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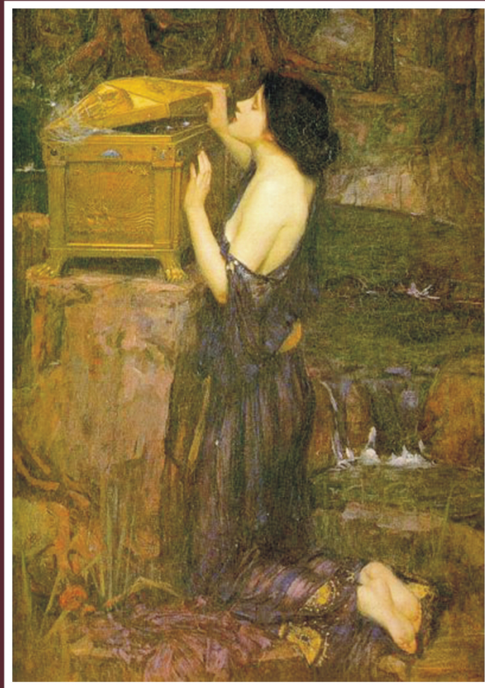

Angelika Reichmann

DESIRE – NARRATIVE – IDENTITY

Dostoevsky's *Devils* in English Modernism

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Sorozatszerkesztő:

Prof. Dr. Mózes Mihály

A 2012-ben megjelent kötetek:

Balásné Szalai Edit: A tárgyas szószerkezetek a magyar és a mordvin nyelvben
(25. kötet)

Németh István: Az osztrák út. Ausztria a 20. században
(26. kötet)

Ian Roberts: Összehasonlító mondattan. Fordította: Dalmi Gréte, Szalontai Ádám
(27. kötet)

Angelika Reichmann

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Dostoevsky's *Devils* in English Modernism

Líceum Kiadó
Eger, 2012

Lektorálta:

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főiskolai tanár

A borítón
John William Waterhouse: *Pandora* (1896)
című festményének részlete látható

ISSN: 1787-9671

ISBN 978-615-5250-01-9

A kiadásért felelős
az Eszterházy Károly Főiskola rektora
Megjelent az EKF Líceum Kiadó gondozásában
Igazgató: Kis-Tóth Lajos
Felelős szerkesztő: Zimányi Árpád
Műszaki szerkesztő: Nagy Sándorné
Borítóterv: Kormos Ágnes

Megjelent: 2012-ben

Készítette: az Eszterházy Károly Főiskola nyomdája
Felelős vezető: Kérészy László

Családomnak

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is first and foremost dedicated to my family, the members of which have always supported me in pursuing my academic interests – whatever consequences it had – and without whose patience, trust and love this book could never have been written.

Apart from them, I am especially indebted to those of my teachers who encouraged me to pursue literary studies and research: Csilla Kukucska and Tamás Bényei. The latter was also one of the opponents of my PhD dissertation, and has encouraged me ever since to organise my thoughts into a book and given me material help to proceed with further research, for which I am ever so grateful. The articles in the present volume are also waypoints in my academic career, and many of them are inseparable from colleague-friends who helped me at the time with their invaluable advice: Zoltán Hajnády, supervisor of my PhD dissertation, József Goretity, professor of my PhD courses on 19th-century world literature, and – last but not least – Katalin Kroó, opponent of the same dissertation. Their friendly support has been with me ever since the PhD procedure was completed: Zoltán Hajnády edited several of the articles in this collection for *Slavica*, and it was Katalin Kroó who turned my interest towards the mytheme of the Golden Age. The Powys articles evoke sweet memories of the warm reception and encouragement I gained in the Powys Society, the immense professional help I have been given by Charles Lock, editor of *The Powys Journal* and Professor at the University of Coppenhagen, and the undying parental affection of Jacqueline and Max Peltier, members of the Society and editors of *la letter powysienne*. Let me express my deepest gratitude to all of them here.

I owe special thanks to those at Eszterházy College who facilitated my research and the writing of this book by providing the institutional means for them: Csaba Czeglédi, Éva Antal and Albert Vermes, as Heads of the English Department, Mihály Mózes, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Zoltán Hauser, the Rector of Eszterházy College.

INTRODUCTION[1]

The present collection of articles reflects the different stages of my research originally started in 1997. It has been guided by one central interest: my lasting fascination with Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky's *Devils* (1871) and the numerous reinterpretations it underwent in both Russian and English Modernism through its consistent rewritings. In the last fifteen years I have published over thirty studies in Hungary, other Central European countries, Great Britain and France, most of which are at least loosely related to this focal point. The present ten articles – three concerned with Dostoevsky's text and seven with English Modernism – have been selected from these. Though except for the Huxley paper none of them are consistently comparative in nature, the collection – I hope – gives a clear view of the dialogue the novelistic texts discussed continue with each other.

Such a long period inevitably must bring about major changes in one's ideas and critical interests, just as it must produce essential new material in the literature of one's field. The story of interpretation these articles outline is subject to the inevitable fate of all narratives: it can be read only backwards, from its end – from the moment when its object-cause is revealed to have always been there, shaping the (de)tours of interpretation which has lead to its emergence (cf. P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* 10–24; Žižek, "The Truth Arises from Misrecognition" passim). Accordingly, it has evolved gradually through textual analysis, and what seems to be a more or less coherent story *now*, did not – could not – seem to be such while it was being formulated. Consequently, the present arrangement of the articles – which follows the chronological order of the novels' release – does not correspond to the order of the articles' first publication and to the consecutive stages in the development of the ideas shaping them. These facts have necessitated both a thorough revision of the original texts – including updated references – and the addition of a new introduction for the present volume. The latter aims at the clarification of the critical concepts informing my readings, which were rather sketchy but involved an inconvenient number of repetitions in the journal articles due to the specifics of the genre. With this in view, the theoretical comments in the articles have been limited to short references and footnotes.

The central idea governing my research, in hindsight, has been a concern with the interrelationship of two seemingly contradictory mythemes – those of

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[1] Special thanks to Charles Somerville for the careful linguistic editing of this section.

the Golden Age and Narcissus[2] – shaping narrative identity[3], that is, the subject's coming into being through and as language (cf. Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 124–47). Thus, the Narcissus narrative is both the beginning and the end of my interpretative quest: inspired by Dostoevsky's novel, which implicitly identifies the Narcissus myth[4] as a fundamental shaping factor of desire, identity and narrative, my research has resulted in readings of the novels as comments on the narcissistic nature of subjectivity[5]. It was both provoked and theoretically

[2] For an interpretation of the mytheme of the Golden Age as a totality, a synthesis of otherwise mutually exclusive binary oppositions see (Kroó, "From Plato's Myth of the Golden Age" 355–70). On the interpenetration of the narcissistic model and the mytheme of the Golden Age in the pastoral tradition see (S. Horváth passim). The latter study is especially revealing, because it demonstrates how mirroring and narcissistic self-reflection became inherent elements in the paradisiacal nature-descriptions of the pastoral tradition. These, in turn, found there way into the highly intertextual spaces of Rousseau's and Dostoevsky's writings – later important models for Conrad and Powys. As S. Horváth emphasises following Paul de Man's train of thought in his reading of Rousseau, in the French writer's texts the mytheme of the Golden Age is primarily an imaginative/imaginary space in which the subject could fictionalise and theatricalise itself, rather than a signifier of any metaphysical quest.

[3] One of the fundamental assumptions behind my readings is formulated by Peter Brooks. Relying on Lacan's ideas, he argues in *Reading for the Plot* that the "question of identity […] can be thought only in narrative terms" (33), whereas "it is in essence the desire to be heard, recognised, understood, which, never wholly satisfied or indeed satisfiable, continues to generate the desire to tell, the effort to enunciate a significant version of the life story in order to captivate a possible listener" (54). Thus, the "engine" of both story and story-telling is *desire*: the longing to reach the object of one's desire, in general, on the one hand, and the desire to formulate a meaningful and therefore "transmissible" version of one's life(-story), on the other. The prime mover of narratives is the object-cause of desire – a *lack* (37–61). Accordingly, prematurely *fulfilled* desire – such as finding the object at home by *incest* – short-circuits desire and brings an untimely closure to the narrative, making all further story(-telling) impossible (103–9). It does so by restraining the potential hero of the story from leaving home, from passing over the limits of the closed space of fulfilled desire – by excluding the possibility of any *further transgression* essential for narratives (85–9).

[4] Cf. (Ovid III 339–508). In accordance with Gray Kochhar-Lindgren's and Julia Kristeva's approach, throughout the present collection I will treat the different discourses (mythical, psychoanalytic and critical) related to the Narcissus narrative as one indivisible intertextual complex. The constants of this amalgam include mirroring, infinite self-reflexion, anxiety of death and an inability to acknowledge the other as an entity independent from the self (2–5).

