melville. To be sure, Melville was among those who sought to escape the confinement of dispassionate reason and to reestablish contact with the

affective qualities that had been pushed aside, first by linear perspective vision and then to an even greater extent by Rationalism and the Enlightenment. In a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Melville made the following statement: "I stand for the heart. To the dogs with the head!" (qtd. in Edinger 31). At the same time, Melville was also what Yu refers to as a "counter-Romantic" (111), which indicates that he was somehow aware, at least in some fashion, of the problematic aspects of Romantic ideology. Additionally, "[l]ike his fictional figure Ahab, he was gifted with the high perception, but lacked the low, enjoying power" (Edinger 13). This is significant, given comments that Romanyshyn makes in comparing the effects of linear perspective vision upon one's perception with those of "reverse perspective" (84), a way of regarding the world that was more common to the Medieval era.

Romanyshyn points out that "the space of reverse perspective resonates lower in your body [. . .] near the mid-line of the body, in the gut, whereas in distancing you from its space, linear perspective more often than not is felt higher up near the chest, and perhaps, if the distance seems quite great, still higher, as a sense of dizziness in the eyes and the head" (89).¹⁰ This would almost appear to be a quasi-mystical observation, but in fact it is purely psychological. Romanyshyn is simply speaking of the perceptual and sensory effects that one will experience—if he/she is attentive enough—when looking at a work of linear perspective art versus a work of art depicted in *reverse* perspective; it is the same as asserting, for instance, that when someone looks straight downward from the top of a 700-story building, he will

become dizzy. The connection between visual perspective and the state of one's perceptions (to which I have witnessed all along in my focus on *linear perspective vision*) has the potential to transcend a single experience—in this case, of looking at a work of art. As I have demonstrated, linear perspective vision has, for Modern culture, become a *means through which* the world is perceived. It is no surprise, then, that the psycho-physiological effects of this particular perspective assume a wider, cultural form.

Edinger's assertion regarding the elevation of Melville's *high* faculties over his *low, enjoying* capacities need not suggest that he, like Modern society in general, valued reason over feeling. As stated in the previous paragraph, he made explicit his preference for the *heart* (feeling) over the *head* (reason). This apparent contradiction seems puzzling, but closer inspection will reveal indications that the difference, in this case, is not between rationality and emotion, but rather between two different ways of experiencing emotion. The concept of elevating feeling over reason typically brings to mind the cultivation of *positive* feelings (mirth, for example). As I mentioned in my brief reference to Poe's approach to Romanticism, though, feeling is also marked with a darker side (just as reason is marked with favorable and unfavorable qualities). Edinger describes Melville as having been "frequently moody and withdrawn" while also stating that there was a period of his life during which "[h]is mental and physical health were in jeopardy, and at times he was close to psychosis or suicide" (13-15). Although the emotional component of human

experience was important to Melville, his Romantic leanings and the literary pursuits connected therewith would, perhaps, not have been motivated by a celebration of the affective aspects of human experience, but rather by a deeper (and, I daresay, *darker*) intuition of the said aspects. Within the wider context of the Modern condition, it is not unreasonable to propose that Melville's emotional and psychological conflicts reflected the burden of bearing emotions privately, apart from one's experience of the world (as I argued in chapter 1, this is an effect of the Modern conception of the human flesh as a mechanical divider that separates people from one another and from the world rather than serving as a means of sensory and affective connection). For this reason, one might argue as Yu does in stating that "he [Melville] was more actually [sic] aware of inner conflicts in Romanticism"—and, I would suggest, within the psychological makeup of Modern Western society in general (most likely at a *subconscious* level)—"than other Romantic[s]" (112). In the 1851 novel Moby-Dick, one finds Melville's exploration of the dilemma of Modern man based upon his awareness of the aforementioned conflict.

The character of Ishmael, the narrator of Melville's Moby-Dick and in many ways a representative of Modern mankind and his condition, subtly hints at autistic consciousness. Before venturing into the specifics, I will here return to May's allegory of the man in the cage. In my last reference to this subject, I alluded to the bewilderment and protestation of this entrapped person. Ishmael, in a fashion, resembles the next phase in the development of this hypothetical experiment. May

states that “[a]fter a few weeks more,” the caged subject shows signs of submission to his king’s arguments, even “developing an extensive theory about [. . .] the acceptance of fate, which sound[s] [. . .] very much like the philosophical theories [. . .] worked out for the fascists in Germany” (164). This last assertion does not apply to Ishmael, but it does demonstrate the nature of the said submission: it serves to *manipulate* reason in order to justify and maintain the entrapment in which one finds oneself (thereby allowing for the employment of *strictly* rationalistic reasoning at the total expense of the appropriate affective sensibilities, which would temper exclusively pragmatic mentality with the proper humane considerations). Also, at this point in the process the experimenting psychologist observes “how the corners of the man’s mouth always turned down, as though he were in some gigantic pout” (May 164). Interestingly, Ishmael’s desire to go to sea is motivated by an emotional experience that bears clear similarities to this. As he himself states, “[w]henever I find myself *growing grim about the mouth*; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses [. . .] then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball” (Melville 11) (emphases added). In terms of the caged man’s acceptance of fate, Ishmael demonstrates this in his belief that the whaling voyage upon which he is about to embark was predestined: “But wherefore it was that [. . .] I should now take it into my head to go on a whaling voyage; this the invisible police officer of the Fates, who has the *constant surveillance* [perhaps not unlike the king

and psychologist in May's allegory] of me, and secretly dogs me, and influences me in some unaccountable way—he can better answer than any one else. And, doubtless, my going on this whaling voyage, formed part of the grand programme of Providence that was drawn up a long time ago” (Melville 15-16) (emphases added). If Hamlet represented the early stages of Modern man in the cage of linear perspective vision, which had him struggling perplexedly, then Ishmael represents man increasingly subdued by the Modern worldview.

Ishmael and the caged subject both represent the conflicted coexistence of a newfound resignation and recognition of a loss. I submit that the latter does not present itself conspicuously in Ishmael's character. There is clearly an element of *depression* in his countenance (like the frowning man in the cage), but no explicit or clear reference to a loss. However, Ishmael's situation bears some similarity to that of Hamlet, which I have argued to represent Modern man's desire to escape from the imposition of the linear perspective worldview. One might indeed surmise that Ishmael's restlessness is an expression of disaffection with Western society and a sincere desire to become reacquainted with lost qualities. As Edinger states, Ishmael's emotional state, “[t]his mood of a ‘damp, drizzly November in the soul[,]’” signifies “a state of depression, emptiness, and alienation from *life values*” (18) (emphases added). He also states—speaking as a psychotherapist—that Ishmael's suicidal ruminations (recall him speaking of *pistol and ball*) reflect the “intolerab[ility]” of a “life” that is “without meaning” (Edinger 18). It is interesting

that Melville's narrative, which many consider to be the quintessential American novel, is introduced to the reader from Ishmael's perspective. Through Ishmael, Melville's "novel speaks so deeply to us today because this state of alienated meaninglessness is so prevalent in twentieth-century man" (Edinger 18). This much may be gathered from his name itself, which is based upon the Biblical character who serves as the archetype "of the rejected outcast, the alienated man" (Edinger 15). Indeed, Ishmael appears to be without a home and without any family or peers of whom to speak. As this is the case, he is "ma[d]e [. . .] [to] jump from spar to spar, like a grasshopper in a May meadow [. . .] and requires a strong decoction of Seneca and the Stoics to enable [him] to grin and bear it" (Melville 14). In tandem with this, I find value in Van Cromphout's declaration that the exterior world, "which Western man had so daringly extended, lost its meaningful context and became the realm of the void" and that consequently "[o]ne Romantic response to this anguish of the void was to turn more emphatically inward" (20). In Ishmael's case, the inward turn is reflected by his desire to go to sea, "which in the symbolic world of *Moby-Dick* is the mirror of the self" (Van Cromphout 20). A number of reflections upon the sea in Melville's novel support this statement, including the following: "Glimpses do ye seem to see of that mortally intolerable truth; that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea" (Melville 124); additionally, when Ishmael reflects upon the quasi-mystical experience of standing atop the ship's masthead, he offers the following advice (perhaps to himself as much

as to the reader): “[W]hile this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all, and your *identity* comes back in horror” (Melville 179-180) (emphasis added). His equation of the shocking recognition of personal identity with losing one’s hold upon the masthead and fallen into the sea is highly significant. Taken together, these issues situate Ishmael, his depressive condition, and his restlessness within the wider social/historical/cultural context of the Modern world view, in which mankind is engaged within the linear perspective field and therefore suffers the loss of a deep, meaningful engagement with existence.

Concurrent with Ishmael’s (perhaps subconscious) acknowledgement of a loss is an inclination analogous to the caged man’s newfound resignation to his entrapment. Ishmael’s resignation is apparent precisely in his Romantic leanings; Romanticism itself may be regarded as the continued presence of anger and/or discomfort of man at having been placed in a cage (the Modern worldview) coexisting with his submission to the cage itself. Ishmael, as a characteristically Romantic figure, appears to maintain the dualism of soul and body that is common among both Rationalists and Romantics. In the seventh chapter, he makes the following statements: “Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being. In fact take my body who will, take it I say, it is not me” (Melville 49-50). Characteristic of the linear perspective self, Ishmael dissociates himself from his body; his search for meaning is, no doubt, misguided by Romantic yearnings for an escape from the body and the physical world of quantifiable objects in order to attain peace at a

transcendent level of pure spirit.¹¹ This signifies submission to the conditions imposed by linear perspective vision (in terms of the dichotomies of body/soul, feeling/reason, etc)—upon the material world, if not upon his supposed inner self—rather than challenging them. Nevertheless, he does separate himself from the linear perspective self of Rationalism. This is demonstrated chiefly in his intimate friendship with Queequeg, a primitive harpooner from the South Seas. He cites the effects of this friendship upon him as follows: “I felt a melting in me. No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it” (Melville 65). He turns away from the rational, *civilized* ways of Western society and finds companionship with an individual who belongs to one of the world’s *primitive* cultures; this is important, as primitive cultures—living remnants of pre-Modern modes of thinking and perception—are traditionally conceived to be far more in communion with nature and its rhythms than people of the modernized Western world.¹² Queequeg is, therefore, a shadow figure. However, the ideal relationship between the ego and the shadow is one of *reciprocity*. The goal of the ego is to reincorporate within itself those qualities that are inherent aspects of the shadow, but which the ego itself has lost; the shadow, meanwhile, has the opportunity to benefit from the incorporation of some of the ego’s qualities. As Edinger correctly states, Ishmael’s relationship with the shadow is not one of “responsible dialogue [. . .] but rather [of] capitulation” (32). He is quite quick, for instance, to turn aside from his Christian convictions and to worship Queequeg’s idol,

Yojo (Melville 67). The Romantic, likewise, will engage with marginalized qualities such as emotion and imagination in a capitulatory fashion, elevating these qualities above rationalistic faculties without any care for moderation. While this may appear to bear no perceivable connection with May's experimental subject who accepts his entrapment, one must remember Ishmael's *capitulation* to the shadows; capitulation to the shadows—as opposed to meaningful, reciprocal engagement therewith—implies that one does not believe positive and necessary change to be possible within the general culture (in this case, Western society of modernity). It is, in a very real sense, a surrender of sorts. One might argue, then, that he has progressed further as a metaphorical *man in a cage* than his predecessor, Hamlet; as I will demonstrate in the next section, the progress of this figure reaches its culmination within autism.

In addition to his illustration of a phase of the encaged subject's development, Ishmael also embodies more immediately recognizable characteristics of autism. In his case, the issue is *identity*. I mentioned in the first chapter that autistic people sometimes lack the natural ability to intuit the subjective mind states of others (*theory of mind*). It is for this reason, ironically, that autism may at times be characterized by the absence of a concrete conception of self identity; the ability to conceive of oneself as a unique person depends, after all, upon the ability to acknowledge others *as other* (Frith 169-170). It is conceivable that Ishmael's famous self-introduction, "Call me Ishmael" (Melville 11), communicates an autistic-like deficit of personal identity. Firstly, it is interesting that he does not introduce himself by saying, *My name is*

Ishmael; he simply informs the reader that this is what he wishes to be called. The name Ishmael, then, appears not to be a designation of identity, but rather a *substitute* for identity. This name, moreover, is based upon the Biblical figure named Ishmael, “the prototype of the alienated man, the outsider who feels he has no place in the nature of things” (Edinger 15). Accordingly, Melville’s Ishmael introduces himself as an isolated, alienated figure without a home and without any relatives of whom to speak. He reveals precious little of his background and personal life. As the narrative progresses, as Richard Chase notes, he “all but disappears as a character” and is relegated (by Melville) to the status of “hardly more than the voice of the omniscient [and therefore detached and depersonalized] author” (qtd. in Yu 110). In this manner, he reflects not only a similarity to autism, but also the linear perspective self who no longer feels that he has a place in the world, but is rather a wanderer in the midst of it. Melville’s Ishmael is an example of “[t]he modern self[] born into distance from the world” (Romanyshyn 90), and therefore not at home anywhere. Also, the reader will recall from chapter 1 that Modern human beings are figures on the linear perspective field, which entirely homogenizes everything within it; it is for this reason, along with the radical isolation of the self and the mechanical, dualistic conception of the body, that each human being “liv[es] out his [or her] existence in an alien body, which in its turn is being surrounded by strange objects [the reader will here recall how linear perspective robs the things of the world of their meaning], in the middle of which objects other subjects can be encountered, equally enclosed in

alien bodies, equally lacking a history” (van den Berg 103). Ishmael, arguably, represents displaced humanity trying to find a home and, moreover, attempting to rediscover a sense of identity. It is of course true that one may confront these observations with reasonable objections. Yu makes the argument that the reader actually comes to know Ishmael better than any other character (113), as he often describes his interior states and presents himself, according to Walter Bezanson, as “an imaginative youth of complex temperament, a hearty lover of laughter and incongruities, who burns to ‘sail forbidden seas,’ [. . .] striving to satisfy an inexhaustible sense of wonder” (cited/qtd. in Yu 113). I both agree and disagree with Yu’s assertion. I agree insofar as I recognize that Ishmael is a very subjective narrator; the reader comes to understand his feelings and ambitions quite well, as well as his ruminations and observations. My conflict with Yu’s argument resides in the fact that apart from a few minor details, the reader does not come to know anything substantial about Ishmael’s *life* or *background* (as I stated, we do not even know with certainty whether *Ishmael* is his real name). If one reads autism as a symptomatic expression of the wider cultural reality of the Modern worldview—specifically in terms of individual identity—he/she will notice clear intimations thereof in the way in which Ishmael expresses his character to the reader of Moby-Dick.