[5] Following Lawrence Cahoone and agreeing with Kristeva, Kochhar-Lindgren points out that Western subjectivity is fundamentally narcissistic in nature, that is, based on self-reflection, and therefore on a gap between self and other. He highlights this element in Western philosophical thought from the period starting with Cartesian *cogito*, but identifies the roots of the phenomenon in Platonic idealism. Relying on Cahoone's views, he sees the model feasible as long as there is a third term – God, nature, *logos*, etc. – to stabilise it by putting an end to otherwise infinite self-reflection. He also contends that narcissistic subjectivity without this third element – the Derridean transcendental signified – is a "depthless surface", which is basically what the post-structuralist subject is (2–18).
Consequently, in literary criticism the notions of the textual subject and the different versions of mirroring and reflexion are inseparable from the Narcissus narrative. These include, among

resolved by Julia Kristeva's impulsive but sketchy reading of *Devils* as a landmark in European literature: a novel ushering in the unstoppable flow of Modernist texts reflecting abjection[6], a crisis of narcissistic subjectivity (*Powers of Horror* 2–18).

Kristeva's vision opens up new theoretical vistas in two directions. On the one hand, her concept of the abject is genealogically related to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnival[7], which, originally formulated with François

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others, the desire for the impossible merger with the (almost) same, incest, and bisexuality, which are explicit even in the mythical versions of the narrative. In the best-known one, Ovid's, Narcissus is desired by both male and female lovers, but he coldly rejects all of them. As a punishment for his heartlessness, he comes to know himself – falls in love with his mirror-image in the water, thus seemingly prioritising homosexual love over heterosexual attractions. The metaphorical incest also implied here (son of a water-nymph, Narcissus in his longing to merge with his fluid image wants the impossible fusion with the mother) is explicit in other versions, in which the unreachable lover is Narcissus's (twin) sister. Falling in love with an image – treating it as a living human being – also highlights another concept inseparable from the Narcissus narrative: the discourse of the double. As for his actions, Narcissus is associated with mechanical repetition: longing for the impossible merger with the maternal element, but also knowing that it equals death, he keeps oscillating between identification and separation, like an *automaton* (Kochhar-Lindgren 2–44). Cf. (Ovid III 339–508; Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts* 53–64). Mirroring, the (living) image and the double are closely related to the text-within-the-text and the infinity of space and mirroring associated with the *mise en abyme* (cf. Szekeres161–71).

[6] Instead of the essayistic and lengthy description of the abject in Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* let me quote the following brief definition for the disambiguation of the term:

> Every social order defines itself as opposed to the non-signified, the non-structured [...]. [T]he marginalised segments and elements are under the laws of prohibition and taboo: the filthy, the disgusting, the dirty, the perverse, the heterogeneous. The term *abject* includes all these elements that are not fixed symbolically, which are hardly encodable and are menacing for culture. The abject is the most archaic experience of the subject, which is neither an object nor the subject, but already articulates separation by marking the future space of the subject in relation to the disgusting, to the heterogeneous, and to the terrifying. [...] [I]t threatens symbolic fixation and the formation of identity. The aspect of the abject most imminently and constantly threatening the subject is the very existence and feeling of the body: it is this uncontrollable structure full of streams and flows that language, the word, and discourse must totally cover so that the subject can feel her/himself a homogeneous monad. (Kiss 19–20; my thanks to Nóra Séllei for this translation)

Here and in the rest of the volume italics in quotes are as in the original, unless indicated otherwise.

[7] Bakhtin's concept emerged in his *Rabelais and His World* (especially 1–58) and was later incorporated into *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (101–80). Let me note here that the first version of the Dostoevsky monograph, published in 1929 as *Проблемы творчества Достоевского* did not involve any references to the carnival – a concept formulated much later, during the writing of the volume on Rabelais, which was finished in 1940, but could be published only in 1965. In the meantime, the Dostoevsky monograph was thoroughly rewritten, to come out in 1963 in the form that became a landmark in Dostoevsky studies (*Проблемы*

Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in mind, was later to provide a context of historical poetics for his reading of Dostoevsky's texts as polyphonic[8]. Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, in which she coins the term abject, discusses phenomena which would be called carnivalesque in Bakhtinian terminology, as is evident for example from Michael André Bernstein's rereading of the carnivalesque in Dostoevsky in terms of the abject, to be detailed below. On the other hand, her earlier introduction of the concept of intertextuality is acknowledgedly rooted in the Bakhtinian notion of the dialogue[9]. Both directions of her development of Bakhtinian thought are heavily indebted to Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis, more particularly to Jacques Lacan's view of the subject[10]. Thus there is an almost straight line leading from Dostoevsky

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поэтики Достоевского). That version already involves carnival as the most important shaping factor of the historical poetics of the polyphonic novel:

> Carnival itself [...] is a syncretic pageantry of a ritualistic sort. As a form it is very complex and varied. [...] Carnival has worked out an entire language of symbolic concretely sensuous forms. [...] This language [...] gave expression to a unified (but complex) carnival sense of the world, permeating all its forms. [...] It cannot be translated in any full or adequate way into a verbal language, and much less into a language of abstract concepts, but [...] it can be transposed into the language of literature. We are calling this transposition of carnival into the language of literature the carnivalisation of literature. (Bakhtin, *Problems* 122)

Kristeva does not refer to Bakhtin in *Powers of Horror,* but the connection is rather obvious. Especially when taking into account the fact that it was Kristeva who introduced Bakhtinian ideas into Western literary thought, including the ideas of carnival and the carnivalisation of literature (cf. Томсон passim).

[8] Cf. Bakhtin's own definition of polyphony:

> *A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels.* What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather *a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. Dostoevsky's major heroes are, by the very nature of his creative design, *not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse.* (*Problems* 6–7)

[9] Cf. "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" (Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 64–91; Томсон passim).

[10] In the poststructuralist notion of the subject, based on Jacques Lacan's ideas, the psychological phenomenon of narcissism plays a central role: primary narcissism is associated with the so-called mirror-stage, the emergence of the Imaginary I (*moi*, roughly equivalent to the ego or self) at the sight of one's mirror-image (*imago*) through imaginary identification with it. The mirror-stage also ushers in the entry into the Symbolic (Language, Law, the realm of the Father, the dialectics of desire) through the Oedipal stage. This period ends with the acceptance of castration (the paternal metaphor of the Name of the Father), which would allow the subject (*je*) to sublimate its frustrated desire (an element of the Real, the Lacanian version of the id) in language – to come into being. At the same time, it ends the dyadic union of mother and child, which is associated with narcissism and parallels the phenomenon of maternal mirroring in the

through Bakhtin to Kristeva and the concepts of the abject, the speaking subject and intertextuality. Following this path reveals Dostoevsky to be what he has always been: a writer who has fundamentally and more or less directly shaped not only twentieth-century European literature, but also contemporary literary criticism and the ways post-structuralism – both as literary criticism and art psychology – sees the (textual) subject.

Kristeva's view of literature after Dostoevsky assigns a very specific role to myth in general: in the permanent narcissistic crisis she envisions myth supplies the discourse in the context of which the subject can redraw – reestablish – its insecure limits, which have been obliterated due to the weakening of the position of the Other, the transcendental signified. However, as Michael Bell's analysis of Modernist mythopoeia reveals, a "genuinely" Modernist approach to myth handles it as a purely aesthetic sublimating discourse of the abject (cf. Kristeva, *Powers* 7) – with the ironic awareness that in a multiverse of truths myth must always remain personal, though an absolute necessity for the survival of the subject dispersed in language (Bell 9–38; 121). This vision of myth in Modernism goes hand in hand with Paul Riceour's hermeneutical approach to myth and Eric Gould's myth-critical re-evaluation of mythopoeia in accordance with the post-structuralist view of the subject and language. Both of them assert that myth functions as an exemplary act of interpretation that attempts to close an ontological gap, but with each attempt all it can demonstrate is the impossibility of such a closure and the absolute necessity of the effort (Riceour 5–6; Gould 6–34; cf. Kochhar-Lindgren 10–11). Thus, though the articles in the present volume are concerned with myth and apply the terms of structuralist Myth Criticism as reference points, they do so with myth as a purely aesthetic and highly productive discourse in view – in short, they focus on what Gould terms *mythicity* (34; cf. Kochhar-Lindgren 10–11) instead of myth as a discourse of the numenous. It is in this context that the vicissitudes of both the myth of the Golden Age and the Narcissus narrative are examined.

In this respect certain aspects of Dostoevsky criticism serve as fundamental assumptions for the studies in the collection. Malcolm V. Jones's book-length study, which is probably the most comprehensive post-Bakhtinian assessment of Dostoevskian realism, names one of these: the conspicuously (post)modernist features in Dostoevsky's texts. As he points out, a most curious and baffling aspect of Dostoevsky's works is that "independently of a specifically deconstructionist theory, [... his] apparently 'realist' texts behave like modernist or post-modernist ones [...] and [...] in spite of his modernism or post-modernism, Dostoevsky may still be read as a latter-day Christian or humanist" (xvi).

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clinical experience related to narcissism (empathic emotional reactions on the part of the mother that lead to the emergence of the child's self, literally in the eyes of the mother). Cf. (Lacan, "The Mirror Stage" passim; Boothby 21–46; Ignusz passim).

This specific feature is closely related to the debate surrounding the notion of polyphony, which surfaces in Jones's monograph as a concern with the nature of Dostoevsky's "fantastic realism". Jones uses the phrase to characterise Dostoevskian texts and emphasises that although the notion originates in Dostoevsky's own description of his art, it is a contested one:

> There is [...] a difference in opinion between prominent Western critics about whether fantastic realism designates a higher spiritual or poetic reality and if so what kind of realm this is; whether, for instance, it is a higher religious realm in which the multivoicedness of human discourse (Bakhtin's heteroglossia) *finds unity in what Derrida calls a metaphysics of presence in which the transcendental signified finds a divine guarantee*. (3, emphasis added)

For his part, Jones insists that many characteristic features of Dostoevsky's texts connect his "fantastic realism" to "a modernist or post-modernist perception of the various ways in which discourse breaks loose from the reality principle and suffers internal fracture" (28). Consequently, Jones defines "fantastic realism" in terms of polyphony, as a combination of three different discourses: those of "authority" (the voice of the father or literary precursor, constantly questioned, undermined, even deconstructed), "mystery" (uncanny effects, like the double, which seem to threaten structure and signification) and "miracle" ("an ideal event whose realisation would be inconsistent with the reality effect") (191–9). If the most disconcerting effect of the uncanny[11] is the disclosing of the abyss

[11] Freud's "Unheimlich" rests on the notion of the return of the repressed, explained in his seminal essay entitled "The 'Uncanny'":

> In the first place, if psycho-analytic theory is correct in maintaining that every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety, then among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which recurs. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny; and it must be a matter of indifference whether what is uncanny was itself originally frightening or whether it carried some other affect. In the second place, if this is indeed the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why linguistic usage has extended das Heimliche ['homely'] into its opposite, das Unheimliche; for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. This reference to the factor of repression enables us, furthermore, to understand Schelling's definition of the uncanny as something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light. (240)

The Freudian term has generated much critical debate. It has been associated from its very birth with the ever-changing concept of the double or Doppelgänger (and by implication with narcissism), and also with the idea of the castration-complex – a phenomenon that has been fundamentally reinterpreted since, notably by Samuel Weber. For him the experience of the uncanny is inseparable from moments of castration in the epistemological sense of the word:

between the signifier and the signified, the "miracle" might imply just the opposite. And so, Jones writes, in Dostoevsky's novels "the demand for miracle is ever present," even though it "never happens" (199). To return to Bell's vision of Modernist mythopoeia, Jones, just like Kristeva, allocates Dostoevsky's place at the dividing line between different periods and approaches. The craving for the miracle Jones mentions clearly translates as an attempt to reinstate the metaphysical signified through myth, and identifies Dostoevsky as a religious writer, as opposed to genuine Modernists (cf. Bell 121–2). If one accepts Jones's assumption that this craving is really never rewarded with an absolute revelation, Dostoevsky still remains a forerunner of the purely aesthetic sublimating discourse of the abject characteristic for Modernism: his resolution of the narcissistic crisis must always remain dubious.

This leads on to another highly contested aspect of Bakhtinian criticism: his optimistic reading of the carnival versus the tragic implications of abjection as narcissistic crisis. According to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky's sense of the carnivalesque is mediated through the classical and Renaissance traditions and "the objective memory of the […] genre" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 121). He – apparently quite naively – reads carnival as an unambiguously liberating source of rebirth[12]. Scepticism about this axiom of Bakhtin's has had far-

moments, when not exactly *nothing* happens, but something that fundamentally undermines the subject's position by revealing the gap between the signifier and the signified and thereby shaking forever their trust in signification. It evokes a distrust in signification and representation, which can never be undone or dissolved, and therefore results in lasting epistemological and ontological insecurity (1111–12).

The other inseparably related term in Freud's essay is the double: he identifies the theme of the Doppelgänger as one of the most frequently occurring instances of the uncanny. He works with literary material and recognises the great variety of the forms in which doubling – the "dividing and interchanging of the self," "the repetition of the same character-traits," or some hidden mental connection between two characters – can occur in fiction. He adopts Otto Rank's theory and interprets the psychological phenomenon of the double as "originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death'," rooted in "self-love" (233–4). Thus he associates its emergence with primary narcissism and points out that once this stage of development is over, the double "becomes the uncanny harbinger of death". The concept has been thoroughly reinterpreted in a Lacanian context. Mladen Dolar sees the double as a powerful mirror image in possession of the gaze, a rival who always enjoys (*jouissance*) at the cost of the subject and inevitably poses a lethal threat (passim). All in all, uncanny effects always mark the subject's insecurity and foreshadow its disintegration.

[12] Cf. "The carnival sense of the world possesses a mighty life-creating and transforming power, an indestructible vitality" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 107). On the return of carnivalesque images as the repressed, as hysterical symptoms in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western consciousness cf. (White passim). Allon White contends that while medieval and renaissance carnivals worked as successful sublimating contexts for the grotesque body (i. e. the human body), with the gradual banning of these festivities such a possibility was annihilated, and the return of the carnivalesque in Modernist literature bears no comparison with the actual ritual as far as the effectiveness of sublimation is concerned. For a mild critique of Bakhtinian optimism cf. (Hutcheon 69–83).

reaching implications for the interpretation of the carnivalesque in Dostoevsky's works. Here I agree with Bernstein's insight, taken up and advanced by Borys Groys, to the effect that the carnivalesque as presented by Bakhtin can have sinister implications[13]. Bernstein argues that Dostoevsky's carnival is not bound by the traditional time limits of the festival, and therefore becomes "a permanent inversion of all values" with "lethal" and "savage" consequences (20). Drawing rather heavily on Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, Bernstein goes on to claim that Dostoevsky's texts give a "bitter" reading of carnival, for they represent it as the realm of the abject and abjection[14].

Bernstein's reading of Dostoevsky also reveals the full potentials of Bakhtinian theory as far as irony – a direct consequence of multivoiced discourse – is concerned, though it also highlights the narcissistic nature of Dostoevskian infinite self-reflection. Combining his Bakhtinian-Kristevan interpretation with Harold Bloom's notion of the anxiety of influence (106) and René Girard's idea of "mimetic rivalry" (the doubling or imitative or mediated nature of novelistic desire [1–15]), Bernstein posits the typical Dostoevskian hero as caught up in infinite, vertiginous ironical self-reflection that makes narratives abysmally endless. Bernstein convincingly argues that the typical Dostoevskian hero – from the Underground Man to Ivan Karamazov – can be defined by the term "Abject Hero". This is a particularly bitter version of the Saturnalian (carnivalesque) ironist who is outraged at his own belatedness, his lack of originality and his inability to break out from the already existing literary scenarios and motifs, even when he wants to define his identity through a narrative of his own (17–22). As Bernstein emphasises, the major irony of the situation is that the "Abject Hero" is bitterly conscious that "even his most 'personal' longings are only commonplace quotations" (105); in other words, his characteristic state of mind is what Nietzsche so magnificently condemned as *ressentiment* (108). Bernstein focuses on the plight of the Underground Man and

[13] For a summary of these arguments, see (Emerson 171–5).

[14] Though the differences between Kristeva's and Bernstein's application of the term (reflecting their attitude to Bakhtinian thought) could be the subject of a separate study, for the purposes of this paper let me cite Bernstein's redefinition of the Kristevan abject:

> [According to Kristeva] the abject [is] a universal psychological condition, a fissure in the relationship between consciousness and corporality that arises at the most elemental levels of human response to the facts of physical existence itself [...]. It undermines the conventional Freudian distinctions between conscious and unconscious [...]. Linked primordially to the body's excretions, the abject 'is something rejected from which one does not part,' a horror that violates 'identity, system, order.' For Kristeva 'The corpse, seen without God and outside science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life.' From my [Bernstein's] perspective, abjection is a social and dialogic category, and its expression is always governed by the mapping of *prior literary and cultural models*. (28–9, emphasis added)

the clown figures in Dostoevsky's texts, but one of the best examples is Stavrogin's confession in *Devils*, which, instead of presenting an authentic narrative that would define Stavrogin's identity, is only a rewriting of the Marion scene from Rousseau's *Confessions*[15].