If one looks critically at the concepts of *self* and *other* as expressed in Ishmael’s narration, the link between him and the characteristic confusion of self and other within the autism spectrum (though by no means common in *all* cases of

autism) will become readily apparent. The absence of clarity in Ishmael's self-conception has been demonstrated already; in terms of the lack of clarity in his understanding of what is *other*, the most prominent example is perhaps that which Van Cromphout cites—namely, Ishmael's expression of the unknowable nature of *whales*. Indeed, in his narration he emphatically articulates to the reader the utter mystery and unknowable nature of the whale—at least insofar as “his true form” is concerned (Melville 295-296). According to Ishmael, “the great leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last. [. . .] So there is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale really looks like” (Melville 296). To be sure, this lends itself comfortably as a rumination upon the enigmatic nature of the whale (especially as it must have seemed during the nineteenth century, when underwater cameras were as yet nonexistent); however, given the overarching framework of the narrative, it is also appropriate to regard it in terms of the absolute lack of knowledge, on Ishmael's part, with regard to what is *other*. The citation of this particular instance is a mark of studious observation on the part of Van Cromphout, who also conveys an implicit recognition of the place of this phenomenon within the context of the Modern worldview. His assertion is that Ishmael's apparent inability to comprehend the whale is an expression of “his insusceptibility to the mind's efforts at *analysis* and understanding, to the mind's attempts at assimilation” (Van Cromphout 26) (emphasis added). The Romantic era witnessed, as stated, a large-scale questioning of reason and “man's assumption that

he knows or is able to know that which he perceives” (Van Cromphout 24). This linear-perspective-influenced principal dictated that such knowledge/understanding was to be based upon detached, objective, experimental, fragmenting reasoning and analytical thinking. In terms of phenomenological experience, such an approach paradoxically places distance between the *knower* and the object to be known. As I have argued to a great extent, this precludes any truly *intimate* engagement with the phenomenon, and therefore the phenomenon cannot truly be known in an experiential sense. In other words, as Van Cromphout states, “the literalist [aka Modern Rationalistic] sensibility” is characterized by “the [. . .] inability to establish any real links between the ‘me’ and the ‘not-me’” (25). Melville demonstrates whales to be creatures that are not easily “force[d] [. . .] into any graspable forms” (Van Cromphout 25). One would do well to remember that it was precisely this literalist, Rationalist sensibility that conditioned the minds of Western citizens at this time in history. In light of this and in light of Van Cromphout’s observations, I would contend that the objectivity of Modern Rationalism had become so deeply ingrained in the thinking of Western culture that anything that did not lend itself to experimental, linear-perspective-based analysis was considered virtually unknowable. Furthermore, it is well to keep in mind the detached, fragmentary, and isolative nature of this manner of knowledge and understanding (within the linear perspective field, this way of knowing applies to *people* as well as to animals and inanimate objects). Romanticism, as an *heir* to the worldview of Faustian Rationalism, is itself

characterized by uncertainty with regard to the identity of both self and other; its primary contribution was to “confront[] man with a universe that exploded his pretense of knowing and controlling it” (Van Cromphout 25). What Ishmael demonstrates, then, is not only the autistic confusion of self- and other-identity, but also its place within the history of linear perspective vision.

The other major figure in Melville’s novel—more prominent in the minds of literary scholars than Ishmael—is Captain Ahab. Before discussing Ahab’s autistic tendencies, I will provide a framework by offering an overview of how he fits into the Modern worldview. In light of his character, one may with reason make the following assumption: if Frankenstein portends the self-destructive capacities of the Faustian ethos as manifested in the form of Rationalism, then in Moby-Dick one sees the way in which the marginalized qualities reemerge in symptomatic form. This symptomatic emergence becomes manifest precisely in the form of Ahab’s madness, which, I would argue, is an expression of the intense conflict between those realities that had long been set in opposition to one another by the linear perspective worldview (feeling vs. reason, soul vs. body, etc). Anyone who is remotely familiar with this crucial characteristic of Western culture in the Modern era will easily take note of Ahab’s scar, which is described as running from the top of his head down the length of his body, dividing him down the middle (right side from left) (Melville 140). This may be taken as symbolic of the fact that Ahab is divided within himself. On the one hand, there is an obvious component of the Faustian Rationalist in him.

His “fanatic egotism” (Yu 113), his determination to *conquer* the white whale—even at the cost of his own life and those of his crew members—and his seeming desire to overpower the profound mystery of this majestic creature (Yu 116) would, at first glance, appear utterly inimical to the affective qualities that Romanticism attempts to re-embrace. On the other hand, there are also intimations of the abandoned qualities—those with which the Romantics occupied themselves—in Ahab. He uses mythological language on a number of occasions, and at one point, referring to himself in the third person, he even flatly asserts that “Ahab never thinks; he only feels, feels, feels; *that’s* tingling enough for mortal man! to think’s audacity” (Melville 606) (emphasis included). Additionally, there are instances in which he appears to relent in his quest for Moby-Dick, only to pursue the chase to his own death and the destruction of his ship and crew. There is quite clearly a warring of opposites within him, and it is not at all inconceivable that this is what lies at the root of his madness.

Concretely speaking, the source of Ahab’s fragmentation/division is the loss of his leg to Moby-Dick. This experience resulted in an “agonizing bodily laceration,” which in turn occasioned “long months of days and weeks” of agony as Ahab “lay stretched [. . .] in one hammock [. . .] [until] his torn body and gashed soul bled into one another; and so interfusing, made him mad” (Melville 206). Edinger interprets this passage in light of the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious, which is defined as “a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is

present in every one of us” (Jung 3-4) and is composed of archetypal patterns.

Edinger’s claim is that the aforementioned instance in Melville’s novel depicts “the collective unconscious with its archetypal images stream[ing] into consciousness”

(56). I cite this assertion because I believe that it approaches something important,

but before explaining this further I must first identify its problematic nature. Jung’s

notion of the collective unconscious and of its archetypal images/patterns is a

theoretical construct that in many ways serves, ironically, as yet another expression of

the Modern worldview—specifically, its tendency to locate all meaning and value

within the *interior* space of human consciousness (much like Romanticism).

Furthermore, I believe it is an over-generalization to argue that Ahab’s madness is

inspired merely by the emergence of supposed images and patterns that are common

to all mankind (hence the term *collective* unconscious) but often left behind by

everyone when they engage in conscious, everyday life. Ahab’s experience of a *tom*

body and gashed soul bleeding together must, I believe, be understood in more

historically and culturally specific terms. Based upon this passage, it would seem as if

Moby-Dick acts as a catalyst for the re-emergence of *neglected qualities* (qualities

behind the window), which became marginalized because of linear perspective vision,

within Ahab. The pain that he experiences may be likened unto what Sardello claims

we experience whenever “soul life [analogous with the qualities abandoned in the

wake of linear perspective] erupts into consciousness without the mediation of

images” (117). As a literary character, Ahab is symbolic of the reemergence of that

which has been marginalized but now cries to be acknowledged and even, in a sense, forcefully breaks through Modern consciousness. Arguably, in Ahab's case, this breakthrough is, for lack of more appropriate terminology, *too much too quick*. Having been repressed for too long, the abandoned qualities emerge in a form that is pathological and destructive. In fact, Romanyshyn designates "[t]he body of *madness*" (151) (emphasis added) as another shadow of the Modern era. In Ahab's case, one sees a literary representation of madness, which appears precisely as the tension resulting from the re-emerging qualities of feeling and imagination within the established framework of cold reason, expansive/conquering ambition, and domination.

Admittedly, Ahab does not necessarily lend himself conspicuously to being interpreted as an autistic figure; nevertheless, the stirrings of autistic symptoms are inherent within his character. Like Frankenstein's creature, Ahab is a *fragmented* being, as may be inferred from his scar and from his missing limb (an example of bodily fragmentation). The said fragmentation is by no means limited to his physical appearance; as I mentioned, he experiences *interior* conflicts based upon the radical demarcations inspired by linear perspective vision—which, I would argue, are to be understood with regard to both the dichotomies to which I alluded in reference to Ishmael's conception of his body and the fragmented view of body and world inspired by the linear perspective window (as discussed in chapter 1 as well as in the first section of this chapter). His attitude toward the white whale, in contrast with that

of Ishmael, is also significant. While “Ishmael accepts all the contrary associations [Moby-Dick’s] hue creates (‘not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors’)[,] Ahab[] [. . .] reduces all ambiguity to univocal evil. In the White Whale Ahab sees malice incarnate, assailable by man” (Yu 118). The reader will recall from chapter 1 that autistic people often tend to be literal-minded, and are therefore unable to tolerate ambiguities (especially in speech). Most importantly, Ahab’s autistic inclinations are implied by his obsession with the white whale. As I stated in the first chapter, obsessive-compulsive tendencies are part of the autism spectrum. It is quite common, moreover, for an autistic child to focus intensely, narrowly, and exclusively upon a single interest; Ahab’s intense focus on the pursuit of Moby-Dick mirrors this commonality, albeit in a dangerously hyperbolic fashion. When one reminds oneself of the propensity of autistic individuals to focus on individual phenomena without recognizing the larger pattern within which they fit (to which I drew attention in chapter 1, where I mentioned autistic engagement with *puzzles*), the character of Ahab’s obsession with the whale will assume a particular relevance. In his tireless quest for vengeance upon Moby-Dick, Ahab perseverates upon his goal to the extent that he does not consider the *wider perspective*. He does not take into account his responsibility, as the ship’s captain, for the safety and welfare of his crew, nor does he appear to care about the grave peril in which he is placing them. Yu makes essentially the same observation in stating that “[i]n his increasing confusion between official duties and private

motives [. . .] Ahab insists on alienation and destruction” (117). Furthermore, in terms of his apparent inability to consider the wider perspective, Ahab does not consider the fact that Moby-Dick, as a “dumb brute[,]” dismembered him not out of malice, but rather “from blindest instinct” (Melville 184). Even after Mr. Starbuck, the ship’s first mate, points this out to him, he still expresses his tormented fixation with the white whale: “He *tasks* me; he *heaps* me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it” (Melville 185) (emphases added). The entirety of the ship’s voyage is driven by his perseverance upon the desire to kill Moby-Dick, even to the point of total destruction. As an individual who exhibits fragmentation and as a figure obsessively focused upon a singular goal, Ahab may be likened unto an individual with autism.

I need to make one final note about Ishmael and Ahab, as I will be drawing upon what they represent (in terms of the Modern worldview) in the next section of the chapter. One might say that Ishmael and Ahab both embody the Romantic resistance to the linear-perspective-based worldview of Modern Rationalism. Ishmael seeks to regain life’s lost passion while Ahab carries his passion too far, and yet both men are engaged in a quest that seems—each in a different manner—opposed to the objective, dispassionate ideals of pure reason. Of particular import are two instances in the novel. The first is of Ishmael recalling a memory of his childhood involving his stepmother, who “was all the time whipping [him], or sending [him] to bed supperless” (Melville 37). The second instance occurs much later in the novel, when

Ahab's condition appears to be implicitly attributed, at least in part, to the "cruel" nature of "the stepmother world" (Melville 583). The notion of the stepmother links both of these situations and carries profound symbolic significance. The notion of a stepparent always implies that a natural parent has either died or been relieved of his/her position before subsequent replacement by another. This should serve as a reminder of Hamlet, whose natural father was displaced by a false stepfather. And, as mentioned, this displacement may be regarded as symbolic of the displacement of the pre-Modern worldview by linear perspective consciousness. Humans of the Modern era may, in some ways, be considered the *stepchildren* of the style of consciousness influenced by linear perspective vision. By nature, we are the children of the older worldview that is more characteristic of the medieval and ancient eras, which involves a meaningful and embodied relationship with other people, with the wider world, and with the sensory qualities of existence. The newly imposed linear perspective consciousness is a historical novelty that was quickly implemented and has since developed rapidly (technological development, mechanistic conceptions of nature and the human body, etc); as I have demonstrated, this Modern worldview has the effect of compromising man's relationship with others and with the wider world (and even each individual's conception of himself/herself, especially with regard to the body). As human beings, however, each of us possesses a desire for a more affective, meaningful, and involved relationship with reality. Since the advent of linear perspective vision, this aspect of humanity has found itself suppressed. It may

well be the case that the Romantics (Ahab and Ishmael being only two examples) recognized—even if only subconsciously—that they had been half-orphaned and left to the custody of a cold, unloving, detached stepparent.¹³ Unfortunately, for some reason or other (most likely because, as with Hamlet, the Modern worldview was too strong and the shadow qualities not yet strong enough to overcome it), they were hindered in their attempt to overcome their plight by the misguided nature of their efforts. I have already alluded to the way in which Ishmael embodies this tragic reality, and now attend to Ahab. Ahab's response is a manner of reckless rebellion that renders him, ironically, a caricature of the imposing spectator self of linear perspective vision. One particular statement of Ahab's resonates: "I will *dismember* my *dismemberer*" (Melville 189) (emphases added). Rather than make an effort to "*re-member*[]" (Romanyshyn 162) himself, Ahab merely, for lack of a better phrase, *fight's fire with fire*. Ahab responds to his plight with vengeance and destruction, thereby caricaturing the masculine enterprise of the Modern worldview. He is therefore a male shadow, very much like Frankenstein's creature; like the latter, Ahab's self- and other-destructive inclinations are readily apparent. In the end, Ahab is killed and Ishmael finds himself alone at sea, "another orphan" (Melville 620). Both men experience the re-emergence of marginalized qualities, but neither responds constructively; in fact, in a sense, each man only serves to demonstrate the devastating and alienating effects of the Modern worldview. Given this paradoxical

juxtaposition in both characters, one should not be surprised that they both exhibit traits that can be likened unto characteristics of autism.

III. The 20th Century, Postmodernism, Fight Club, and the Emergence of Autism

Autism officially appeared in the twentieth century. The disorder was discovered in 1943, and after years of confinement under the model of psychiatric diagnosis it emerged into public consciousness, gaining the benefit of greater awareness and understanding, in the 1990's. As this thesis has thus far demonstrated, no cultural phenomenon appears in a vacuum. I have determined that autism and its symptoms are inextricably linked to the psychological influences of linear perspective vision and the Modern worldview; with that established, one might ask: *What happened in the twentieth century, and what is the significance of this time period in the history of the Modern worldview, that it coincided with the emergence of autism?* My goal in the concluding section of this chapter is to explore the *immediate* (rather than historically comprehensive) context of which autism is a part. Here, I will be devoting my exploration primarily to the narrative medium of film, as I believe that this, more than any other medium, aids in understanding the psychological condition

of our current time. Romanyshyn, in fact, goes so far as to argue that “[f]ilm portrays the mythology of an age [. . .] [and] is a shared myth, a cultural daydream” (19). Specifically, I will be analyzing David Fincher’s 1999 film Fight Club, which gives vivid, lively, and shocking expression to the cultural, historical, and psychological context within which and from which autism officially emerged as a shadow and a symptom. If one views the film in this fashion, then the year of its release is highly important. Having been released in 1999, the film is able to reflect back upon the entirety of the decade during which autism emerged as a widespread and widely recognized phenomenon. As the social, historical, and psychological makeup of the 1990’s was, in many ways, a culmination of that of the entire twentieth century—during which autism was *discovered*, for lack of a better word—the film reflects, by extension, upon that as well. Moreover, as the social, historical, and psychological makeup of the twentieth century was a culmination (at least of sorts) of the Modern worldview of linear perspective vision, the film will be able to draw together various strands of the overall history explored in this chapter while simultaneously presenting analogies with the autistic condition.

Before turning to Fight Club, I need to allude to the fact that the twentieth century was the *heyday* of Modernism, which carried the notion of human progress to the highest degree. This ideal was realized primarily in the form of rapid technological development that exceeded that of any other era in history and, moreover, has continued to develop at an increasingly faster rate since its initiation.

Concurrent with the triumph of Modernism were technological, medical, and other developments that have, no doubt, been of considerable service to society; simultaneously, however, these same developments could not escape the ambiguous influence of linear perspective Rationalism, which has always sought to subdue important aspects of experience (such as emotions and the imagination) in favor of cold, detached reason and objectivity. As Western culture's technological advancements progressed, the linear-perspective-based conception of human beings (specifically in terms of their physical bodies) as basically mechanical gained greater strength. Oftentimes, for example, science referred (and still refers) to the human brain and body in terms of mechanistic connections (i.e. the leg bone being joined to the hip bone just as one parcel of an automobile is joined to another) and electric-like processes (as in the science of the human brain, which is significant considering that the brain comes to be considered the center of consciousness). What began with the advent of linear perspective vision not only continued, but also intensified with 20th century man's devotion to technology and progress; Romanyshyn characterizes the corresponding conception of the Modern worker as "a being more perfect than man or woman [. . .] which would never be distracted by the pains and pleasures of the flesh[,] [. . .] [and therefore] would transcend nature" (147). It is for this reason that the 20th century witnessed—albeit gradually—a purely functional evaluation of the Modern worker. As Sardello states, "[c]orporate culture treats individuals as units" (93). Sardello then proceeds to cite the account of a contemporary worker who

witnessed layoffs in his company: “The way the layoffs were handled was legalistic, efficient, and demeaning [. . .] In the meetings where people were told they were being laid off, the vice president read from a prepared statement, the same statement for each employee. Next the employee was escorted back to his or her desk where they [sic] had little time to pack up, and then they [sic] were escorted to the door. This was all carried out in front of the rest of the company” (93-94). In this recollection, one bears witness to the impersonal, crassly formal, dehumanizing regard that the corporate world of Modernity has for its workers, who, in the context of the linear perspective model, appear as homogenous subjects that can be manipulated to suit the spectator’s (in this case, the employer’s) ends and easily replaced if they do not satisfy. At the same time, Modernist ideals of individual liberty prevailed (Guignon 44-45). Along with the experimentation and research that accompanied technological development, which exercised the “solitary project” of “adopt[ing] a disengaged, objective stance toward things” (Guignon 43)—in other words, of dispassionate engagement with a subject that is treated in purely mechanical terms (which occurs even among those who work with human beings; doctors, for instance, are frequently dissuaded from allowing any type of close, humane relationship to develop between himself/herself and his/her patients)—Modern individualism inadvertently contributed to the sense of alienation from which Modern humankind suffers. Meanwhile, human technological development continued to produce deleterious effects upon nature and the environment, thereby

compromising the stability of the world in which Modern man lives. Needless to say, Modernism's conception of human progress was not (and is not) realized without cost.

Autism was formally diagnosed—*discovered*, if you will—in the early 1940's by Dr. Leo Kanner. I believe that the primary reason for this occurrence is that autism is predominantly a male shadow. As such, the condition displays before a culture that is driven by the masculine ethos of linear perspective Faustianism/Rationalism, in an exaggerated form, what its men are becoming—namely, introverted beings who lack imaginative and affective qualities and are unable and/or unwilling to live in true community with one another and with the wider world.¹⁴ The notion that mankind was finally genuinely awakening to the dangers of the Modern ethos is also evidenced by the fact that the ideals of Modernism began to face challenge at this time. World War II involved the most destructive acts of violence associated with the Modern ethos in history, perhaps especially in the form of the atomic bomb, which of all occurrences in the twentieth century was arguably the most illustrative of the perils of Modern man's technological hubris. This event occurred two years after formal diagnosis of autism and effectively signaled our “renunciation of the world as a sacred place” (Sardello 119), thereby marking a significant stage in the development of the linear perspective worldview. At this time, society witnessed its own potential to destroy itself and the surrounding world through rapid technological development; in fact, it was after

World War II that *Postmodernism*, a movement that questions the ideals of Modernism (especially in terms of the Modernist ideal of *progress*) began to surface (Richards). It is reasonable to suppose, then, that Modern man saw a reflection of his own *lost-ness* and self-depreciation in the emerging shadow of autism. Because autism reminded us of the dangers of the Modern worldview, it necessarily posed a threat thereto. After all, those who espouse the Modern ethos naturally prefer not to believe that it can be anything but successful, and therefore ignore that which they do not want to acknowledge. For that reason, autism was diagnosed, institutionalized, and safely hidden apart from society. An increased understanding of and more meaningful engagement with autism would not occur until the 1990's, when, more than ever, popular culture began to actively engage itself with Postmodernist concerns (even while such concerns were waning among intellectual and academic circles).

Finally, in the 1990's, autism emerged into public awareness. In fact, during this time period, the so-called *autism epidemic* began to surface. More and more children were being diagnosed with the disorder, and the DSM-IV was forced to broaden its definition of autism due to a surprising degree of variation within the disorder itself—one that defied the medical paradigm and its attempt to classify patients in accordance with the psychology of the linear perspective plain, on which all figures are anonymous, the same, and without variation. Indeed, the complexity of autism was recognized at the very beginning by Hans Asperger, who, along with Kanner, was a key figure in the emerging discovery of autism as a distinct disorder.

According to Frith, Kanner's observations involved those children whose symptoms are those typically associated with autism, while Asperger—whose paper on autism “was largely ignored” (Frith 7)—perceived in his young patients a much wider spectrum of symptoms (7-8). It was during the 1990's that the wideness of the autism spectrum gained recognition. Briefly stated, the autism phenomenon grew out of the Modern worldview of the past several centuries, emerged as an acknowledged disorder in the twentieth century, and gained the recognition of the wider culture during the 1990's.

In the previous two sections of this chapter, much attention was given to May's allegory of the man in the cage; autism, I would argue, represents the man in the latest stages of his confinement. The analogy, in fact, is quite obvious. If one reads May's allegory carefully, he/she will see that as the caged man increasingly submits himself to the authority of the one who has placed him in the cage, thereby denying/suppressing his anger and indignation, he becomes progressively more *autistic* in his behaviors. For example, after passing the phase that I cited as comparable to Ishmael's condition, the man finds himself in this situation: “When his food was handed to him through the bars by the keeper, the man would often drop the dishes or dump over the water and then would be embarrassed because of his stupidity and clumsiness” (May 165). *Clumsiness* is quite common in children with Asperger syndrome (Grandin 37), and results from the motor/gait difficulties within the autistic spectrum. *Stupidity*, in this instance, though not the most sensitive or

accurate choice of words, may be thought of in terms of social ineptitude, which is often evidenced in children on the autism spectrum. Furthermore, the caged man's "conversation became increasingly one-tracked; and instead of the involved philosophical theories about the value of being taken care of, he had gotten down to simple sentences such as 'It is fate,' which he would say over and over again, or he would just mumble to himself, 'It is'" (May 165). Such simple, "barren" (May 165) speech is not at all uncommon in autism, and Frith draws attention to it in describing a young autistic girl who answered questions with "minimal and final" (120) responses, none of which conveyed any sense of emotion or interest (118-119).

Finally, if the reader recalls Frith's description of the autistic child cited in chapter 2, he/she will understand the analogy between autism and the final phase of the caged man's confinement. At this point, "the psychologist became aware that the man's face now seemed to have no particular expression; his smile was no longer fawning, but simply empty and meaningless[.] [. . .] [H]is eyes were distant and vague, and though he looked at the psychologist, it seemed that he never really *saw* him" (May 165-166) (emphasis included). The distant gaze of the man in the cage is very much like the distant gaze of the autistic child, whose disengagement with the world and those around him/her is sometimes so extensive that no emotion or meaning is perceivable in him/her. It is important to remember that May's allegory is situated within the wider context of his ruminations upon the condition of contemporary mankind; with this in mind, the condition of autism may be said to represent not only

the comprehensive condition of Modern man, but also the struggling shadow qualities that have been gradually subdued by the linear perspective paradigm. With this context in place, the film analysis may now begin.

If we equate autism with the later stages of the man in the cage, then we will immediately recognize the significance of the unnamed narrator and main character of Fight Club (Edward Norton). Giroux and Szeman describe him as a “bored corporate drone” (Giroux and Szeman 97), and certainly this observation holds true (I will speak more of this shortly). However, a truly robust understanding of his condition requires deeper insight than this. His appearance and demeanor exude the conspicuous sense of depression, listlessness, and meaninglessness that appears, at a glance, to characterize the existence of a disengaged autistic child. When the viewer looks at his face, he/she notices that he indeed shows *no particular expression*; the look in his eyes as he faces the camera is, likewise, *distant and vague*. As he narrates, he speaks in a considerably monotonous fashion that resembles autistic speech; like the speech of the man in the cage at the phase corresponding with Ishmael’s condition, the narrator of this film speaks with a voice that is “flat and hollow” (May 164). He thereby demonstrates the emotional poverty that often afflicts autistic children. In his case, what this expresses is his *encage-ment*, if you will, within himself. Like the autistic child, he is hypo-aware of the surrounding environment and does not engage with those around him in any meaningful, social fashion. In his estrangement, isolation, affective deprivation, empty gaze, and

monotonous tone of voice, the narrator of Fight Club is quite analogous to autism—especially if autism is considered in light of the allegory of the man in the cage.

Norton's character provides a fitting means of exploring the connection between autism and the wider context of the Modern worldview. In him, the viewer sees what has become of the Modern, dissociated human being who bears the weight of experience alone, behind the window (or *cage*) of linear perspective vision. Returning to the description that Giroux and Szeman offer of the narrator, I must express my general agreement therewith; indeed, he is an example of the Modern "industrial worker[,] the purpose of whose existence is merely to perform the function of "produc[ing] [. . .] anonymous[,] [. . .] interchangeable things, [. . .] which are equal and the same, much like the reflex body of the worker is anybody or everybody and therefore nobody" (Romanyshyn 145). In the 1920's, Czechoslovak playwright Karel Capek took notice of the effects of this "mechanization and dehumanization of humanity" as he observed, from his car, "the grim faces of people on their way to work" (Romanyshyn 146). Based upon this observation, Capek wrote a play entitled R.U.R., Rossum's Universal Robots, thereby marking the origin of the contemporary concept of the robot—which, incidentally, "is a Czechoslovak word meaning 'forced labor'" (Romanyshyn 146). The grim countenance of the narrator of Fight Club serves, then, as a bridge by which one may connect the contemporary phenomenon of autism to the effects of linear-perspective-based conceptions of the body upon human psychology and upon the conceptions people have of themselves

and their lives. The narrator, like Capek's robots, gives the impression of merely being an individual "designed to work, [. . .] [and] whose death would simply mean the absence of motion" (Romanyshyn 147). Of course, one might object that a corporate position differs to a sufficient degree from the menial position of an industrial worker to render this a non-issue in the case of Norton's character. However, if one studies his situation carefully enough, he/she will notice that the difference, qualitatively speaking, is minimal. The narrator is a recall coordinator for an automobile company, and at one point in the film he states that his position entails determining the advisability of recalling a particular model after a fatal accident resulting from an interior problem with the model itself. The formula that his company uses (which it is the narrator's job to calculate) in order to do so is structured so as to determine the financial cost of a recall to the company, and it is this factor that influences the final decision. If the amount of money that such accidents cost the company "is less than the cost of a recall, [they] don't do it [namely, recall the model]" (Fight Club). Like the position of the industrial worker, this demonstrates—though in a decidedly more extreme fashion—the subjugation of all *human* qualities that might be involved to mere quantification and logic. In the narrator of Fight Club, one is able to observe the emotional distantness and numbness of autism while at the same time being able to relate it to the mechanization of Modern man.

As a whole, Fight Club also reflects the symptomatic *sensory* aspects of autism. The narrator and his alter-ego, Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt), establish *fight club*—later termed “Project Mayhem” (Fight Club)—“a bare-knuckles club” in which “the violence [eventually] escalates into a terrorist bombing campaign against banks, credit card companies, and other corporate holdings” (Giroux and Szeman 97). Much of the film, consequently, is characterized by engagement in extreme violence, self-injurious behavior, and destruction. This is highly significant, as it is well known that autistic children often engage in seemingly extreme activities in order to stimulate hypo-acute sensory perception. Such “behaviors [are] referred to as ‘stims,’” and include “rocking, chewing, flapping, rubbing, wandering and other repetitive mannerisms” (Notbohm, Ten Things Every Child 8). In dramatizing this particular component of the autism spectrum, Fight Club draws attention to a matter of significance on a cultural level, thereby alerting the viewer to what may well have been one of the factors leading society to be more concerned about and aware of autism during the 1990’s. Given the fact that sensory and interpersonal awareness had, for five centuries, been compromised by linear perspective vision, society suffered from a certain affective numbness.¹⁵ In response to this, people in 1990’s society relied (as do people in current society) upon extreme sensory experiences in order to experience feeling (resulting in an *excess* thereof—momentarily—as opposed to a deficit). As examples, Sardello—whose book, Freeing the Soul From Fear, was published in the same year and within the same cultural context as Fight Club—cites

“the heavy metal concert [and I would add, for that matter, any type of loud and/or boisterous music], in the movie theater [referring, no doubt, to the loudness of contemporary surround-sound], rolled into a reefer, [. . .] [and] in a video store”.

(138). Sex and violence in the media, advertising, and popular culture also constitute a substantial part of this phenomenon. This is a likely influence upon the contention of Giroux and Szeman that the film “create[s] a narrative centered around the kind of hip, stylishly violent action that is so attractive to today’s filmgoers” and that for this reason, along with the film’s seemingly narrow focus on a contemporary crisis of masculinity (to which I will return in due course), Fight Club “tells us very little[. . .] about the real circumstances and causes of our discontent” (98-99). In terms of the violence in the film, I would argue the opposite. Indeed, it is precisely *through* the extreme violence that the film communicates Modern culture’s sensory and affective imbalance and consequent need for overwrought sensory experience. Certainly, the narrator’s initiation of and involvement in the fight club is based on his own numbness, as well as upon the fact that his relationship with the world and with others is devoid of meaning. He describes his experience in this fashion: “[. . .] [N]othing’s real. Everything’s far away. Everything’s a copy of a copy of a copy” (Fight Club). His description of his daily experience easily reminds one of the field of linear perspective vision in its homogeneity and in the distance and intangibility of the objects contained therein.¹⁶ Here especially, the link between Fight Club and the autism phenomenon is more than merely analogical. The excessive violence in which

the men in Fincher's film engage represents our society's need to reawaken sensory experience and human connection, as well as the employment of extreme measures in order to achieve that end. In this respect, it is highly possible that society began to see a reflection of itself in autistic children, whose attempts to stimulate hypo-acute sensory abilities were (and are) sometimes violent and/or self-injurious. Common appearances of this tendency in autistic children include "bit[ing] the backs of their hands or other parts of their body[,] [. . .] bang[ing] their heads against a wall or other hard surface[,] [. . .] [and] hit[ting] themselves" (Bleach 44). In Fight Club, one sees an expression of society's tendency toward drastic means of stimulating hypo-acute sensory capacities, which, in turn, corresponds with this very same symptomatic aspect of autism.

Simultaneously, the film also places the characteristic *hyper-sensitivity* of both autism and 1990's society on display. This is perhaps most evident in the narrator's insomnia, which Sardello suggests is a trait of Modern self in fear (to which I alluded in the first chapter) (45) and which is connected to hyper-sensitivity by virtue of its intimation of a sense of distractedness and/or an inability to experience the calmness necessary for natural sleep. Writing in 1999, the year of this film's release, Sardello states that "many people find it increasingly difficult to sleep, an indication of unease" (81).¹⁷ The narrator's own unease and desperation are most painfully apparent when he asks his doctor for some manner of medication to help him sleep, only to be refused and advised that he instead requires "healthy, *natural* sleep" (Fight

Club) (emphasis mine). Such hyper-awareness in society is related to the paranoid consciousness that accompanies our sense of affective separation from others and from the world, the latter of which “[w]e feel [. . .] threatened by” in our “isolat[ion]” (Sardello 34). Sure enough, as Grandin asserts, “[a] low-functioning autistic adult” suffers the difficulties of “a nervous system that is often in a [. . .] state of fear and panic[,]” which in turn causes “a state of hyperarousal [. . .] in a world of total chaos” (48). In the case of the narrator of Fight Club, as in the case of some autistic individuals, an underlying sense of unease is present; this unease is connected to the neglected qualities that are suppressed beneath the façade of an efficient, mechanical society. What the narrator’s desperation to be medicated reflects is a cultural trend, based upon this very anxiety, that became quite prevalent in the last few decades of the twentieth century—namely, the use of artificial (and sometimes dangerous) means of trying to settle one’s anxiety (Sardello 73). And so, in Fincher’s film, the viewer may intuit that just as society saw itself reflected in autistic hyposensitivity and in the autistic child’s drastic means of self-stimulation, it also saw itself reflected in the *hypersensitive* aspects of the condition.