Bernstein's insight sheds new light on Bakhtin's interpretation of the confessional dialogue in Dostoevsky's works as a site of the "vicious circle of self-consciousness with a sideward glance" (*Problems* 234): he implicitly reveals it as the staging of the subject's narcissistic crisis. The "genre memory" of the ironic Saturnalian dialogue and the penchant of the Abject Hero for „self-laceration" (93) as a definition of his identity seem to lead almost inevitably to a preference for the abject confession, the moving force behind which is an unhealable narcissistic scar. Among others, both Bernstein (90) and Peter Brooks (*Troubling Confessions* 46–60) point out how the (often abject) confession is a dominant element in Dostoevskian texts, and the latter clearly connects it to the lapse of faith, the weakening of the transcendental signified's position. As Brooks argues, once "faith and grace" become highly problematic concepts, as they do in Dostoevsky's novels, the "confessional discourse" might turn out to be sterile (*Troubling* 48–50), as in the case of the Underground Man or Stavrogin.

Indeed, Dostoevsky's treatment of narcissistic subjectivity in *Devils*, and in particular in "Stavrogin's Confession," is the reference point for all the other readings included in the present volume. Stavrogin's confessional discourse retains at least traces of the central element in sacramental confession. As Riceour points out, the believer is raised to self-consciousness by confession exactly because in his discourse he evokes myth, that is, the transcendental signified, the Other, in whose eyes he can establish his identity through (confessional) language (25–47). In the Modernist novels, as already implied by Stavrogin's narrative, this becomes strictly impossible: the narratives become obsessed with secular forms of confession (Joseph Conrad), involving the theatricalisation of identity (Aldous Huxley) or reflect claustrophobic consciousnesses, caught up in the obsessive attraction-repulsion that dominates the subject lured in the terrain of abjection in his otherwise mythical quest for his identity (John Cowper Powys).

My exploration of the consistent rewritings of *Devils* in English Modernism is worth considering in the context of Peter Kaye's insights concerning Dostoevsky's reception, which show how much Dostoevsky himself is the metaphorical other – the abject? – of Western cultural thought. Kaye argues that the release of the first Constance Garnett translation (1912) provoked a cult-like fascination with the Russian classic among major English Modernists. This reception, however, shows curious similarities with Russian Dostoevsky

[15] On Stavrogin's use of Rousseau, see "The Marion motif: the whisper of the precursor" (Jones 149–63) and (S. Horváth passim; Miller passim)

criticism, which was handicapped by what Bakhtin termed monologic readings – exactly up to the publication of his own groundbreaking monograph:

> The Russian author was acclaimed as mystic, prophet, psychologist, irrationalist, a chronicler of the perverse, and *sometimes as a novelist*. […] To understand how the modern novelists in England responded to Dostoevsky, it is helpful to keep *monsters* in mind. Monsters resist classification and hence pose a threat of dissolution, for *they combine what is normally kept separate and distinct* – head of man and torso of beast become one. […] all viewed Dostoevsky as a writer who could not be classified or assimilated within the traditions of the novel; his works were assumed to be unshaped by artistic intent and unloosed from social restraints. […] By disengaging him from his literary heritage, *misunderstanding was assured*. (5–7, emphasis added)

It is tempting to see the image of the abject – the ambiguous monster, the "enigma" that both resists classification and threatens order – as a master trope of English Dostoevsky-reception. Kaye's scope involves the period between 1900 and 1930, but of the authors discussed in this volume he deals only with Joseph Conrad. His reading of *Under Western Eyes* as a consistent rewriting of *Crime and Punishment* is highly inspiring, but, as I will suggest, *Devils* can have at least equal claims for the status of being the novel's central Dostoevskian intertext.

The articles in the present volume focus on a relatively small segment of the vicissitudes of Dostoevsky's vision of narcissistic subjectivity. Their reference point is a reading of *Devils* explored in the first three studies: it contends that the Narcissus myth implicitly shaping Stavrogin's confession is also indicative of the nature of the desire that shapes the whole narrative. I agree with Kristeva that the novel's major concern is the redefinition of the subject's – and text's – borders after faith has been shaken in the transcendental signified. Stavrogin's narrative and fate, however, make a comment on narcissistic subjectivity that leads to a dead-end, from which no life or story-telling seems to be possible. Joseph Conrad, Aldous Huxley and John Cowper Powys try to overcome this deadlock with varying success in their rewritings – and readings – of *Devils*, which plays a central role in their artistic self-definition. Conrad problematises the gaze that determines symbolic identification in *Under Western Eyes* (1911). While he practically deconstructs one particular ideological construct that can determine identification, he fundamentally repeats the bleak Dostoevskian comment of hopelessness. Huxley, in his turn, launches a rather malicious attack in *Point Counter Point* (1929) against Dostoevsky, whom he identifies with Stavrogin, and reads in terms of a diseased narcissistic consciousness. He tries to fight his "literary father" both by recreating his character as an inauthentic play-

actor, and by countering what he interprets as the Dostoevskian stance with a version of D. H. Lawrence's "philosophy". His argument is rather weakened by the fact that Stavrogin's – that is, Dostoevsky's – narrative simply appropriates his novel.

Powys's reading of Dostoevsky evolves gradually in his so-called Wessex novels and therefore reveals its full implications if followed through. Thus, the studies included in this volume deal with three out of the four novels[16]. *Wolf Solent* (1929) raises the dilemma of narcissistic subjectivity through a dialogue with both *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Devils.* Its Bildung-like structure reveals the gradual emergence and the final promise of the acceptance of narcissistic subjectivity as part of the human condition through a Rabelaisian personal philosophy. In other words, Powys explicitly rereads the abject as carnivalesque, which enables him to accept the indefinite, fluid nature of subjectivity. This will remain a constant in the following two novels, though will acquire different shapes. In *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932) this personal philosophy appears as the mystical-revivalist element behind a newfangled commune. The story, which is the only consistent rewriting of *Devils* among the Wessex novels, repeats Dostoevsky's fundamental strategy as far as myth, identity and narrative are concerned. Clearly motivated by the Saturnian quest, the narrative is just as explicitly the "pure Romance" of Narcissus with his only love – himself. Based on the Arthurian legends, just like T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, it makes a highly ironic comment on Modernist mythopoeia as a discourse redefining the subject. If Modernist literature moves in the terrain of abjection, *A Glastonbury Romance* is a textbook case. But it is also a phase: by turning the promise of a Rabelaisian philosophy hinted at in *Wolf Solent* into fictional reality, it also poses the mythical/mystical sublimating discourse of the abject as a closure unacceptable for narcissistic subjectivity. *Weymouth Sands* (1934), which continues the Dostoevskian dialogue with a magnificent carnivalesque rewriting of Stavrogin's vision of the Golden Age, transposes the Rabelaisian attitude advocated by the previous texts on the level of narration. Thereby it can be read as a fairly successful artistic (aesthetic) discourse of the abject, which – characteristically for Powys – involves in its multiverse of narcissitic (solipsistic) subjectivities its own metatext. A synopsis of a work on the philosophy of representation, this metafictional segment (88–9) indicates that English Modernism has run its full course as far as the interrelationship of myth, identity, narrative and desire are concerned: it suggests that every myth is born from human desire to come up with a meaningful version of existence. Powys here reaches a conclusion which is in accordance with the post-structuralist

[16] The fourth novel, *Maiden Castle* (1936), which completes the cycle, adds no significant new shade to this reading – in fact, it is a novel of rather modest artistic merits and in many ways a major step backwards. The conclusions of my reading would be rather fruitful in an analysis of Powys's later, quasi-historical novels, which, however, should be subject to an individual study.

vision of subjectivity and myth: for him mythopoeia is born from the desire to close an ontological gap, but all it can demonstrate is both the necessity and the impossibility of doing so.