One sees suggested in these issues the ambiguity and conflict inherent within this time period, during which the consequences of linear perspective vision appear to have been surfacing in a more intense and pervasive fashion than ever before in Modern history. In this case, the conflict is between sensory capacities that had become so numb as to require overstimulation (rock music, violence and sex in the

media, etc) in order to be reached and perceptual capacities that had become so hyper-aroused that they required unnatural methods of amelioration (drugs and alcohol, for instance). Sardello makes a similar claim in stating that “[a] narrowing of consciousness characterizes our time: numbness on the one hand, and *rage right beneath the surface* on the other” (Sardello 82) (emphases added). The rage of which Sardello speaks is related to “[t]he flaming up of passions” (Sardello 83), which in turn is related to the eruption of qualities that were suppressed behind the linear perspective window for centuries. Psychologically, this expresses the importance of the 1990’s within the context of the Modern worldview—namely, the decade’s status as a *transition* stage. The Modern worldview certainly faced greater and more successful resistance from the shadows during the 1990’s (I will shortly discuss this further), but by no means did the 1990’s witness its extinction. Indeed, the ideals of Modernism continued to thrive in the form of further and more rapid technological development as well as in other areas (education, for example). The coexistence of Modernist and Postmodernist concerns was an expression of the fact that the 1990’s constituted “a cultural lag” in Western society that was characterized by conflict and ambiguity (Robbins, Personal Interview, 27 Sept. 2008). What this means, essentially, is that 1990’s Western culture was comparable, on a collective level, to a patient undergoing therapy. Like such a patient, society as a whole possessed (even if only at a subconscious level) a rather ambiguous attitude with regard to its condition—namely, the desire to change conflicted with the desire to remain in and/or

return to the state with which it was familiar. After all, the Modern worldview had been in place for so long that to turn away from the habits induced thereby required no small degree of adjustment. Romanyshyn alludes to this phenomenon in stating that “[m]oments of breakdown and breakthrough are filled with danger, because old visions die hard while new ones struggle to be born” (183). Naturally, the conflicting inclinations within society produced considerable ambiguity. The emergence of autism within the context of this time period was likely occasioned by a subconscious intuition, beneath the surface of everyday awareness, of how the tumult within the autism spectrum reflected the psychological tumult of this period in history.

Before I continue my exploration of aspects of autism in Fight Club, it is proper to elaborate upon my previous assertion that the film draws attention to how the 1990’s witnessed, to a degree, intimations of the impending collapse of the Modern, linear-perspective-based worldview. Throughout the twentieth century, even as the Modern worldview gained strength, there were intimations of “the breakdown of the cultural psychology of [linear perspective vision] [. . .] and the breakthrough of a new psychological style” (Romanyshyn 205). Examples, incidentally, include psychoanalysis (Romanyshyn 205-209) and Impressionism in visual art (Romanyshyn 216-221). Given the primarily masculine character of the Modern ethos, the attention of Fincher’s film to crises of masculine identity is of considerable importance. Significantly, the first support group the narrator attends is a weekly meeting for men with testicular cancer. At this meeting, the men grieve

over their emasculation. At least two of them have had the experience of being left by their wives, and one of them (Meat Loaf) has also been estranged from his children (the other man's failure was his inability to *produce* children with his former wife (Fight Club)). When regarded symbolically, the anguish that these men express at the meetings embodies a fallen dream—namely, the masculine dream of the Modern worldview, which initially aimed at the glorification of man but instead occasioned the existential lost-ness of humanity. Interestingly, Kaja Silverman, author of Male Subjectivity at the Margins, makes an explicit link between the weakening of notions of male power and “[t]he ‘historical trauma’ caused by World War II” (cited and qtd. in Hamming 149), which, as I have argued, relates to the growing disenchantment with—as well as awareness of the dangers of—the *progressive* impulses of Modernism in the twentieth century. In Fight Club, one finds a visible representation of the ultimate failure (for lack of a better word) thereof.

There is an important background relating to the aforementioned topic against which both Fight Club and the emergence of autism must be considered. The deposition of the male authority figure was a significant part of the challenge to Modernism that occurred at this period in history, beginning in the 1960's and continuing until the end of the century. The phenomenon of feminism, which Romanyszyn seems to suggest as yet another shadow of the Modern worldview (209-215) (and this will be discussed in greater detail momentarily), made no small contribution to the said deposition; more instrumental, however, was the decline of

the nuclear family (which is itself a Modernist invention that, while taken for granted, actually differs from pre-Modern societies in its isolation of the immediate family unit from the wider support system of extended family¹⁸). Concurrent with the decline of the traditional family was the absence of the father. The percentage of single-parent families was increasing, and more often than not the single parent was the mother. As Tyler states (regarding all men born in the period from roughly the mid-1960's through the 1970's): "We are a generation of men raised by women" (Fight Club). By the time the 1990's had arrived, Western culture (perhaps especially in America) had produced an entire generation that had been raised without genuine role models/guides from whom they might learn what it means to be masculine. In consequence, as Robbins suggests, the conceptions that the men of this generation held regarding masculinity assumed the form of a caricature (Personal Interview, 27 Sept. 2008). One of the shadows, therefore, of the decline of the family was the emergence of a manner of hyper-masculinity that, in many ways, carried the already caricatured Modernist ideal thereof (as portrayed in figures such as John Wayne, Humphrey Bogart, etc) even further. Hamming expresses an implicit recognition of this in contending that Tyler's ethos "is defined by a past that is itself mediated by frontier novels and Western films" (150). The aforementioned hyper-masculinity constituted an unrealistic, archetypal (for lack of a better word) conception of masculinity—one holding that the ideal man lacked feeling/empathy and embraced brute force, "leading [. . .] by force" rather than "by example"

(Robbins, Personal Interview, 27 Sept. 2008). The latter is readily apparent in the character of Tyler Durden. Likewise, Giroux and Szeman correctly assert that the male characters in Fight Club—Tyler/the narrator included—aim “to establish a sense of community in which [they] can reclaim their virility and power” (Giroux and Szeman 98). They endeavor to regain their masculine identities via gratuitous violence and destruction, thereby allowing the reactionary hyper-masculinity of the later part of the twentieth century to present itself with astonishing force.

The relevance of this aspect of the film to the autism phenomenon resides in the fact that autism is, in its own fashion, a form of hyper-masculinity. Bearing in mind that most autistic individuals are male, one ought to take note of the fact that they often (though once again I must make plain that this is not always the case) embody stereotypical conceptions of men in their emotional distance, their hyper-independence (i.e. their seeming inability to form emotional bonds with others), and their strictly logical capabilities. Furthermore, as Robbins states, the more extreme cases of autism reveal an especially masculine form of dependence—namely, the need to be waited upon and aided with simple tasks such as tooth-brushing, shoelace-tying, cleaning up after themselves, etc (Robbins, Personal Interview, 27 Sept. 2008). This aspect of autism reaffirms the condition as a caricature of the Modern ethos, as it exposes the oft-referred to laziness of the Modern male in relation to what may be characterized as *domestic* tasks (having to do with clothing, food, etc). In light of this, the fact that autism emerged into public consciousness at the same time as the

crisis of masculinity that occasioned the issues dealt with in Fight Club must be regarded with importance. Stated succinctly, it is as if awareness of the mostly male shadow of autism reflected suspicion (perhaps, for the most part, at a subconscious level) of the flaws inherent within the collapsing Modern worldview and its masculine ethos.

As a final note, I wish to draw attention to the connection between the film's expression of the both the sensory aspects and the male character of autism. As one may surmise, the aggression and self-injurious behavior of the men in Fight Club is inextricably bound to their desire to reawaken a sense of masculinity; ironically, the sense of masculinity toward which Tyler calls them to aspire is one that is opposed to the conditions of the Modern worldview. Tyler complains against Modern consumerism (another aspect of Modernism that continued to progress in the 1990's) on the grounds that it feminizes men, robbing them of their "hunter/gatherer" instinct and rendering them "by-products of a lifestyle obsession" (Fight Club). In light of this, Giroux and Szeman, whose analysis of Fight Club expresses an awareness of the wider implications of consumerism (if not of linear perspective vision and its related history), argue that Fincher's film "ultimately manages to offer a critique of [. . .] contemporary capitalism only in a way that confirms capitalism's worst excesses and legitimates its ruling narratives. [The film] is, finally, less interested in critiquing the broader material relations of power and strategies of domination and exploitation associated with neoliberal capitalism than it is in rebelling against a consumerist

culture that dissolves the bonds of male sociality and puts into place an enervating notion of male identity and agency” (96). By evaluating the film in such a fashion, the authors confuse its value. If viewed in the proper fashion, Fight Club will suggest itself as more of a *documentary* than a solution-driven narrative. The film is not overly concerned with suggesting solutions to society’s problems, but utilizes the art of the narrative in order to awaken people to the reality of the world in which they live. As I have suggested throughout this chapter—and in this section, especially, in my citations of Sardello—the problematic nature of society as a whole is nowhere more apparent than in the symptomatic emergence or repressed qualities. The type of masculine identity sought after in Fight Club, while in some ways caricaturing the destructive bent of Modernist ideals, is more related to *shadow* qualities than to the Modern worldview.¹⁹ Hamming observes that “[m]asculinity and ecology are aligned in [Fight Club] through the image of an idealized or purified male body that appears as a rejection of modern, industrial, and even technological configurations of self and reality” (149). As may appear evident, the ultra-physical engagements of the men in this film embody a type of masculine identity that relies not upon Modern notions of progress, development, or reason, but upon primitive, natural instincts and feelings of brute aggression.²⁰ This aggression progresses so far as to seek the destruction of major financial/credit institutions in the city in which he lives. Dissatisfied with “the mind-numbing effects of urban and suburban cultural life[,]” he envisions the ideal society with which he seeks to replace it as follows:

“In the world I see, you’re stalking elk through the damp canyon forest around the ruins of Rockefeller Center. You’ll wear leather clothes that will last you the rest of your life. You’ll climb the wrist-thick kudzu vines that wrap the Sears Tower. And when you look down you’ll see tiny figures pounding corn, laying strips of venison on the empty carpool lane of some abandoned super-highway.”

(Fight Club)

Clearly, at the root of the hyper-masculine aggression and extreme sensory engagement featured in Fincher’s film is a symptomatic impetus toward re-embracing shadow qualities (in this case, nature over modernized culture).

I have already established the link between the behaviors of the men in Fight Club and those of children on the autism spectrum. The relevance of the above argument resides in its demonstration of the fact that the expression of what seem to be hyper-masculine tendencies *may*, in fact, coexist alongside the reemergence (albeit in symptomatic form) of shadow qualities. More importantly, it indirectly demonstrates that it is possible for reemerging shadow qualities and hyperbolic expressions of the effects of linear perspective vision to coexist within the same condition. As those who have seen Fight Club are aware, the narrator and Tyler are, in fact, the same person (as the narrator suffers from some manner of personality disorder). The impulse toward primitive instincts in opposition to Modern culture, then, emerges from within the psyche of the narrator—the same individual I have

argued to portray Modern man in his alienation, affective poverty, and reduction to the ideal of a mechanical worker whose existence is ruled by strict *logic* rather than by feeling. Similarly, an autistic person, while appearing on the surface to be the quintessential disengaged spectator—and in many cases, even a thoroughly alienated individual who possesses only the most minimal forms of connection with the wider world and with others—carries beneath the surface the *re*-surfacing of suppressed qualities. Like the aggression of the men in Fight Club, the extreme and often painful sensory experiences of autistic children may be regarded as the forceful and symptomatic return of sensory qualities that have been suppressed for too long by the linear-perspective-based worldview. In the autism spectrum, then, one sees the conflict between the latter, which are attempting to reemerge, and the development of the dominating effects of the Modern worldview. As a shadow phenomenon, the condition of autism is something from which society as a whole can learn and benefit; it is to this possibility that I turn in the next chapter.

NOTES

¹ *Myth*, in this instance, refers not to fanciful fictions, but to the underlying meaning, conviction, and ideology that drives a culture and/or group of cultures, influencing every aspect of life therein (examples include art, politics, science, literature, philosophy, and even simple everyday interaction).

² See chapter 1.

³ Many may object to this statement, citing Augustine's Confessions as a much earlier example of introspectiveness in literature. Guignon addresses this very objection by asserting that Augustine's exhortation toward inward examination was characterized by his conviction "that the self in its very being is initially, essentially and inextricably bound to God" (15). Augustine's inwardness differs from Hamlet's in that his goal is the surrender of himself to God, whereas Hamlet seems simply to be absorbed in self-pity and self-reflection.

⁴ See chapter 1 for the reference and citation.

⁵ This statement must be read in light of the information provided in chapter 1 on the *window as veil*, which allows the spectator/viewer to manipulate what lies on the other side to suit his/her own private vision thereof.

⁶ I will here re-present the information I cited in the 1st chapter regarding this matter: *As art historian Helen Gardner states, it "made possible scale drawings, maps, charts, graphs, and diagrams—those means of exact representation without which modern science and technology would be impossible" (qtd. in Romanyshyn 33).*

⁷ In reply to this (mis)conception of the human body, I can only cite Romanynshyn's response: "It is surely correct to note the efficient and automatic character of reflex action and to acknowledge that such action does occur without the necessity of personal awareness. [. . .] But I do not have to think about this action any more than I have to think about the rhythm of my breathing. And yet it is certainly true that *I* belong to this rhythm, that it is mine, and that how I breathe in a situation is an index of how I belong or fail to belong to that situation. In other words, between me and my body there is a whole range of relations linking the pre-personal and the very personal, and only in the most extreme situations, like severe injury or illness, or under pre-established conditions, like in a laboratory setting, can and does my body become detached from me to function as a piece of machinery. Indeed, the fact that I can, so to speak, lend my body to pre-established situations, like an experimental arrangement, to demonstrate a reflex, or the fact that after an injury or illness I can recognize the functioning of my body at that time as out of the ordinary, is proof enough that I belong to my body. No, that is not quite the way to put it, because it still smacks of that split about which Descartes speaks. Rather, we must say that these extraordinary circumstances are proof enough that the most ordinary but also most primary fact about a person and his or her body is that the person *is* his or her body. You *are* your body and because you are you also *have* a body at varying degrees of distance" (140) (emphases included).

⁸ Interestingly, the Cartesian view of God gives rise to the Deist notion of God as a

“watchmaker” who is radically detached from His creation and is barely (if at all) involved in its affairs (Romanyshyn 47). Linear perspective vision, as mentioned, makes *man* the center and the “measure of all things” (Guignon 32-33).

⁹ It is important to note that this is one of those instances in which the reader must willingly set aside the Modern characteristic of *literalism*. Romanyshyn says that our age has seen “a literalization of the feminine in the woman” (211), and I would argue that there has been a corresponding literalization of the masculine in men. In talking about masculine and feminine, we are not concerned with literal gender. Rather, we are here concerned with qualities that are typically designated as masculine (courage, authority, domination, fixity of purpose, reason, etc) or feminine (compassion, tenderness, understanding, passivity, emotions, etc).

¹⁰ Recall from chapter 1 that *dizziness* is one of the sensory symptoms of autism.

¹¹ We see this type of Romantic influence even in our contemporary era with practices and beliefs of the New Age movement.

¹² Romanyshyn contrasts “the body of archaic man[,] [. . .] a body of ritual, a body in intimate connection with the earth” with “[t]he body of the space man, [. . .] a body of technical functions, a body born in and made for distance” (28). In talking about the two, he cites William Barrett’s observation of the coinciding “appearance of space man [. . .] [and] *disappearance* of archaic man” (qtd. in Romanyshyn 28) (emphasis added).

¹³ One will perhaps be able to infer a metaphorical connection with the Snow White myth (see chapter 2), and with the stepmother motif in general.

¹⁴ I must indicate here that I do not mean to caricature autism or to portray autistic children negatively; as indicated in chapter 1, the specifics behind autistic symptoms are much more complicated than this. What I am saying is that the presence of these symptoms, as is the case with all shadows, confronts Modern culture as a whole with an image of its psychological life and, perhaps, of what it may eventually become if it continues as it is.

¹⁵ Sardello states that “numbing [. . .] occurs with the tandem realities of terror and anonymity”—the former referring to the rise of terrorism in the Modern world (which is only one of many fear-based phenomena), the latter referring to the sense of powerlessness on the individual level (65).