THE GOLDEN AGE AND NARCISSUS: THE EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT MYTH IN STAVROGIN'S CONFESSION[1]

Stavrogin's confession, which is probably the most debated section of Dostoevsky's *Devils*[2], plays a crucial role in defining the main character's enigmatic identity, since practically this is the only occasion when his silence is broken. The "confession" is Stavrogin's first-person narrative of his own identity[3], which retrospectively reinterprets all other narratives about him. Apparently, all the mysteries surrounding him are solved, Stavrogin's "final" and "true" word stops the infinite shift of meanings and ends the signifying chain (Lacan, "The Insistence of the Letter" passim; cf. Gould 51–2). This "appearance", however, is revealed as the "real" key to the understanding of the confession. On the one hand, it is the myth of the Golden Age which explicitly appears in it as a text literally shedding light on the story of Stavrogin and Matryosha in the moment of epiphany and thereby fulfilling its sacred interpretative function (cf. Gould 6). On the other hand, Stavrogin, the author of the confession, makes sure that the myth should definitely appear for the reader as the climax of the whole scene: he embeds it in multiple frames and separates it from the rest of the confession stylistically (Гроссман 611). What is covered up by this luminous appearance is the ultimate importance of appearance itself, the implicit myth of Narcissus: in the dialogic situation of the confession Stavrogin acts out the role of Narcissus looking at his own "appearance" – that is, reflection – in his text alienated from himself, just like in the eyes of his

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[1] Originally a section of my doctoral thesis submitted in 2005 and entitled *A szándék allegóriái – Az identitás mítoszai Dosztojevszkij örökében* (*Allegories of Intent – Myths of Identity in the Wake of Dostoevsky*). First published as "The Golden Age and Narcissus – The Explicit and Implicit Myth in Stavrogin's Confession," *Slavica* XXXIV (2005), 147–64. Special thanks to Karin Macdonald for her careful linguistic editing of the English version. The preliminary research for the thesis was carried out with the assistance of the Eötvös Scholarship supplemented by a grant from the Hungarian Ministry of Education (OM).

[2] The chapter entitled "At Tikhon's" is a philologically problematic section of the novel, and this fact is also reflected in the critical reception of *Devils*. The present study is based on the 1996 critical edition of the novel (Достоевский, *Бесы*), and adopts its editor's standpoint, according to whom in the reception history of *Devils* the problematic chapter has become an unalienable part of the text in readers' consciousness and for this reason it should be published in its original place, as Chapter 9 of Part 2 (Сараскина 459). The English quotations are all based on (Dostoevsky, *Devils*) and since no other Dostoevsky text is cited in the article, only the page numbers are indicated in the parentethical notes.

[3] On different aspect of narrative identity – among them psychoanalytical, historical and literary – see (Rákai and Kovács passim). Cf. (P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* 33–54).

experimental reader, Tikhon, and his imaginary would-be readers. The phenomenon of mirroring, a central metaphor of the Narcissus myth, is also characteristic of the interrelationship of the confessional situation and the confession related in the form of a printed pamphlet, of the four narratives included in the confession and of the multiple frames embedding the mythical narrative. Consequently, if the "confession" retrospectively reinterprets the earlier narratives of Stavrogin's identity, it does so by oscillating between the paradigms and partly overlapping metaphors of the myth of the Golden Age and of Narcissus.

The Golden Age

Being embedded in the frame of a dream, the mythic vision forming the climax of the confession represents the universal myth of the Golden Age as Stavrogin's personal myth and thereby makes it the key text of the narrative of his identity. Though Stavrogin's direct references to both the Greek and the Christian versions of the myth (471) make it most explicit in the text, the mythic quality of the vision would be clearly recognisable even without them: with its "gentle blue waves, islands and cliffs, a luxuriant shore […] a beckoning, setting sun" and with its inhabitants, who are the "beautiful children" of the sun (471), it is obviously a world of total metaphor, the Golden Age (cf. Hesiod, *Works and Days* 106–68; Kirk 232–7), the Isles of the Blessed (Kirk 227–9) described through "apocalyptic imagery" (Frye*, Anatomy of Criticism* 141–6). Since the well-known myth, however, appears in the frame of a dream, its personal, psychological motivation is emphasised. On the one hand, the dream is externally and rationally motivated by Stavrogin's reference to seeing Claude Lorrain's painting, since the experiences of the previous days often leave their traces in the dream content (cf. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 165–87). On the other hand, the image in the painting becomes an internalised and irrational mythic experience, having its roots in the – rather collective than personal – unconscious (cf. Jung 59–69; Freud, *The Interpretation* 541–82), when Stavrogin declares that "this picture […] appeared to me […] as if it were the real thing" (471). Thus, when Stavrogin strives to tell his dream, he makes an attempt at verbalising the unspeakable, an attempt at the historisation of a censored chapter of his unconscious, and thereby at defining his identity (Lacan, *The Language of the Self* 20–24).

The dream and Stavrogin's reaction to it realise a moment of epiphany in both Northrop Frye's and James Joyce's sense of the word. In Frye's terminology it is "the point at which the undisplaced apocalyptic world and the cyclical world of nature come into alignment" and one of "its most common settings" is the island (*Anatomy* 203). Such a meeting of the mythic world of the paradisiac island in Stavrogin's dream and of the natural world of the present

surrounding him is self-evident in the text. The connecting element between them is supplied by "the slanted rays of the setting sun" (472)[4], which form a part of both Stavrogin's dream and fictional reality, and consequently become the very metaphor of the epiphanic moment. In the context of the Golden Age the "setting sun's bright, slanting rays, bathing [Stavrogin] in light" (472) evoke a vision of golden light, and gold is a central element in the apocalyptic, that is, undisplaced mythical world (Frye, *Anatomy* 146). This mythopoetic interpretation can obviously be related to the theological one, according to which light – especially golden light – symbolises divine wisdom (cf. Флоренский 592–6). The Joycean concept of epiphany follows the same train of thought: for him it is a sudden moment of insight resulting in the recognition of some hidden truth, an enlightenment, and consequently it often leads to a crucial turn in the character's fate – a hardly secularised version of the theological concept (cf. Bowen, "Joyce and the Epiphany Concept: A New Approach" passim; McGowan passim).

This sudden moment of insight is nothing but the understanding of Stavrogin and Matryosha's "forgotten" story, which is also brought back by the slanting rays of the setting sun:

> I closed my eyes again quickly, as if yearning to recapture my passing dream, but suddenly, amidst the very bright sunlight, I noticed a very small spot. It acquired a shape, and all of a sudden I clearly saw a tiny red spider. At once I recalled the one on the geranium leaf, when the slanting rays of the setting sun were pouring down in the same way. Something seemed to pierce me, I raised myself and sat up in bed… (472)

At this point the "slanting rays of the setting sun" come to connect three temporal dimensions – the mythic past or eternal present of the vision, Stavrogin's present and his personal past – and correspondingly three psychological realms: the collective unconscious, the conscious and the personal unconscious. The latter is represented by the repressed events of Stavrogin and Matryosha's story, which is brought back from oblivion by the joint contradictory images of the sunlight and the tiny red spider breaking it. The inseparable presence of these images reveals the fundamentally contradictory nature of the epiphanic moment of Stavrogin's dream and of his memory – his personal unconscious. His cathartic reaction to the dream – as he says, "when I woke up and opened my eyes, for the first time in my life literally awash with tears. A feeling of happiness yet unknown to me invaded my heart until it hurt" (472) – turns into a highly emotional reaction to his hitherto repressed personal

[4] For a detailed analysis of this recurrent motif in Dostoevsky's oeuvre see (Kovács 141–63).

past and culminates in his vision of the threatening Matryosha. The moment of epiphany is thus fully realised in both senses of the word: through the image of the golden rays of the setting sun not only the mythical and natural worlds are connected, but a sudden moment of insight into Stavrogin's own unconscious is also represented. An element of his life which was meant to be repressed without interpretation is (literally) seen in a new light and becomes an object for interpretation through the cathartic experience of his mythic vision.

Thus under the influence of the epiphanic moment Stavrogin is forced to interpret the action gratuite (Fehér 215–20) retrospectively: from the amoral standpoint of the intentional forgetting of the uninterpretable event through its interpretation as a (mythical) sin and the source of a possible sense of guilt he arrives at the masochism of intentional remembering. Stavrogin emphasises that Matryosha's death, similarly to his other sins, initially left no trace in his memory – and on his conscience:

> I mention this precisely to show to what extent I could control my recollections and how indifferent I'd become towards them. I used to reject them all *en masse*, and they would obediently disappear each time *en masse*, as soon as I wanted. I always found it boring to recollect the past, and could never talk about it, as most other people do. As far as Matryosha is concerned, I even forgot her picture on the mantel. (471)

Stavrogin claims no less than being a man without a past, which leads to significant psychological, narrative and ethical consequences. Firstly, forgetting means the repression of the traumatic moment into the unconscious without working through and exactly because it cannot be worked through (Freud, "Remembering, repeating and working-through" passim). Thus, by ironically forgetting Matryosha even twice Stavrogin testifies to the exact opposite of what he consciously seems to aim at: to how strongly his unconscious strives to hinder the repressed element from returning and to how unable he actually is to cope with it. Secondly, Stavrogin's claim to be free from a need for the historisation of his past (Lacan, *The Language* 20–24) implies that he does not create narratives to define his identity and is also free from the desire to create a meaningful version of his life-story and find a listener (P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* 33). Thirdly, since in Christian thinking the issue of remembering and forgetting is inseparably tied to the ethical moment of forgiving (Weinrich 232–49), Stavrogin's statement also implies that for him making a confession, showing repentance and gaining absolution are completely unnecessary for being able to forget his sins. All in all, he is not only a man without a past, but

also a man without a history and identity[5] standing outside moral norms. However, as Mikhail Bakhtin also points out (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 242–6), the confession, which aims at nothing but remembering and reminding (Janion 130), paradoxically undermines all these implications.