¹⁶ This is yet another trait of Postmodernism—namely, that it explicitly recognizes this aspect of Modern, linear-perspective-based consciousness. One of the traits of Modernism (especially in art and literature) was that it was, for many years, extremely self-reflexive; by the time Postmodernism had taken hold, this sort of hyper reflexivity had been in existence for so long that people came to believe that there was nothing original, nothing distinguishable from anything else (Robbins, Personal Interview, 27 Sept. 2008).

¹⁷ It is not difficult to support Sardello's claim with statistical evidence. In a statistical and psychological study of the connection between sleep deprivation and motor vehicle accidents from the late 1980's through the mid-1990's, Coren, with parenthetical reference to his own 1996 study, states that "researchers have claimed that society is chronically sleep deprived," to the extent that "even small additional reductions in sleep time may have consequences for safety" (par. 4).

¹⁸ I would argue that, much like the Modern individual, the Modern family bore too much weight upon itself, and that without reliable, nearby familial support systems, it was bound to fall apart (as it did not have sufficient strength to sustain itself). I am not suggesting that this is the *whole* of the reason for the decline of the family, but I do believe that it is a significant component thereof. This, like most Modern phenomena, should be viewed in light of the history of linear perspective vision and its consequences.

¹⁹ This reinforces the relevance of the Modern worldview for both men *and* women, and suggests that both genders suffer from the loss of pre-Modern sensibilities.

²⁰ Recall my mention, in the previous section, of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who believed in a similar ideal of finding oneself by separating himself/herself from civilization and turning to *nature*—"for nature 'does everything for the best,' and so has placed in us the instincts and feelings that will always lead us in the right direction" (Guignon 58-59). But whereas Rousseau's conception of man's natural state was rather sentimental, Tyler's is based upon a conception of man's relationship

with nature as one involving the exercise of power. While Rousseau's emphasis is upon positive feelings, Tyler's is upon a sort of primitive aggression.

Chapter Four: Autism in Contemporary Children's Literature

It is fitting that this thesis should conclude with an analysis of texts that explicitly and knowingly deal with autism as a subject. All of the said texts belong to the genre of children's and young adult literature, which, more than any other type of fiction, deals with such matters as autism in a manner that is both straightforward and self-aware. Rather than founding its engagement with autism upon biological, neurological, and/or psychological theories based upon the objective medical/diagnostic model, children's literature more often concerns itself with the *experience* of autism—for the individuals with autism as well as for their friends and family members. Furthermore, autism is very much a *childhood* disorder—at least insofar as society regards it (perhaps because childhood—and especially early childhood—is when the condition is normally diagnosed); Grandin states that “[t]oday, autism is regarded as an early childhood disorder by definition” (35). If, within the field of literature, the possibility exists for a richer and more meaningful engagement with autism, it is arguably to be found in fiction that focuses upon and is inspired by the experiences of childhood.

There is, however, another reason for the claim that children's literature is the most appropriate venue for my exploration of autism. By the point in history at which autism was diagnosed, as society had become more highly technical and industrialized, more highly specialized, and increasingly separated from nature and from sublimated sensory qualities, the discrepancy between the adult and the child

had grown remarkably. The discrepancy itself is as old as linear perspective vision in Modern culture (Simms 385), as children are more in sync with the human experience of the world as meaningful and imbued with imaginative qualities. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by the childhood propensity for "*thinking by association*" (Lehane 4) (emphases included), which Brewster Ghiselin cites Einstein as having defined in the following way: "combinatory associations or the playing around with different combinations of ideas" (qtd. in Lehane 4). As Lehane states, the ability to think in this fashion "triggers metaphorical and allegorical concepts—like Erin's [Lehane's son] definition of ice: 'water going to sleep for the winter'" (4). In this respect, the worldview common to childhood resembles the metaphorical, anthropomorphic view of nature and phenomenological experience that was characteristic of the pre-Modern era. For this reason, throughout Modern history, adults looked to childhood with an ever-increasing sense of nostalgia; in the Modern child, the Modern adult sees what he/she has lost (Robbins par. 8). In autistic children, one sees children behave—though in an exaggerated fashion—more like the Modern adult than a child. Rather than exhibiting the characteristic vulnerability and emotional dependence of the average child, the autistic child will typically form no such attachments—even to his/her own parents. While most children engage in imaginative play, an autistic child's interests are oftentimes characterized by a rigid logic (i.e. the child may be interested in the mechanics of how a computer works). Society's increasing sentimentality with regard to childhood coincides with attention

to children who, for some reason or other, do not act as children are supposed to act. It is almost as if what first happened to the adult population is now happening to the children as well. At the same time, however, certain marginalized sensory qualities reemerge in the form of autism as well (I will devote the next paragraph to the 19th century shadow of *hysteria* in order to expand upon this statement). As is the case with all shadows, these suggest a reassertion of what cannot be ignored. The consequences of man's destructive self-seclusion from sensory and affective experience and the accompanying conflict with the emerging secondary qualities gain stark representation in the shadow of autism, which appears chiefly in the form of the male¹ child.

In anticipation of the reader's possible curiosity regarding my declaration that the autism phenomenon includes the reemergence of repressed symptoms, I digress momentarily to draw attention to what I consider to be a foreshadowing of autism—namely, hysteria. I mentioned in the previous chapter that psychoanalysis was an intimation of a *new psychological style* during the 20th century; therefore, I account it of great importance that at the roots of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory lays his work with women who suffered from hysteria, which Romanyshyn identifies as a "shadow [. . .] of the abandoned body [of linear perspective vision]" (163). In the hysteric, Freud saw "an insistent reminder that the body displaced from the world and forced to carry its memories and desires alone breaks down" (Romanyshyn 163). The "passion[s]" (Romanyshyn 164) of the body that were marginalized by linear

perspective erupted in the body of the hysteric, making themselves present precisely in the act of caricaturing the mechanized body of modernity. The most obvious example of this hysteric trait is the fact that the symptoms often occur while the hysterical patient is in a disengaged state of consciousness—for example, “in a kind of sleep or in a state of seizure” (Romanyshyn 167);² the importance of this lies in the fact that the abandoned qualities that resurge in the symptoms of hysteria came to be considered subjective and therefore *independent* of the body—at least as conceived by Modern Rationalism. Indeed, the appearance of the hysteric presented a serious challenge to the mechanical/anatomical/mathematical conception of the human body. An important characteristic of hysteria is that the feelings of pain and other bodily symptoms experienced by the hysteric do not have any physiological explanations, nor can they be attributed to the fabrications of an interior, Cartesian mind state, as the symptoms are so intricately bound to somatic experience.³ It was the phenomenon of hysteria, with its reminder “that the body speaks a symbolic language, which is neither reducible to the mechanisms of the abandoned body, nor able to be distanced from the flesh as a pure meaning of a spectator’s mind” (Romanyshyn 169), that occasioned the birth of Freudian psychoanalysis. This condition, in a number of ways, resembles autism. One of the lesser known symptoms of some of the more severe cases of autism is the propensity for seizures, which is also common among hysterics. Other analogous symptoms within hysteria are “anaesthesia [sic] or the loss of sensation and feeling” (Romanyshyn 163)—which

relate to autistic hyposensitivity—problems with gait, and “tunnel vision” (Romanyshyn 163). The latter symptom is especially important, as it perceives the world precisely as the linear perspective eye is meant to see it. The other symptoms are important as well; the anesthetic body “mimics the body without feeling” and the gait deviation and seizures display “the symptomatic side of the body whose movement in the world is more like the motion of a machine” (Romanyshyn 164). In addition, another symptom that is common between autism and hysteria is lack of speech, which, according to Romanyshyn, “can very well bespeak the silence of estrangement” (169). This estrangement, I would suggest, may certainly be viewed in light of the estrangement of the Modern self behind the window (Hamlet, for example). These relationships between hysteria and autism are crucial, given the place of these symptoms within the context of Western society’s condition in the Modern era. As one might expect, hysteria was doomed to be labeled and consigned to separation from the wider culture. It is perhaps because of the masculine character of the Modern ethos that the symptomatic side thereof would soon need, in order to gain society’s serious attention, to assume the form of a predominantly male shadow—namely, autism.

My digression on the subject of hysteria requires some justification. My intention, in the previous paragraph, was to offer a concrete demonstration of how autism is not only a caricature of the linear perspective self, but also a carrier of abandoned qualities that emerge in symptomatic form. As mentioned, certain

hysteric symptoms that correspond with symptoms of autism represent marginalized sensory and bodily experiences that struggle to reemerge from within the mechanized and privatized body of linear perspective consciousness. The presence of marginalized qualities suggests that Modern society may learn from the shadow of autism, and that if approached constructively, the autism phenomenon may speak to people in unexpected ways. This proposition is essential to the forthcoming literary analyses.

Of all of the books I have determined to examine in this chapter, the one that offers the most interesting approach to autism on a metaphorical level is Diane Duane's A Wizard Alone, the sixth book in a series for young adults about pre-teens (who have become teens at this point in the series) who are initiated into the secrets of wizardry. In Duane's book, the autistic individual is Darryl McAllister, a young boy who is undergoing his "Ordeal," the necessary initiatory challenge for aspiring wizards (Duane 20). A victim of late onset autism, he has been engaged in his Ordeal for far longer than is typical for young wizards, and it is the task of the two main characters, Christopher (Kit) Rodriguez and Juanita (Nita) Callahan, to rescue him. In researching the assignment, Nita discovers that Darryl is one of the "Abdals" or "Pillars[,]” beings who, without realizing it, possess "immense supportive strength[,]” such that "[t]he physical and spiritual structure of the Universe and its contents is strengthened against the assaults of evil by [. . .] [their] presence, and weakened by their loss" (Duane 201). This description brings to mind the popular adage of an

individual who bears *the weight of the world*—or in this case, the *universe*—upon *his/her shoulders*. This, in turn, is the quintessential definition of the Modern self. As mentioned in the first chapter, the Modern worldview and its mechanistic view of the world caused all meaning and all values to retreat from the world and into the private space of human consciousness; this is problematic, given the fact that human desires and values rightly belong in a relationship with the wider world, beyond the narrow, isolated confines of the individual. In this sense, the Modern self, like Darryl, bears the weight of the world, which was once meaning-laden but is deprived of meaning by the linear perspective paradigm. Stated differently, the Modern self bears the weight of the linear perspective worldview and its consequences (marginalized sensory qualities, severed affective connections, etc) upon himself/herself (not unlike the hysteric, with her symptomatic bodily passions that have been borne too long apart from the wider world, or the narrator of Fight Club with his suppressed emotions). It is quite interesting, then, that such a concept is applied to a character with autism.

In terms of engagement with autism, it is helpful for the reader to contrast the ways in which each of the novel's main characters interacts with Darryl. In Kit, the reader bears witness to what happens when one approaches autism with preconceived notions and/or with an inadequate understanding thereof. As the narrative progresses, Kit becomes increasingly *autistic* himself. He becomes so involved in Darryl's Ordeal and so immersed in his privatized world that he begins to lose his own

personality as well as his connection with the wider world. I will expand upon this statement momentarily, but first I need to point out that Kit's approach is in some ways analogous to that of the Modern, linear-perspective-inspired models. When he becomes assigned to the mission of rescuing Darryl, he prepares himself primarily by attempting to analyze the situation—for example, by familiarizing himself with the symptoms of autism (Duane 53-55). This, of course, is by no means problematic in and of itself, and is indeed a necessary step toward aiding autistic children. However, when the analytical component of one's approach to autism occupies the whole of one's attention (as appears to be the case oftentimes with the diagnostic paradigm), this renders autistic children *others* to be studied, rather than coequals and/or partners with whom to communicate. It also obstructs the ability to truly understand and assist autistic children; in Kit's case, as Duane's other principle character (who will be identified in the next paragraph) speculates, "preconceived ideas" about Darryl's condition affect his experience of Darryl's inner world (Duane 198). Likewise, our society's fixation with diagnostic criteria and medical/mechanical conceptions of autism risks a loss of respect for the *individuality* of autistic people and their personal experiences with the disorder. In the case of Kit and in the case of Modern culture, too formal an approach to autism precludes more meaningful engagement with the condition as a shadow phenomenon and binds us to the limitations of the Modern, linear-perspective-based worldview (with its objective, strictly logical, analytical paradigms).

A more efficacious relationship with autism (and with any shadow) is exemplified in the other main character, Juanita (Nita) Callahan. In order to understand this relationship, one must first understand that in her familiarization with Darryl's autism, Nita finds someone who she perceives to be much like herself: a child alone. Nita suffers considerably because of the recent death of her mother. In her grief, as DeCandido succinctly and perceptively states, "she turns *inward*," withholding her "friendship and support" from Kit as he attempts to rescue Darryl (588) (emphasis added). She finds herself separated from the ability to appreciate/perceive the beauty of the world and the qualities of everyday experience, and for a time she persistently secludes herself from contact with Kit, "shut[ting] him out emotionally and telepathically [a wizardly ability]" (Prolman 140). She is in a state of isolation and depression. Interestingly, the symptoms of her depression are presented as analogous to those of Darryl's autism. In her grief, she, like Darryl, views the world through a "filter" characterized by "remoteness [. . .] (and the *feeling of nothing mattering*" (Duane 184) (emphases included). Such a state of existence is not dissimilar to the condition of Modern mankind (as exemplified, for example, in the emptiness that the viewer witnesses in the life of the narrator of Fight Club). Sardello reflects often, in his book, upon the extent to which fear (meaning that which separates us from a deeper sense of the meaningfulness of life, the world, and interpersonal relationships) has come to govern, in subtle ways, the people and

institutions of contemporary society (6-7). He describes the psychological effect of this phenomenon as follows:

“The effect [. . .] is [. . .] a contraction, a shutting down of emotional depth in our lives. Gradually, and imperceptibly, our lives begin to feel flat. As we go about doing the same things we have always done, our feelings diminish, and even if we’re in the midst of a great deal of activity, we experience a kind of isolation. [. . .] A mild depression sets in, and if we look inward at all we discover a great deal of fear.”

(Sardello ix)

He later states that the life of a person living in such a state “is life lived at a distance, observing the life one lives rather than being in it” (Sardello 83). In Nita’s grief, Darryl’s autism (and, indeed, in many cases of autism), and the empty, isolative, disengaged existence from which Modern man suffers, one sees a triad of like conditions. In Nita’s case, the symptoms possess their origin in her *grief*. Her grief and the occasioning loss reflect our cultural grief and loss—namely, of the rich, meaningful, engaged worldview that preceded the Modern era and is only allowed splintered appearances in everyday life in the Modern world.⁴ As this is the case, she possesses an intimate awareness of Darryl’s experience.

When Nita encounters Darryl, she is able to approach him with no preconceived notions of his experience based upon principles of the medical/diagnostic paradigm or the psychological/social paradigm. Her sympathetic

understanding of Darryl's experience perhaps forms part of the impetus to aid Kit in helping Darryl to overcome his Ordeal. When this mission is accomplished, Darryl and Nita acknowledge their shared condition, "[t]he pain of being alone" (Duane 304) (emphases included). Along with Kit, Nita then convinces him to overcome his fear of living in the outside world among others, thereby drawing him out of his isolation. In doing so, she also helps herself; she finds herself able to perceive the wonders of the world around her once again, "noticing a lot of things that had passed her by recently: the snow, the slush [. . .][,] the icicles hanging down, glittering, from the eaves of people's houses; the color of the sky, the sound of people's voices as they said good-bye to each other" (Duane 312-313). Arguably, this relates to the possibility of once again becoming open to a sense of wonder and appreciation in relation to our experiences; as Sardello states, "just about anything radiates depth when we are open to what is present" (43). At this point in the narrative, Nita is immediately reminded of what Carl, one of her advisors in matters of wizardry, had told her about "the concept that [. . .] 'all is done for each[,] [. . .] mean[ing] that every good thing that happened to everybody had some effect on all the rest of the universe" (Duane 313). What she realizes is that this is exactly what transpired in her mission to rescue Darryl. A mutual healing took place precisely because Nita recognized the similarities between Darryl's experiences and hers, and therefore approached him with *empathic*—rather than preconceived, alienating—assumptions with regard to his condition. May, writing from a psychotherapeutic perspective,

argues that “[i]n genuine encounter both persons [meaning patient and therapist] are changed, however minutely. C.G. Jung has pointed out rightly that in effective therapy a change occurs in *both* the therapist and the patient; unless the therapist is open to change the patient will not be either” (122) (emphasis included).⁵ The success of Nita’s interaction with Darryl rests upon her awareness of the ways in which their respective maladies are related. Prolman asserts that Duane’s “incorporation of Darryl’s autism is seamless and drives the plot forward” (140), thereby implying the extent to which Darryl’s autism is connected to Nita’s grief and its role in the story (as well as the effect that Darryl’s autism has upon Kit, which in turn hints at the *wider* implications of autism). It is in this manner that Modern society must resolve to approach the autism phenomenon, acknowledging the connections between the latter and its collective grief in order to facilitate a sympathetic and mutually beneficial relationship.

A Wizard Alone, while serving as a helpful and interesting text, features two problematic conceptions of the autistic condition, which ironically represent two polar extremes. First, the notion of the *abdal* may tempt the reader to adopt a romanticized view of autism. Indeed, it should surprise no one if there were people in some subcultures within Western society who might attempt to conceive of autistic children as somehow *otherworldly* or quasi-mystical. In fact, in speaking of autistic children within the context of New Age ideology, Sunfell claims that “[t]hey [. . .] have a way of communing with [other children] that is almost supernatural to

outsiders” (par. 5). Here, then, is a concrete example of the sort of discomfiting (and almost totemic) view of autism that one sees portrayed in A Wizard Alone. Furthermore, I need to mention that Duane’s series does feature occult and New Age concepts, which Sardello identifies as symptomatic of our time, asserting that the practices associated therewith often seem to provide a favorable alternative to the emptiness of Modern life but in reality accomplish more harm than good (if they accomplish *any* good). For example, he states that “[g]oing inward by using [. . .] popular trance techniques can become a form of running away” and that “[t]he wish for powers beyond the range of ordinary consciousness can be no more than a distraction from the task of confronting fear [or, I would add, of dealing constructively with any Modern dilemma]” (Sardello 157-158).⁶ In many ways, then, the New Age/occult movements of the past century bear resemblance, within the context of the linear-perspective-based worldview, to the character of Romanticism, which held that one must locate truth, meaning, and potentiality by turning inward, away from the visible world and from human society, to one’s supposed *inner self*. The dangers of viewing autism within the context of New Age mysticism and occultism are many (and, I would hope, *obvious*), and to expand upon them sufficiently would transcend both the scope and focus of this thesis. For the purpose of coherence, I will simply state that drawing upon such strange principles in one’s perception of autism resembles the Romantic error of capitulating to the shadow phenomena, rather than interacting therewith in a manner that is constructive and

beneficial to both the shadow and the ego.⁷ Many occurrences of autism involve precisely the problem of leading too *inward* an existence, thereby bearing resemblance to the inwardness of the Modern spectator self behind the linear perspective window; Romanticism and the New Age movement are guilty of the very same error (namely, the excessive interiority of existence), but focus upon the other side of the window, as it were (where the marginalized qualities may be found). For this reason, it may be argued that to situate the conditions of autism within this sort of paradigm is qualitatively similar to restricting the condition to the medical/diagnostic paradigm. Such an action maintains the dichotomies and errors that result from the advent of linear perspective vision (body/spirit dualism, inward vs. outward existence, etc), thereby *furthering* the comprehensive cultural condition of which autism is a part. Needless to say, one would be well advised to regard Duane's narrative presentation of autism with great caution.

As stated, A Wizard Alone is also errant—rather ironically—in its treatment of Darryl's autism as a mere anomaly that may be eradicated. Once Darryl's Ordeal is complete, he is able not only to leave the interior universe he has created for himself, rejoining the communal world of everyday life, but he is also able to “ditch[.]” the autism itself (Duane 304). Having been cast out by Darryl himself, the autism is left behind, assuming the form of “a clown r[i]d[ing] a tiny bicycle around and around, [. . .] [having] eyes [that] [are] empty [. . .] [and appearing to be] a machine, just a fragment of personality without the soul that had once animated it”

(Duane 307). Hopefully, the reader will be quick to perceive the errors in this characterization of autism. First, as is the case with the medical/diagnostic paradigm, the approach upon which this narrative relies does not recognize the fact that autism is not something that can simply be eradicated; moreover, like the medical/diagnostic paradigm, the latter fashion in which the narrative views autism precludes the opportunity to engage meaningfully with the phenomenon as a cultural shadow. To approach the shadows in such a manner is not only destructive, but also unrealistic. The shadows and symptoms of Western society are both equally part of the Modern worldview, which cannot easily be discarded. To attempt to do so would be to submit ourselves to “denial” (Romanyshyn 202). Secondly, this narrative’s presentation of autism is almost, in a sense, *exploitative*. His powers as an abdal are highly valuable to the wizard community, and Kit reminds him that “[t]here’s strength in numbers” in order to persuade him to join him and Nita in “the real world” (Duane 302). Combined with the treatment of the autistic disorder as a mere obstruction to be set aside, this seems to suggest that the proper response to autism is to persuade these children to set aside anything that prevents them from being *one of us* in order to extract the benefits of their gifts for our own sakes. As a shadow, autism should neither be denied nor excessively embraced (especially for selfish reasons). Rather, it must be recognized as both an expression of Modern society’s collective condition and, simultaneously, as an opportunity for what Romanyshyn calls “re-entry” (199)—in other words, the possibility of regaining a sense of the meaningful nature of the

world and of experience. This possibility depends upon our willingness to learn from and help autistic people as well—although without the pretense that their condition can simply be *cured*. As is the case with the Modern worldview in general, any profitable engagement with autism must seek to effect positive change from within the condition itself.

One may only conjecture as to why Duane makes the errors she makes in A Wizard Alone. It is possible, however, that her errors stem, in part, from an approach to autism resembling that of which Frith accuses the Snow White/Sleeping Beauty myth (recall chapter 2)—namely, of using the art of storytelling to present a naively optimistic view of the *curability* of autism. This error would apply to Duane's depiction of the more severe symptoms of autism as phenomena which can simply be *set aside*; in this particular instance, she fails to recognize these symptoms (in Darryl's case, autistic inwardness and isolation) as hyperbolic expressions of a wider cultural condition, and therefore concocts a scenario in which the aspects of autism that remind us of this wider condition may be easily dispensed with and, by extension, ignored. As for the implicit fetishization of the autistic condition, I believe that this stems from a *Romantic* inclination, which, as mentioned in the previous chapter, accepts the separation of the individual human being from the wider world and from others and therefore locates profound creative and spiritual potentialities within the individual person. In light of this tendency on the part of some within Modern culture, the mysterious, inward existences of many autistic individuals lend

themselves easily to the type of Romanticizing described in preceding paragraphs. While these two motivations appear to be quite different, they both convey a naïve and uncritical sense of optimism. The first suggests that the *problems* inherent within autism may be eradicated quickly and with relative ease, while the second resembles Romanticism, the optimism of which lies in its deification (for lack of a better word) of human imagination and feeling.

If it is possible to find genuine, healthy, and deep meaning in the seemingly linear-perspective-driven traits of autism, then certainly it may be discovered through the curious eyes of young children; it is for this reason that I turn to Ian's Walk, a picture book by Laurie Lears. In the first-person, present-tense narrative account of a young girl named Julie, the reader is given a portrayal of the life of an autistic child through the eyes of a sibling. Julie's younger brother, Ian, has autism. He manifests the symptoms thereof in his lack of speech and in his unusual sensory perceptions, each of which is clearly autistic in nature. For example, he appears almost unaware of "a fire truck rush[ing] by with its siren wailing and horn blaring [. . .] [b]ut [. . .] tilts his head sideways and seems to be listening to something [Julie] cannot hear" (Lears 6). Similarly, he is averse to the aroma of "sweet-smelling lilacs" but relishes the activity of smelling a brick wall (Lears 8). These are, of course, quite thoughtful depictions of the surface peculiarities that can appear within the autism spectrum. Perhaps because of the simplicity of Lears' portrayal of autism, Howell argues that the book "does not give enough specific information to be truly useful" (176). It is by

no means surprising that one might attempt to evaluate a story about autism in this fashion, given the fact that our conception of the condition is so inextricably bound to the medical/diagnostic paradigm. This manner of criticism is unhelpful, though, because it is based upon strictly utilitarian principles. It is true enough that Lears does not provide a wealth of particular information about the condition of autism, but one must remain open to the possibility that this is not her intention. Ian's Walk is not a medical or psychiatric manual, nor is it properly categorized as a handbook listing criteria for autism. Rather, it is an illustrated narrative for young children intended for the purpose of illuminating the *experience* of families impacted by autism as well as the possibility of understanding and learning from the ways in which autistic children are different. By the end of the story, Julie has decided to make an effort to understand Ian's experiences, and therefore patiently and happily allows him to engage in his seemingly odd behaviors (sniffing bricks, for example). In some cases, she even participates with him in his activities. In the case of the fire truck, "[w]hen Ian [. . .] seems to be listening to something [she and Tara, her older sister] cannot hear, [they] wait patiently, and [Julie] tr[ies] to listen, too" (Lears 26). Lears' book portrays autism through the frustrated perspective of siblings and the childlike openness to different ways of viewing the world, respectively.

The single component of Lears' story that perhaps deserves the closest attention is the narrative's turning point. After Julie, Tara, and Ian arrive at the park,

Julie loses track of Ian. Ian is lost, and Julie must find him. After some searching, she adopts the following strategy:

“[. . .] I squeeze my eyes shut and try to think like Ian.

Ian likes the balloon stand where the big machine hisses and stretches balloons into colorful, bobbing shapes.

He likes the water fountain where he can put his face up close and watch the stream of water gush past his eyes.

Suddenly the old bell in the center of the park begins to ring. *Bong, bong, bong!* And then I remember. . . Ian loves the bell best of all.”

(Lears 19) (emphases included)

Sure enough, she finds her brother ringing the aforementioned bell, much to her relief (Lears 20-21). The key mark of significance in this situation is that Ian is lost, and Julie finds him not by relying upon her *own* capabilities, but precisely by making an effort to understand *his* experience. She is able to place herself *in his shoes*, so to speak, in order to imagine where he might go after running away. As Mandel succinctly states, “her close observations of her brother serve her well when Ian wanders away” (1331). She understands Ian’s unusual preferences and, aware of his enjoyment of the bell, she is able to locate him once she hears the bell ringing. Incidentally, this is the catalyst for her decision to “walk home the way [Ian] like[s]” (Lears 24), thereby opening herself up to the appreciation of the ways in which his sensory experiences are different from those of most people.

As this book is intended for younger children, one may assume Lears' message to be very simple and unambiguous: it is well that we understand others and appreciate the ways in which they are different from us. However, a more attentive and focused reading of the text will reveal a more subtly conveyed moral/message. The fact that Julie is able to locate Ian precisely by bringing his experiences to mind suggests an alternative means of approaching not only *personal* relationships with autistic children, but also *professional* relationships. Writing in the mid-1990's, a few years before the publication of Ian's Walk, Grandin states that "[p]rofessionals in the field of educating autistic children have largely ignored sensory problems and favored behavioral therapy" (66). Behavioral therapy is a decidedly mechanistic procedure that focuses upon gradually conditioning a child to behave in a certain way in the same manner in which one might slowly repair one's computer or car so that it functions properly. Recalling his time performing behavioral therapy with autistic individuals, Robbins states when, for example, he was to teach a patient how to brush his teeth, the activity would be fragmented into separate goals (Personal Interview, 27 Sept. 2008). The goal of the first week of therapy might require the patient to lift his elbow, followed by any number of such goals that have him, with each step, bring the toothbrush closer to his mouth, until at last he is able to brush his teeth. Robbins expresses the following conviction with regard to this methodology: "What that completely misses [. . .] is that our behaviors are not mechanical in nature. They are shot through with intentionality" (Personal Interview, 27 Sept. 2008). To rephrase

this statement in practical terms, people do not necessarily give conscious attention to the mechanics of their actions, but rather remain mindful of the *motivation* for the said actions; in the case of brushing one's teeth, the motivation would be the cleansing/freshening of one's mouth. In the case of the autistic patient learning to brush his/her teeth, one would be less well advised to focus upon habituation toward the *mechanics* of the action than to inquire: *Why is it that he does not want to brush his teeth? Is the feeling of toothbrushes against his teeth painful to him?* Indeed, such a difficulty as this would not be at all uncommon within the context of the condition of autism. Like Grandin and Robbins, Notbohm also laments the propensity toward neglect of autistic sensory experience, stating the latter to be "the *first* outpost of autism we should address" (Ten Things Every Child 8) (emphasis included). I must concede that my argument for attention toward sensory experience bears, on the surface, seemingly little similarity to Julie's act of trying, momentarily, to *think* like her brother. My intention is to demonstrate the vital importance of understanding an autistic person's *experience* for anyone who wishes to help them and to interact with them in a beneficial manner. If professionals and parents attempt to establish the foundation of such an endeavor upon behavioral paradigms, which depend upon the mechanistic view of the human body advanced by the linear-perspective-based worldview, then their efforts are bound to bear little fruit. Ian's Walk communicates to young children—and, for all intents and purposes, to parents, teachers, and professionals as well—the importance of attempting to appreciate and

understand the ways in which their autistic peers experience the world around them, rather than to attempt to rely upon misconceptions or preconceived paradigms (in the case of adult professionals) that they might possess.

As a children's book, Ian's Walk attributes careful and self-aware attention to the sensory particularities of autism. In order to habituate the reader to Ian's disorder, Lears first presents these particularities as rather unusual and even odd. It is after Julie almost loses him that she comes to better appreciate him and the autistic traits that form part of his unique personality. Again, Lear draws the attention of her readers (or listeners, in the case of the younger children) to the value of appreciating the differences of others—specifically, in this case, of those that accompany autism. It would not be fair to make any assumptions regarding Lears' knowledge of linear perspective vision and its effects upon Modern consciousness throughout history; given that her narrative is focused upon an elementary school audience, the more prudent assumption is that she intends to offer a general presentation of different ways of understanding the world to curious young minds (as children are naturally curious). However, the knowledge of the traits of autism that Lears depicts, when accompanied by an understanding of the connections between autism and linear perspective vision (as well as the Modern worldview influenced thereby), may aid the more scholarly reader in determining the deeper meaning of these traits. For this reason, the said traits deserve to be explored a bit.