Stavrogin's move from forgetting to remembering and interpreting is effected by his mythic vision, whose interpretative function is fulfilled through the juxtaposition of the motifs of the dream and Matryosha's story. The "tiny red spider", which appears as a counterpoint to the slanting rays of the setting sun and evokes the girl's story, is the starting point of a whole metaphorical chain:

> I stood on tiptoe and looked through the chink. At this very moment, standing on tiptoe, I recalled that as I was sitting by the window, staring at the red spider, and had dozed off, I had thought about how I'd stand on tiptoe and put my eye to the chink in the door. […] I stared through the chink for some time; it was dark there, but not totally. At last I could discern what I needed to… I wanted to be completely sure.
>
> At last I decided I could leave and went down the stairs. (468–9)

Firstly, the motif of the spider is related to Stavrogin's desire, to the forepleasure (Freud, "The Creative Writer and Daydreaming" 33; cf. P. Brooks, *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* 29–34) gained from imagining Matryosha's death while he is waiting for her suicide like a spider in its web. Then, pleasure and desire are connected to the motifs of voyeurism and the chink – the gap – both literally and figuratively: Stavrogin, the peeper, cannot actually concretise either his presentiment about Matryosha or what he really discovers in the dark and therefore both his desire for seeing her dead and the fulfilment of his desire form a conspicuous gap in the text. The chain starting with the "tiny red spider" and ending in the unspeakable death of the child and Stavrogin's unnameable and transgressive desire is all compressed into the "very small spot" (472) – another gap – which breaks the bright sunlight and shatters the dream of the Golden Age. Consequently, this breaking-point is the metaphorical equivalent of the moment of the loss of the "earthly paradise" (471), since Matryosha's story is the re-enactment of the destruction of childlike innocence often associated with the Golden Age (Hajnády 267). Thus in the retrospective interpretation supplied by the mythic vision of the Golden Age the narrative of Stavrogin's

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[5] Cf. Léna Szilárd's interpretation, according to whom *Devils* is "an encyclopaedia of an obsessive search for roles", which is the consequence of the absence of real selfhood in the novel (25). Stavrogin's action gratuite, on the other hand, is an attempt "to check his authenticity" (34), that is, to prove that he has an identity of his own.
Here and in the rest of the volume all translations from non-English sources are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

unnameable desire becomes the moment of his mythic fall, in which he himself plays the role of the snake or the mythic dragon representing chaos (Eliade 48; cf. Riceour 255).

The epiphanic moment leads to an ethical turn in Stavrogin's behaviour, which is most clearly embodied in his confession: to his forced remembrance. Though he rejects even the idea of repentance, and admits only a recollection of the events devoid of all their ethical content, his masochistic remembering of Matryosha's vision as if it was his self-inflicted penance clearly shows that not only the psychological and narrative, but also the ethical aspects of Stavrogin's identity are concerned in this reinterpretation:

> Perhaps it's not the recollection of the act that I find so loathsome even now. Perhaps even now that recollection contains something that appeals to my passions. No – what I find intolerable is solely this image, namely, her in the doorway, threatening me with her raised fist, just her appearance at that moment, that one minute, that shake of her head. That's what I can't stand because that's what I've been seeing ever since, almost every day. It doesn't come of its own accord; I summon it and can't help doing so, although I can't live with it. […]
>
> I have other memories of the past that perhaps go one better than this one. […] But why doesn't a single one of these memories make me feel anything similar? […] I know I could dismiss that little girl from my mind even now, if I wanted to. I'm in complete control of my own will, as always. But the whole point is that I never have wanted to do that, I don't want to now, and I never will want to; I know that by now. So it'll go on right up to the point where I go mad. (472–3)

The inevitable return of the repressed thus turns into intentional recollection resulting in his desire for the historisation of the unconscious and the creation of a narrative of his identity. This is the very desire that urges him to write his confession. And here the circle is closed: the mythic vision leads to a narrative which verbalises Stavrogin's identity explicitly in the language of total metaphor, as myth. However, his split consciousness is reflected in the emergence of a disunited, heterogeneous, self-contradictory narrative instead of a unified story which would resolve all the ambivalences of his identity: the traumatic nucleus of his unconscious is illuminated on the one hand in the vision of the Golden Age, on the other hand in Matryosha's story, which is put in the mythic context of the fall and paradise lost by this self-same vision. Ultimately, the myth is meant to interpret the unspeakable – the unconscious, desire, death and nothing – but because the narrative, due to its heterogeneity, retains its ambivalence and is inevitably metaphorical, the issue of Stavrogin's identity is still left open after the confession.

“Oh, Mirror, Mirror…” – The Myth of Narcissus

If Stavrogin’s confession aims at the historisation of a censored chapter of his unconscious, the censoring does not occur without a trace at all: it is involved in his vision of the Golden Age, more precisely, in his renaming Claude Lorrain’s painting (cf. S. Horváth 292). Like a Freudian slip of the tongue, it reveals an attempt to hide behind the image and narrative of the Golden Age another mythical plot, the palimpsest-like narratives of Narcissus/Acis/Cyclops/Pygmalion. It is so because the original title of the painting, *Acis and Galatea*, evokes both the stories of Narcissus and Pygmalion, and posits Stavrogin’s vision as a paradigm of narcissistic (artistic) self-reflexion.

The story of Acis and Galatea is that of a tragic love-triangle, in which Polyphemus, the Cyclops first peeps at the beautiful young lovers, then destroys his rival – the image he cannot be. The narrative parallels the Narcissus story in several ways. First and foremost, in this myth it is Polyphemus who looks in the mirror of the watery surface and, in an ironic echo of the fatal prophecy, exclaims: “Certainly, I know myself, for only recently I saw my own reflection pictured clear in limpid water, and my features pleased and charmed me when I saw it” (Ovid XIII 840–41). The central metaphor of his solar self-reflexion is the sign of his monstrosity, his only eye, which sheds light on his identity like the sun, and becomes an emblem of his “beauty” and power: “I have but one eye centred perfectly within my forehead, so it seems most like a mighty buckler. Ha! does not the Sun see everything from heaven? Yet it has but one eye” (Ovid XIII 851–3). His vision, nevertheless, is fatal, since the moment of perception signals the realisation of his narcissistic scar, the fact that for Galatea Acis is so much more beautiful than the Cyclops that she has united with him in love: “I see you and you never will again parade your love before me!” (Ovid XIII 874). Polyphemus strikes Acis to death by hurling a bulk of stone at him, but the blood streaming from under it turns into water, and Acis emerges reborn as the spirit of the river of the same name from “the hollow mouth in the great rock”. He is transformed, though: has newly-sprung horns and his face are all “azure” (Ovid XIII 887–97).

This is the culminating point of the other major parallel between this narrative and the Narcissus story: the one between the two youths. Acis, just like Narcissus, is sixteen years of age, when his destiny is fulfilled. His mother is, just like Narcissus’s, a water-nymph. The most significant element of his beauty is that he is not manly yet, as opposed to the Cyclops. This Narcissus parallel is emphasised by the bitter outburst of the one-eyed monster: “let him [Acis] *please himself*” (Ovid XIII 861, emphasis added). Consequently, Acis’s union with Galatea, a Nereid, is reminiscent of the narcissistic – or the incestuous – union of the (almost) same, which is ended by the Cyclops, a father-figure of unlimited power. Thus Acis, when in his plight he turns for help to his water-

nymph mother and lover to be resurrected as a river-spirit, fulfils Narcissus's most elemental – and impossible – desire by reuniting forever in his death with his mother, lover, and himself. At the same time he becomes a looking-glass image and a watery mirror, since he acquires some of the specific features of the Cyclops looking into the stream: his horns are indicative both of his mature masculinity and his monstrosity, and his azure face is reminiscent not only of clear water but also of the body of the drowned, of his return from the dead. He is an image born from death: from the abject fluid of his own blood running from the mouth of the cleft rock. Lorrain's painting, however, grasps an apparently idyllic moment before the tragedy: the lovers are united, the bleak future is indicated only by the hardly noticeable presence of the Cyclops on the hilltop. In view of the painting, for Stavrogin the idyll of the Golden Age means a narcissistic mirroring/union in sight of the Father.

The crisis of narcissistic subjectivity is also highlighted by the other – much better known – mythical narrative the Acis and Galatea story evokes: the narrative of Pygmalion, who falls in love with his own creation, a beautiful statue. This myth, however – thanks to Aphrodite's mercy on the unfortunate lover – ends happily, with the victorious fulfilment of narcissistic desire. The transformation is from death to life, and not the other way round, as in Acis's case: the statue is brought to life by the goddess, and the artist can be united in his lifetime with his own alienated mirror-image (Ovid X 243–97). What is hidden by both the painting and the Galatea narratives is the tragic longing determining the fate of Narcissus in the more archetypal version: his frustrated desire to be united with his perfect image and his deathly fear of the same union, which can be resolved only in death. What is equally clear, though, is that Stavrogin's version of the Golden Age involves the Narcissus myth from the moment of its emergence and thus from now on the term should refer to this specific amalgam of the otherwise contradictory mythical narratives.

This implicit evocation of the narcissistic paradigm of subjectivity turns critical attention to phenomena related to it in "Stavrogin's Confession." Thus, in the chapter "At Tikhon's" one can identify a special mixture of the literary traditions of the confessional genre, the confessional situation and the foreshadowing of the psychoanalytic situation. From the point of view of psychoanalytic literary criticism these components are related to the paradigm of the myth of Narcissus through such links as psychological narcissism (Holmes passim), the mirror stage (Lacan, „The Mirror Stage" passim) and the coming into being of the subject through its entry into the Symbolic (cf. Kristeva, „Nárcisz: az újfajta téboly" 51–2; Sarup 106; Wilden 172). The mirror and its metaphors have become the emblematic key metaphors of the myth and its versions in psychoanalytic discourse. And these are the metaphors which play a crucial structural role not only in "Stavrogin's Confession" but also in the entire text of the *Devils*. In the confessional situation Stavrogin appears as Narcissus

looking at his own image in the mirror of the text he himself has created. Nevertheless, similarly to the beautiful youth, he must realise that the process of mirroring is infinite, the narrative of his identity can be terminated only by death. The madness of chiasmus and the death wish, which paradoxically appears as the only way to fixing his identity, are the only two (or rather one?) options left open by his confession, thus foreshadowing the resolution of the entire novel.

Narcissus' Confessions

The special form of the "confession" in the strict sense of the word is related to three issues to be interpreted within the tradition of confessional literature: the implications of the confession as a printed "political pamphlet" (460); its stylistic features, including orthography; and the alternation of shame and exhibitionism.

The format of the pamphlet is incongruous with the communicative situation of either the sacramental or the literary confession[6], since, on the one hand, it places the confession in a political context, on the other hand, the very fact of printing undermines the spontaneity which is characteristic of oral confessions and whose illusion confessional literature strives to recreate with its special stylistic features (cf. S. Horváth 282). The narrator's introduction makes the impression that Stavrogin's text concerns the whole nation and it is so revolutionary that it must be hidden from the police:

> The print was indeed foreign – three small sheets of ordinary writing-paper, closely printed and stitched together. It must have been published secretly at some Russian printing press abroad, and at first glance the pages closely resembled a political pamphlet. The heading read: 'From Stavrogin'. (460)

The very heading implies partly that the writing is the embodiment of Stavrogin's identity, partly that his personality is known nationwide and therefore his name is a sufficient title. As a result, similarly to the only other pamphlet in the novel, "The Noble Character" (371–2), which is Peter Verkhovensky's self-created enlargement of his insignificant personality (402), "Stavrogin's Confession" must be treated with some irony. Another problem related to the issue of identity also emerges from the temporal distance between the moments of its writing, printing and reading: the Stavrogin giving the confession to Tikhon and promising its publication cannot be identical with the author of the text, just as the author cannot be the same as the subject reflected in

[6] On the phenomenology of the sacramental confession cf. (Riceour 3–24).

the narrative (Lacan, "The Insistence" 312; cf. Žižek "The Truth Arises from Misrecognition" passim). Though the pamphlet is an attempt to define Stavrogin's identity in a narrative with political significance, its form achieves exactly the opposite result.

Since the subject emerges as a result of the entry into the Symbolic, through language, the linguistic features of the confession are of outstanding significance. The narrator's introduction highlights two related aspects, orthography and stylistics:

> I shall insert this document verbatim in the chronicle. […] I've allowed myself to correct only the rather numerous spelling errors, some indeed quite surprising, since the author was and educated man after all, and even well read (relatively speaking, of course). I've made no changes in the style, in spite of irregularities and even some obscurities. In any case it's perfectly clear that the author was above all not a man of letters. (460)

Concerning the spelling errors, which are nothing but the "slips of the tongue" of the unconscious (cf. Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* 158–68), their correction means that the narrator, though he promises to relate the confession "to the letter" ["буквально" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 266)], ultimately still rewrites Stavrogin's only "authentic" self-definition. As for the stylistic features, the narrator here testifies to surprising blindness himself, since they reveal that "the author *was* above all a man of letters". Both Leonid Grossman and Yeleazar Meletinsky analyse Stavrogin's confession as an excellent specimen of the tradition of confessional literature, clearly in the wake of Rousseau. While Grossman emphasises the stylistic similarities (Гроссман 609–13) and Meletinsky the psychological ones (Мелетинский 61), including the reminiscence of some elements of the plot of the *Confessions*, neither of them relate these features to Stavrogin's identity. Stavrogin actually points out the literary model he follows by a direct reference and thereby emphasises that his text is a stylisation: "Having indulged until the age of sixteen with unusual immoderation in the vice to which Jean-Jacques Rousseau confessed, I ceased doing so at the age of seventeen, just as soon as I so decided" (462–3). The sentence reveals not only the similarity of a seemingly redundant detail of character, but also a more significant similarity of the narrative strategy of hiding and revealing applied in the two confessions: since Stavrogin still finds the practice of adolescent masturbation unnameable, he sends his readers to the famous literary forerunner, who actually also substitutes it with euphemisms (Rousseau III). The conscious following of Rousseau's model means that Stavrogin reads himself in the context of an already existing literary text, and by producing a stylisation as the only authentic text of his identity he actually writes

himself "into" Rousseau's text. His "confession" is only one of his potential "literary roles" (Szilárd 31–2), which he narcissistically performs for himself, his imaginary audience and Tikhon[7].

The similarities of "Stavrogin's Confession" and Rousseau's *Confessions*, especially the parallels between the scenes of stealing the penknife and the ribbon (Мелетинский 61; cf. Jones 149–64), call attention to the dialectic of hiding and revealing, that is, shame and exhibitionism, so central in the "Rousseau-like role". Paul de Man points out two kinds of desire and two kinds of shame behind Rousseau's "excuses" for his false charges against Marion: "As the ribbon changes hands it traces a circuit leading to the exposure of a hidden, censored desire" (*Allegories of Reading* 283). The first, most obvious one is related to possession, Rousseau's desire for Marion. The second, more important one is the shameful "exposure of the desire to expose oneself" (*Allegories* 285), which actually generates the text – and more and more text:

> The more there is to expose, the more there is to be ashamed of; the more resistance to exposure, the more satisfying the scene, and especially, the more satisfying and eloquent the belated revelation, in the later narrative, of the inability to reveal. This desire is truly shameful, for it suggests that Marion was destroyed, not for the sake of Rousseau's saving face […] but merely in order to provide him with a stage on which to parade his disgrace […]. (de Man, *Allegories* 285–6)

In "Stavrogin's Confession" the story of the penknife and Matryosha's punishment is also centred on shame and desire, which is the more significant because it is a metaphorical foreshadowing of the scenes of her seduction and following suicide. There are, however, at least two major differences. On the one hand, Stavrogin is clearly conscious of his desire to create a shameful situation, he admits that he was even willing to lie in order to do so: "It occurred to me at once not to announce the discovery so the girl would be given a beating" (462).While telling how the girl suffered her punishment without a cry (461), he apparently digresses to relate how much pleasure he finds in shame, in "utterly disgraceful, immeasurably humiliating, despicable […] situation[s]" (462), revealing an ambivalent mixture of feelings which amounts to abjection of the self (cf. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 19–20). It is only then, that partly projecting his own feelings on Matryosha, he interprets her silence as a sign of her shame: "she must have felt some disgrace at having been punished that way with me there; she hadn't screamed when she was hit, only sobbed, no doubt because I

[7] Mikhail Bakhtin also points out, that Tikhon's words reveal his recognition of the dialogic nature of "Stavrogin's Confession", that is, that he has created his text for his imaginary would-be audience (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 244). For a thorough analysis of the role of the Rousseau intertext in "Stavrogin's Confession" cf. (S. Horváth passim).

was standing there watching it all. But like a child she blamed only herself for her disgrace" (463). Since the phallic symbolism of the penknife (cf. Freud, *The Interpretation* 354) defines the scene as a foreshadowing of Matryosha's seduction and suicide, the same motivation can be analogically applied to her silence and self-inflicted punishment then. Just like Marion, she has to be destroyed – and much more literally than the object of Rousseau's desire – so that a desire for shameful exposure should be fulfilled, but Stavrogin exposes even this desire consciously.