While autistic behavior does caricature the behavior and mentality of the Modern individual, it must be kept in mind that autism, as a carrier of shadow qualities, will often contain opportunities for approaching sensory phenomena in a different fashion. Ian's apparent appreciation of some strange olfactory quality in the bricks brings to mind an issue that Sardello raises in discussing the effects of fear upon Modern sensory qualities; he asserts that "if we slow down a bit and give close attention to our immediate surroundings, something of [. . .] [the meaningful and engaging] quality [within the world] can be brought back to life[,]" and identifies as an example "[t]he beautiful texture of a *brick wall*" (42-43) (emphases added). It is highly probable that an autistic person's fragmented sensory perceptions, which isolate given phenomena from their contexts, lie at the root of his/her ability to perceive in this fashion. As I have stated, the worldview brought about by linear perspective vision resulted in the mechanization of nature and of experience; what happens as a result of this, inevitably, is that every phenomenon is considered knowable in terms of how its component parts fit together. Each part is essentially worthless in and of itself, proving valuable only in connection with all of the other parts. The whole, meanwhile, is viewed through a purely *functional* lens—namely, the concern is with how well and how efficiently it functions, which in turn depends upon whether or not the component, mechanistic parts are operating efficiently in their mechanistic pseudo-relationship. As we do not *experience* ourselves, the world, or others in this fashion, the prevalence of such an ideology has the effect of severing

us from meaningful experience and leaving us isolated and in existential crisis (as I argued in depth in chapters 1 and 3). In our Modern era, we and everything around us have become, in a sense, dissected and fragmented. While the autistic individual's consciousness is characterized by more extreme fragmentation, there is a truly fascinating trait inherent within their experience of fragmentation. It is certainly true that autistic individuals often are unable to perceive a single phenomenon as part of a larger context; however, their sense of the *fragment* is imbued with more meaning and significance than that of most people. For them, unlike for neuro-typical people, fragments never "lose their meanings *as fragments*" (Frith 112) (emphasis added). It is because of this attention to detail that autistic people are more attuned to "the form rather than the content" of what they perceive (Robbins, Personal Interview, 8 Oct. 2007). This type of ability—namely, the careful and focused attention to subtle sensory details that can potentially open one up to previously un-attended-to aspects of sensory phenomena—is likely what motivated and enabled the artistic talent of Vincent van Gogh, who is said to have been on the autism spectrum (Notbohm, Ten Things Every Child xxxi). As Sardello states: "[average people] may look at a field of sunflowers and admire its beauty, but van Gogh saw such an intensity of life in the vibrant yellow against the blue of the sky, swirling into each other, creating each other, that to make an image of what he saw all but killed him" (225).⁸ Without a doubt, this also relates to the *hyper-sensory* aspects of autism. If society views the autism phenomenon (which, it must be remembered, is very diverse and consists of

symptoms that will differ from person to person) as a shadow and recognizes its potential for the re-emergence of abandoned qualities into the Modern worldview, then perhaps the incorporation of abandoned sensory qualities into the Modern mode of perception may be effected precisely from within what is arguably its most accurate caricature. With this in mind, I proceed to the final text.

Colder Than Ice, a chapter book by David Patneade, is a very fitting illustration of the potentiality of positive and needed change to be effected from within the condition of autism. Patneade's "story is simple, straightforward, and effective, and has characters who are true to life" (Bilton 175). The fact that a children's book review has deemed the novel as such is important, given my initial argument for the value of children's literature in relation to topics such as autism. To rephrase Bilton's argument, Colder Than Ice is accessible, realistic, and straightforward in its concerns—as is appropriate, given the age and grade level of the target audience. The simplicity of such a story is ideal for the exploration of autism and of how one should engage therewith.

Patneade portrays autism in the form of Mark Silverthorn, a 12-year-old boy with Asperger's syndrome. Mark is a friendly child who is able and willing to interact with his peers, even though his methods of interaction are highly unusual. Josh Showalter, the book's main character, makes mention of "the way he talks, like a short grownup" (Patneade 65). This is a common trait in children with Asperger's syndrome, who often speak in a manner that is reasonably sophisticated for their

young age. Additionally, as is often the case with children on the autism spectrum, he lacks proficiency in athletics. As Patneude states, “[h]e could run, but he looked kind of uncoordinated” (29). This, of course, demonstrates the sensory-motor problems inherent within the autism spectrum. The hyper-acute sensory perceptions of autism are also quite apparent in Mark’s inability to tolerate the feeling of *snow* on his skin, which prompts him to don a fishing hat whenever snow is a possibility. In spite of all of this, his relatively social behavior and verbal fluency separate him from the image of autism held by the average person, thereby demonstrating the diversity of the spectrum. On the whole, then, Mark is an appropriate and important representation of autism within the field of children’s literature.

If one thinks of autism in terms of the Modern spectator of the linear perspective worldview, then the significance of Mark’s character is not difficult to perceive. As mentioned, Mark is not heavily involved in sports. While Josh and others are playing soccer during recess, Mark provides commentary on the game, very much in the manner of a professional sports announcer. He will not engage in the *experience* of playing soccer, but he will analyze it from a distance. This should remind the reader of Hamlet, who likewise serves as a detached commentator of the theatrical performance at Elsinore. Granted, Hamlet’s situation is somewhat different from Mark’s. A theatrical performance is almost an object of spectatorship by nature; an audience member normally does not engage himself with the action of a play as a matter of course. It may be argued, though, that Hamlet’s spectatorship resides in his

inability to immerse himself in the drama of the performance; instead, he provides an objective and descriptive commentary related to the action of the play. Bearing in mind that Hamlet's story is located very early in the history of linear perspective vision, one must remember that the development of the worldview influenced thereby was gradual. Early spectatorship was confined primarily to specimens being observed for the purpose of artistic representation (i.e. painting models), experimentation, and other such purposes. As we have seen, this spectator/spectacle relationship gradually came, in a certain sense, to characterize Modern man's experience of the world in the midst of which he lives (consider the distantness and apathy of Edward Norton's character in Fight Club). The reader perceives a fitting symbol of this in Josh's detached spectatorship with regard to soccer, which is very much meant to be a communal, embodied experience. In addition to this, and perhaps more importantly, Mark is highly skilled at photography. He carries a camera with him everywhere and takes pictures of people and things around him as often as he is able. According to Romanyshyn, "[t]he camera is the technological incarnation of the linear perspective eye" (57). In other words, more than any other Modern technological instrument, the camera renders its user "a spectator observing a world which has become a spectacle, an object of vision" (Romanyshyn 58). As one might expect, Mark often takes photos of the events on which he provides commentary. In this sense, he views and engages with the world through what may quite literally be

termed a limiting lens. In his spectatorship and in his fascination with the camera, Mark exhibits the coinciding traits of autism and linear perspective vision.

Colder Than Ice alludes to the diversity within autism as well as to the manner in which the condition may manifest traits of the Modern worldview; however, the book also and at the same time achieves a more important end. Mark's odd behavior and perceptions of the world are imbued with a deeper meaning throughout the book. Especially relevant in terms of the linear perspective worldview is his act of alerting Josh to an accumulation of dog excrement while walking to school; more particularly, the relevance resides in the following comment upon this action: "Mark seemed to have a hard time looking at a person's face, but sometimes he saw things nobody else noticed" (Patneau 47). What this suggests is that autism, as a shadow phenomenon, involves openness to aspects of experience to which the generality of Western culture has been rendered inattentive in compensation for a deficit in attention to other aspects, ones of which most people in society are still aware (and if unaware, not to so great an extent as autistic individuals). This, in turn, provides a basis for the propensity of autism to serve as a "path[] of return" (Romanyshyn 199)—that is to say, an opportunity to regain some of the sensibilities that have been lost in the wake of linear perspective vision—for the Modern world.

The potential within autism is aptly demonstrated in a number of instances in Patneau's book, and I will focus upon two such instances. First, though, I must establish an important principle: in spite of the vast attention I have given to the

negative impact of linear perspective upon the world, there are definite positive potentialities within this model and the resulting worldview (insofar as ambition and innovation are concerned). Let us take, as an example, Modern *technology*, which is perhaps the epitome of the Modern worldview and arguably the most prominent development to have taken place as a result of linear perspective vision. Romanyshyn suggests the possibility of technology constituting a *path of return* by referring to it as the potentiality of "that power to realize [. . .] the imaginative depths of the world [. . . .][,] [even though] in large measure technology has eclipsed the life of the imagination" (6).⁹ One might easily think of the strong imaginative quality of the motion picture industry, special effects, and famous theme park attractions, the design of which would hardly have been possible without linear perspective vision (as many models of technological design rely upon the linear perspective technique). As to why the advent of linear perspective vision occasioned the loss (or at least the diminished experience of) the imaginative depths of the world and of human experience, one may perhaps only speculate. Most likely, though, this was due to the novelty of the vision itself, as well as to the fact that it involved increased disengagement with the world and with sensory experience (in which mankind had once been profoundly immersed). In any case, if society is to regain the sensibilities it has lost, then the necessary change must be effected from *within* the reality of the Modern worldview. An attempt to capitulate to the shadow phenomena (like Melville's Ishmael and the Romantics) or to overthrow the dominating paradigms of

society (like Tyler/the narrator in Fight Club) is unrealistic, and ultimately will bring about more harm than good. Romanyshyn alludes indirectly to such an approach in describing “a nostalgic longing for a pre-technological edenic world[,]” in which case “too much a passion to return [. . .] may [lead us to] be destroyed” (202). On the other hand, if we continue to unreflectively embrace the Modern, technological, linear perspective paradigm at the expense of marginalized qualities, maintaining an “attitude [. . .] rooted in a false optimism concerning technology and in an uncritical acceptance of its style and its claims[,]” then we risk deepening our collective cultural loss (Romanyshyn 202). As is the case autism and other shadow phenomena, opportunities for growth and improvement exist within linear perspective vision, and these should be found and nurtured.

As part of the history of the linear perspective worldview, autism is imbued with potential; Mark, as I mentioned, demonstrates this potential in a number of important ways, two of which I will now discuss. Firstly, although Mark is certainly representative of the spectator self with his camera, he utilizes this position for creative and constructive ends. Using editing software on his computer, he combines his photographs with unusual sights such as jungle animals, the grim reaper, and past presidents of the United States. He shows his work to Josh and Skye—the latter being a twelve-year-old girl who, like Josh and Mark, is new to the town in which the three currently live—when they visit his house, and they are both amazed and excited by what they see. Mark describes what he does as “[c]reating” using “[c]omputer

magic,” and even refers to photographic pictures as “*poems* without words” (Patneau 104-105) (emphasis added). Obviously, this child possesses an imagination. Granted, this imagination provides the impression of being purely *visual*, without any reference to the other senses; nevertheless, Mark’s attention to visual detail (exercised through the skill of photography) enables him to put into practice an appreciation for creativity that others perhaps may not possess. Furthermore, he demonstrates the imaginative capacities of technology (as alluded to previously) in a concrete fashion. Secondly, earlier in the narrative Mark uses his capacity for extraordinary visual attention (which, as suggested in relation to the linear perspective paradigm, requires a degree of *distance* from what one observes) in order to save a life. Walking to school, Mark, Josh, and Skye witness a small boy fall upon the ice in the street while a car moves speedily in his direction; while Josh and Skye are momentarily paralyzed with fear (understandably), Mark, who “must have had a picture in his head of what was coming[,]” lunges into the street and rescues the boy, “half-carrying, half-sliding [him] toward the other side” (Patneau 82). Whereas the previous example illustrates the capacity for imaginative qualities within autism, this example constitutes an instance in which an autistic child exercises altruism. He not only recognizes another *as* other, but also risks himself for the sake of the other in question; moreover, he does so precisely by means of the visual thinking that is so often characteristic of autistic experience. By intimating that Mark was able to *picture* the oncoming collision *in his head* before anything happened,

Patneau de alludes to the remarkable visual abilities that many autistic individuals possess, which will shortly be examined more carefully. In both of the above instances, an exceptional capacity for creativity/imagination and interpersonal connection is evidenced from within the shadow of autism.

The potentialities inherent within Mark's condition surface together in one pivotal occurrence near the end of the narrative. Josh has gone with Corey, a popular seventh-grader—and also a bully—who pretends to befriend him in order to gain the favor of his father (the newly appointed head basketball coach at the local high school), to the local ice pond, as the first snowfall has come and Corey and his cronies want to test the surface in order to ascertain whether or not the ice is thick enough for skating. In order to accomplish this, Corey elects an overweight peer named Alex to skate onto the ice alone, thereby serving as a “guinea pig” (Patneau de 115). Upon reaching the center of the pond, Alex falls through the ice and nearly drowns. Corey and his friends abandon the scene hastily while Josh, Skye, and Mark remain behind to rescue Alex. The accomplishment of this task is, in large part, made possible by the skills that Mark possesses because of his condition. Even before Alex falls through the ice, he exercises his commentating skills from a safe distance, surprising everyone with the following commentary: “ALEX MOVES OUT TOWARD THE DANGEROUS PART OF THE ICE[] [. . .] COREY AND BUNK, TOO COWARDLY TO GO THEMSELVES, FORCE ALEX TO TEST THE ICE” (Patneau de 120) (all cap's included). Having distracted Corey, Mark then urges

Alex—speaking in the same detached, commentator-like manner—to attempt to escape (Patneau 121). After Alex falls through the ice (at which point Corey and his friends flee the scene), he puts his autistic traits more specifically into play. He initiates the rescue of Alex by “stud[ying] the water, the ice around it, twisting his hands and arms into different configurations as if designing a plan[,]” and then telling Alex to “tread [. . .] backwards” (Patneau 131) (all cap’s removed). This is a narrative treatment of the autistic capacity for visual thinking that expresses an intimate understanding of the way in which this particular autistic trait functions. Grandin, who possesses this autistic trait herself, describes it in this fashion: “When I do an equipment simulation in my imagination or work on an engineering problem, it is like seeing it on a videotape in my mind. I can view it from *any angle*, placing myself above or below the equipment and rotating it at the same time” (5) (emphases added). It is quite likely that Mark is exercising this same ability by pre-visualizing the specifics of extricating Alex from the ice pond and by mentally examining the activity from different angles, thereby ensuring the effectiveness of the rescue effort. These aspects of autism and the employment thereof in Patneau’s book demonstrate the positive, interpersonal, creative, and constructive possibilities that may emerge from within the linear-perspective-like traits of the autistic condition.

Before concluding, I must attend to the theme of coldness in this story, which culminates with the climax at the local pond—which, incidentally, is called “Poor Rooney’s Pond” (Patneau 74). Throughout the story, Josh both dreads and

hopefully anticipates the opportunity to skate with the seventh-graders on the ice. Concurrent with his anticipation is a sense of foreboding, influenced not least of all by the warnings Josh receives from Skye and Mark about Corey's true nature. Corey is, after all, a bully who feigns friendship in order to use Josh for his own purposes (as mentioned previously).¹⁰ Mark succinctly describes Corey and his friend, Bunk, as "colder than ice" (Patneau 100). In addition to this, Josh has a dream about "spaceships shaped and patterned like soccer balls"—based, of course, upon the fact that Corey and his friends play soccer—that emit "giant streams of frigid vapor [. . .], freezing the ground, [. . .] paralyzing everything that moved" (Patneau 95-96). That last participle is particularly important. When the young boy is about to be struck by the car, Josh and Skye both, as I mentioned, find themselves paralyzed with fear; Josh admits that he "froze" at that moment (Patneau 85). Frozenness, in this case, refers to a lack of agency and to a sense of powerlessness in the face of fear that prevents one from reaching out to others. May writes of the cultural manifestation of this type of paralysis in his description of Americans who experience utter powerlessness and personal "impotence" in the face of the threat of nuclear war (30) (which is very much connected to the Modern worldview and to the concerns that followed World War II and the resulting suspicion of Modernism). Coldness, moreover, has long been understood to represent fear, selfishness, the absence of agency, pride, unkindness, and other attributes that threaten human community and foster self-absorption.¹¹ Within the history of linear perspective vision, this concept

bears connection to the secluded spectator self who objectifies the world and others, analyzing them in an uninvolved and dispassionate manner from behind the linear perspective window. The reader will recall from the previous chapter the fate of Frankenstein's creature, who finds himself lost and alone in the cold, Arctic north. As Romanyshyn states, "he is [. . .] a haunted, hunted, isolated being whose end is [. . .] exile in the barren, frozen wastelands of the cold and dark Arctic night" (214). The reader will also recall that this creature is the obverse of Modern man's Faustian ambitions and an embodiment of its consequences (displaying, as he does, the symptoms of Modern man's shortcomings). The *cold*, rationalistic attitude of detachment that characterizes the spectator self behind the window, the strong isolative component of the linear-perspective-based conception of the self as encapsulated within a mechanical body, and the consequent seclusion from the imaginative and affective qualities of an embodied relationship with the world and with others has exacted a considerable toll on the consciousness of Modern man throughout the centuries (as exemplified, for example, in Hamlet's madness, Ishmael's isolation in Moby-Dick, and the narrator's emptiness and need for extreme sensory reawakening in Fight Club). In evaluating the significance of the theme of coldness in Colder Than Ice, one would do well to bear in mind the self-absorption and affective compromise that characterize much of the experience of Modern man.

Given that the ice and coldness of Poor Rooney's Pond may be viewed as analogous with the effects of the Modern worldview, the circumstances surrounding

Alex's rescue are important. Skye and Josh, for their part, overcome their paralysis and take action in order to save Alex's life. Essentially, they delve into the cold and the ice precisely in order to draw another out of it. At this point, it is too late to reverse what has happened; as mentioned, many warnings and intimations preceded this event, but passed largely unheeded. Now that the feared consequence has arrived (of someone's life being placed in danger), the only manner in which a positive change may be brought about is from within the dilemma itself. The characters, therefore, must delve into the cold and the ice in order to draw another out. Even more compelling and interesting, however, is the fact that Mark, the *autistic* child, serves as catalyst for the said agency by luring Corey and his friends away with his commentary. After they learn of his unwanted presence, Corey and his friends leave the ice pond behind and attempt to attack Mark (only to be eluded) (Patneau 121). Mark thus inspires Josh and Skye toward action, and arguably is the least afraid to take action himself, if his previous rescue of the young boy in the street is any indication. Additionally, one must remember his aversion to snow. After the rescue is accomplished, but while the four characters are still on the pond, "[s]now swirl[s] down around him[,] [. . .] [causing him to] ma[k]e a face at it" (Patneau 136). Not only has Mark put the traits of autism to use for altruistic purposes, he has also willingly exposed himself to the discomforting aspects of the condition—in this case, tactile hypersensitivity—in order to rescue another from danger. One might easily read this as a testament to the ability of autistic individuals to overcome the

difficulties of their condition, an ability to which Notbohm attests in describing the triumph that her son achieved over his tactile difficulties; according to Notbohm, her son “spent the early years of his life sporting only his birthday suit [. . .] [but] [b]y fifth grade [. . .] was backpacking the great outdoors with all kinds of slimy-crawly critters and substances without batting an eye” (Ten Things Every Child 13). In the climax at the pond, Patneau once again presents a scenario in which aspects of autism have a positive impact; in this very same scenario, he also suggests the ability of autistic children to overcome and/or cope with the unfavorable aspects of their condition. If one is able to read this narrative with a metaphorical sensibility and with the ability to think of it in light of the Modern worldview, he/she will be able to intuit a more nuanced way interacting with autism than the way that is typically employed by Modern society. Autism, as I have established, is part of the Modern worldview, which cannot be *unrealized*. As a part of the Modern worldview, then, autism cannot be unrealized either. In both cases, what is needed is the reintegration of lost qualities into our collective and individual identities without surrendering any genuinely positive aspects of the Modern worldview; in the case of autistic people, such reintegration, if approached with care, may serve to benefit them and society as a whole simultaneously. Considering the place of autism within Patneau’s narrative and the significance of its themes in relation to the Modern worldview and linear perspective vision, one might indeed concur with Peterson’s argument that Mark’s autism “gives more depth to this thought-provoking story” (497). In particular, the

story's overall context and presentation of autism bear relevance to the history of Modern man and to the possibility of a better understanding of and engagement with autism.

Returning to Duane's A Wizard Alone for a moment, I wish to express my conviction that the way in which Colder Than Ice deals with autism may be regarded as a response to the manner of approach found in the former novel. It may be argued that Duane's narrative treatment of autism and that of Patneade are founded upon the same general idea—namely, mindfulness of both the troubling and positive traits of autism and openness to the possibility of interacting with autistic children in a manner that fosters reciprocal learning and benefits. In a sense (though to a far lesser extent), the reciprocal benefits that transpired between Nita and Darryl in A Wizard Alone transpire between Mark and Alex in Colder Than Ice. In the same instance, while Mark puts his autistic traits to constructive use, Alex's life is saved and Mark successfully confronts the sensory difficulties of his condition. Additionally, Josh and Skye, while befriending Mark at the behest of their teacher (Patneade 70), are able to learn from and appreciate his altruism and his photographic creativity. Arguably, the same impulse driving Duane's approach to autism drives Patneade's approach. Simultaneously, however, Patneade manages to avoid the dangers to which Duane's text falls prey. Patneade's treatment of autism is arguably more realistic, sensitive, and sophisticated than that of Duane, whose seemingly Romantic inclinations in this matter lead her to at once to a disturbingly over-reverent attitude

toward certain aspects of autism and to a simplistic solution for the eradication of its more troubling aspects. Patneaude, by contrast, honestly presents the unusualness of Mark's condition without suggesting, at any point, a simple *fix*; to speak in colloquial terms, at no point does Patneaude intimate that Mark's autism can be *gotten rid of*. As is apparent in the climactic scene at the ice pond, Mark is able to come to terms with the challenges of autism; however, he does not simply *leave them behind*, as Darryl did. Additionally, he presents the positive aspects of and potentialities within the autism spectrum (Mark's visual capabilities, for instance) without conveying them in a quasi-mystical and overly Romanticized fashion. In Patneaude's book, Mark is simply a child whose talents and capacities are different from those of his peers. Nevertheless, his autistic traits are portrayed in a fairly positive light, and ultimately they work toward the achievement of a noteworthy goal. In short, Colder Than Ice approaches autism in a manner similar to that of A Wizard Alone, but does so in a more careful and effective fashion.

In conclusion, I offer brief illumination of Mark's interpersonal abilities. An individual without a robust appreciation for the wideness of the autistic spectrum and whose knowledge thereof is characterized by stereotypical notions will find himself/herself surprised by this. It is indeed true that many autistic children seem encapsulated within their own privatized existences (although it must be remembered that this stems not from anti-social inclinations, but rather from the inability to understand others in the manner necessary for reciprocal interaction). As the

spectrum is considerably vast, though, this is by no means characteristic of the generality of autism. Parents of an autistic child with whom I have spoken personally—who, for the sake of privacy, will remain nameless—speak with great respect of their son's kindness to others. The connection between such interpersonal sensitivity and autism is perhaps unclear, but possibilities may be gathered from research into the spectrum. Autism often involves a deficit in concern for social customs and norms; for that reason, the actions of an autistic person may proceed uninhibited by the self-consciousness that plagues most individuals. Additionally, the fact that many autistic individuals are lacking in strong, sentimentalized emotions, but rather view life and the world in a practical fashion, may explain Mark's propensity toward risking himself without thought in order to help others. After all, the encumbrance of the emotion of fear does not present itself as an obstacle to him, and the simple and practical sensibility that allows one to recognize and respond to a fellow human being in need prompts him to action without the interference of terror-inspired paralysis. He is cognizant of the practicality of saving another, likely because of the simple intuition of the value of human lives. Moreover, Mark's altruism conveys an important aspect of his character: the ability to recognize another *as* other. This, in turn, demonstrates the wide variety within the autism spectrum by illustrating this very capacity within a child on the autism spectrum (as mentioned, autism very often features deficiency in that area). There are features of autism that may prove beneficial within the context of Modern culture's interaction therewith;

indeed, some of those features are related to interpersonal connection. In Colder Than Ice, David Patneaude cleverly explores these features in the character of Mark Silverthorn.

NOTES

¹ The reader will recall from chapter 3 the predominantly *masculine* character of the autism phenomenon.

² In their published study of the hysteria phenomenon, Breuer and Freud argue as follows: “We should like to balance the familiar thesis that hypnosis is an artificial hysteria by another—the basis and *sine qua non* of hysteria is the existence of hypnoid states [. . .], [which] share with one another [. . .] one common feature: the ideas which emerge in them are very intense but are cut off from associative communication with the rest of the content of consciousness” (12) (emphases included). Stated in terms of the history of linear perspective vision, the symptoms that emerge within hysteria are very much confined to the space *behind the window*; they announce themselves in the world and, arguably, are attempting to emerge into everyday consciousness, but they are nonetheless still confined from everyday life.

³ Romanyshyn cites, as an example, a hysteric patient who thought she was pregnant and began to develop the symptoms of pregnancy (168); later, he mentions loss of voice, which is a physical reality, even if there is no physical explanation in the case of the hysteric.

⁴ On a metaphorical level, one might think of Nita’s mother as embodying a role similar to that of Hamlet’s father, that of a representative of the pre-Modern worldview usurped by linear perspective vision.

⁵ Again, I would caution against reading Jung too enthusiastically, given the problematic aspects of his theories. Nevertheless, the notion of mutual benefit in the interaction between patient and therapist is another mark of wisdom on Jung's part that has—via my reading of May—inspired my conception of how autism should be dealt with.

⁶ Interestingly, one of the support groups attended by the narrator of Fight Club involves engagement in New Age spirituality. Ultimately, such things are, at best, momentary distractions.

⁷ See section 2 of the previous chapter for the definition of *ego*.

⁸ Other unusually talented people whose abilities were enabled by this type of sharp focus were Goethe, Einstein, and Mozart (the latter two of whom were also supposed to have been on the autism spectrum).

⁹ One would do well, in light of Romanyshyn and Patneade, to be mindful of the fact that autistic children often have an affinity for technology.

¹⁰ Incidentally, Josh's fears are also driven by the story of a young boy named Rooney, who, many years earlier, fell through the ice and drowned in the pond while his friends looked on helplessly (Patneade 102).

¹¹ By this I am not strictly referring to ego-aggrandizement—although that is a component of self-absorption and one way in which it can become manifest—but to any instance in which the *self* becomes one's primary focus. In instances of extreme fear, one becomes focused upon his/her feelings of nervousness and/or powerlessness,

and therefore is unable to venture beyond himself/herself in order to reach out to others in a manner that is meaningful, beneficial, and/or benevolent.

Chapter Five: A Brief Conclusion

Having reached the end of my study, I wish to reflect thereupon in light of its relevance to the reader and to society. The enigma of autism—and, more importantly, the historically recent occurrence of the so-called *autism epidemic*—has captivated and frustrated many in Western society for years. Naturally, people continue to seek explanations for the condition itself and for widespread cases thereof in recent years. In accordance with the mentality of our Modern era, which looks primarily to technical, straightforward, medical/diagnostic answers in matters such as this, many in our society attribute the *autism epidemic* to the use of infant vaccines containing mercury. I must admit that I am not well enough informed of the ways in which vaccine contents interact with human biology to definitively confirm or deny this claim; however, I do feel that the ascription of the cause of autism to vaccines is probably based more upon paranoia and the desire for *easy answers* than upon factual evidence. A number of years ago, the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine was a suspected cause of autism in young children. However, Daniel A. Salmon, Ph.D., M.P.H., a professional at the Institute for Vaccine Safety at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, states that “later studies confirmed that the MMR is not linked to autism” and that “the Institute of Medicine and the American Academy of Pediatrics have concluded that the MMR vaccine doesn’t cause autism” (par. 5) (bold removed). This is only one instance in which our culture’s over-

reliance upon the Modern diagnostic paradigm has dominated people's view of the autism phenomenon.

My intention, in writing this thesis, was to provide a different lens through which to understand the phenomenon of autism and its place not only in contemporary society, but also within the wider context of Modern history. I believe that doctors, psychologists, teachers, parents, and many others can benefit from a more nuanced approach to the condition, which theorists like van den Berg and Romanyshyn make possible by their work in the field of metabletics. My sweeping analysis of different types of fiction throughout history was meant to convey the complexity of the autism phenomenon and, moreover, of the cultural context to which it belongs. In chapter 2, my goal was to prepare the reader for my metabletics of autism by providing an understanding of the contrasts between the pre-Modern worldview and the Modern worldview, as well as to examine the implications of Modern readings of autism in traditional fairy tales. In the third chapter, I strove to use the analysis of important narrative works in order to offer the reader insight into the history of linear perspective vision, the evolution of the resulting worldview (the implications of which are visible to this day), and the ways in which autism is connected thereto. Finally, in the fourth chapter I wanted to offer analyses that, in union with those of the preceding chapter, would inspire a more sensitive, nuanced, and thoughtful understanding of and response to autism. I hope that we, as a society, may learn to see ourselves in autistic people, recognize our collective condition in

their symptoms, and come to an understanding of how we can help and learn from them at the same time. I am not, of course, suggesting that the medical/diagnostic model should be dispensed with—far from it. But I do believe that we should attempt to broaden our understanding of autism as a cultural phenomenon. In a very real sense, it is part of a *story*. More specifically, it is part and reflection of the story of the Modern era, which, in spite of its many achievements and positive aspects, includes a great deal of isolation, anxiety, sensory/emotional poverty (which occasions, as a response, extreme sensory/emotional experience in order to attempt to compensate and/or reawaken compromised sensory capacities), and the quantification and mechanization of many aspects of human life, the world, and experience. In autism, one often sees this condition represented in an extreme, exaggerated fashion. At the same time, as my study has suggested, the autism phenomenon features marginalized qualities and, in the wideness and diversity of the spectrum, challenges the linear perspective paradigm upon which Modern thinking too often relies. In brief, autism is a much more meaningful phenomenon than many people realize.

It may be helpful to summarize the most essential connections between autism and linear perspective vision, which provided the central impetus for my various analyses. Thematically, autism and the linear perspective vision of the Modern era are linked by the feature of the *spectator self*, secluded, disengaged, and separated from the outer world as if concealed behind a window (and, as a result, relating to the objects of its vision with what appears to be stark objectivity). Literal-mindedness

and a lack of appreciation for metaphorical approaches to reality proceed from this spectatorship, and are therefore present in both the linear perspective self and autism. In both cases (namely, that of the spectator self and that of autism), the relationship between the individual, other human beings, and the world weakens. Simultaneously, a number of other effects arise, including the following: depression, disengagement, listlessness, emotional poverty, lack of a proper sense of self and other, and fragmentation of consciousness. In the severely autistic person, one sees a reflection of the consequences of this problem in Modern man. However, beneath the surface of this shadow side of Modern man's Faustian ambitions is the symptomatic reemergence of qualities that have been repressed for centuries beneath the linear perspective paradigm. The tension between these qualities, struggling to reemerge, and the manifestation of strong linear-perspective-based traits may be exactly what lies behind the difficulties experienced by autistic individuals across the spectrum. Because the context within which we understand and approach autism is inspired by linear perspective vision, we are usually prevented from the sort of deep, meaningful engagement that would allow our society to reincorporate lost qualities and to interact with autistic people in a manner that possesses the potential for mutual benefits. The most effective way in which we may interact with the phenomenon of autism is neither the coldly objective and rationalistic stance of the Modern medical/diagnostic paradigm nor the naïve, quasi-mystical optimism of society's more Romantic tendencies; rather, the optimum method of operation includes an effort to better

understand autism and those who suffer from the condition, a realistic evaluation of autistic traits, a deep understanding of how the autism mirrors our own condition, openness to the positive aspects of autism, and openness to the possibility of being helped by autistic individuals in addition to by understanding them better. Most of all, we should always bear in mind the fact that autism is not an isolated condition, but rather part and parcel of a history—a story—that includes all of Western culture of the Modern era.

Finally, I would like once more to emphasize the importance of literary/narrative analysis in this examination of autism. As I mentioned in the first chapter, the narrative generally gives expression to the psychological depths of the wider culture and the human experience while also providing meaning to our individual and collective experiences. Unfortunately, it seems that one of the effects of linear perspective consciousness is that the humanities have been largely marginalized in favor of more *practical* pursuits—in other words, pursuits and areas of study that lend themselves more comfortably to quantification, measurement, etc. I sincerely believe that by studying the narrative works of our Modern era, those who experience the effects of autism in their lives may derive a sense of not being alone and of being a part of a much wider and more significant phenomenon than they might have supposed. In a sense, one might say that my thesis is geared both toward a deeper understanding of autism and toward a defense of the relevance of the humanities in our Modern culture.

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