On the other hand, as opposed to Rousseau, Stavrogin makes no "excuses" for his crime; on the contrary, he wants to avoid all appearances of repentance and a need for absolution which could effect the forgetting of his crime. He is rather afraid of the possibility that his reader might find some fatal extenuative for him – like temporary madness in the case of his misdoings in his hometown – which would annihilate his crime and give it to oblivion, together with him. Since the only evidence of the crime is his confession, he stubbornly repeats his claims of sanity: he needs his crime to make his only "authentic" story narratable at all (cf. P. Brooks, *Reading* 108), so that this crime acquiring mythic dimensions through the interpretative context of the Golden Age should define his identity. In his case the mechanism of shame is based on the oscillation of his openly declared desire for exposure as such, including the exposure of crime and the annihilation of this crime resulting in the exposure of nothing. His utter shame would be the disintegration of his textual image – a mere appearance – in the moment of revelation, just like the disappearance of Narcissus' reflection in the water.

Narcissus, the Ridiculous Automaton

The emphatic literariness of "Stavrogin's Confession" makes it possible to read it as the dialogue of the author and his experimental – but most expert – audience, in which both the motivation of writing and the reaction of the reader are centred on narcissism, shame and laughter. Tikhon draws attention to Stavrogin's paradoxical relationship to laughter, which also gives rise to the question of how a comic reading of Stavrogin's story is possible. He reveals Stavrogin's own self-reflexive reading strategy by giving a "comic" reading of his confession, which is problematic because "Stavrogin sometimes appears 'ridiculous' only for himself, and not for the other characters of the novel or for the reader; for the latter he actually appears as a fully tragic hero" (Гессен 669). Using Bakhtin's reading and Bergson's theory of laughter as reference points, I will demonstrate how perfectly Stavrogin's "comic" image complies with the concept of Narcissus as an *automaton*, a mechanical figure caught up in the eternal repetition of frustration (Kochhar-Lindgren 44; cf. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts* 53–64). His self-irony is also most fitting: Kristeva

suggests that in the narcissistic crisis laughter is a device of transposing the abject so that the subject can continue its wandering (*Powers* 7).

Bakhtin draws attention to the facts that Tikhon not only recognises the dialogic nature of the confession, but also makes Stavrogin realise that shame – the shame of repentance (475) – and his fear of being laughed at hinder him from publishing the document and even if he does publish it, might make his plans fail (cf. *Problems* 242–6). Tikhon actually does much more than realising the heightened self-reflexive nature of the dialogic confession: he practically charges Stavrogin with narcissism. His claim that Stavrogin writes "as if [he] revels in [his] own psychology" (475) („вы как бы любуетесь психологией вашею" [Достоевский, *Бесы* 276]) contains the reflexive verb любоваться–revel, which is etymologically related to the verb любить–love. Thus it also implies that he sees Stavrogin as Narcissus in love with his own psychology – his own self. Tikhon, behaving in a truly critical manner, proceeds to analyse the form and contents of the confession in terms of aesthetics and becomes the experimental reader on whom Stavrogin provokes the potential reaction of his confession and who realises his most hidden fear, the fear of being seen as the laughingstock of people:

> 'Enough. Show me precisely how I appear ridiculous in my manuscript. I know, but I'd like you to show me. And tell me very cynically […].'
>
> 'Even the form you cast your great penance in has something ridiculous about it. […]'
>
> 'So you think what's ridiculous is just in the form, in the style?' Stavrogin insisted.
>
> 'And in the substance. The ugliness will kill it,' Tikhon whispered, lowering his eyes.
>
> 'What? The ugliness? What ugliness?'
>
> 'Of the crime. There are genuinely ugly crimes. Crimes, whatever they are, the more blood and horror, the more impressive they are, the more they are, so to speak, picturesque. But there are crimes that are shameful and infamous beyond any horror, so to speak, too inelegant.' (478)

As an amateur theoretic of the comic, Tikhon traces the source of ridiculousness in the "ugliness" („некрасивость" [Достоевский, *Бесы* 278]) of the crime, that is, he expresses it as the lack of both aesthetic and moral beauty, thereby inflicting a truly narcissistic wound on Stavrogin. The emphasis is finally transposed on the aesthetic aspect of the crime with the use of the adjective "picturesque", which puts appearance, the (painted) picture in the centre of attention. The crime and the text of the confession, which turns this crime into

the narrative of Stavrogin's identity, metaphorically become Stavrogin's ugly (mirror) images, and since he is moved by "the aesthetic drive" (Janion 129; cf. Szilárd 23–4) the implication of the lack of beauty has an utterly destructive power. Tikhon, as if giving a (deconstructive) critical interpretation of the confession within the novel, reveals Stavrogin's narcissistic fear of being shattered by laughter, which is the exact opposite of his open claims of finding pleasure in becoming the laughingstock of people (462).

Bakhtin's comments on the comic aspect of Stavrogin's character are highly revealing because they already focus on the mechanical repetition related to narcissistic desire – in fact, to the narcissistic wound. Bakhtin points out that though Stavrogin seems to be anything but comic, his situation still has much in common with that of the underground man, who, while he claims that he has no need for other people's attention, does everything to attract that very attention (*Problems* 244–5). So, if after all Stavrogin *is* comic it is the result of a narcissistic wound. This realisation leads to extreme self-irony in his case, a form of "reduced" laughter, whose destructive nature is expressed even on the level of metaphors: in Stavrogin's words, "Well, forgive my stupid joke […] since last night I've really felt like laughing all the time, a great deal, without stopping, for a long time, a great deal. It's as if I were infected with laughter…" (310). The English "infected" can only partly convey the lethal implications of the Russian original, "заряжен" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 183), which literally means being charged like a weapon: Stavrogin's laughter is destructive and suicidal. His vertiginous, unstoppable irony threatens with madness by undermining definite meanings and offers only death as a way out.

From Bergson's definitions of the comic the notions of the puppet, the deformed body, and the anticlimax seem to be applicable to Stavrogin's story. Firstly, the comic nature of automatism and mechanic movements, such as those of a puppet (Bergson Ch. I Part IV) are associated by the repeated references to Stavrogin as a death-mask or a wax figure. Secondly, just like his indifference and immorality, these "deficiencies" cause his metaphorical deformity, however beautiful he otherwise is, and Bergson claims that the deformed – and ugly – body is one of the most frequent sources of the comic (Bergson Ch. I Part III). The metaphor of the cripple appears in Stavrogin's printed confession. As he claims, when he "conceived the idea of crippling [his] life" (470), he did so by literalising the figurative expression and realising the morbid pun in a marriage with Marya Timofeevna – a cripple[8]. In addition, both Tikhon and Stavrogin

[8] This metaphor is carried on in the novel to characterise his other relationships with women. Thus, his "affair" with Darya Pavlovna is repeatedly compared to the relationship of a nurse and her patient. As Stavrogin says, "you seem to be interested in me the way some elderly nurses for some reason take a greater interest in one particular patient relative to the others, or, more like it, the way some God-fearing old ladies who love to attend funerals find certain corpses more attractive than others" (309). Liza, who refuses to undertake this role of a nurse (cf. Szilárd 26)

characterise the latter's life as basically anticlimactic, which, relying on Kant, without the actual use of the term Bergson also defines as one possible source of laughter, because it involves "a great effort for a result that is nil" (Bergson Ch. II Part I). Tikhon sees in Stavrogin's crime a "great […] amount of idle energy intentionally wasted on filth" (475) and the dashed hopes of potential greatness because his efforts took the wrong direction[9]. All in all, in the Bergsonian context Stavrogin is both an indifferent spectator of the performance of his own life[10], and happens to play the main part in it – not that of the potential hero fulfilling great expectations, but that of the both physically and mentally deformed lifeless petty puppet.

This image goes well with Gray Kochhar-Lindgren's description of Narcissus as a Lacanian *automaton*, caught up in the infinite repetition of his own frustrated desire (44). His self-irony is part and parcel of this mechanical repetition: it distances him from the desired image by shattering it, and thus makes redrawing the image – Narcissus's further vegetation through empty speech – possible. His self-ironical laughter helps Narcissus, the *automaton*, to avoid accidentally bumping into the truth (Tuché) about himself, and thus to live on. But he can never allow others to laugh at him. And indeed, the Stavrogin puppet is a helpless *automaton* driven by most unextraordinary desires. As Tikhon points out:

> As for the crime itself, many other people sin the same way, but they live in peace and harmony with their consciences, regarding crimes of that sort as inevitable youthful peccadilloes. There are even elders of the church who sin the same way, even quite comfortably, frivolously. The whole world is filled with these horrors. (475–6)

The unextraordinariness of Stavrogin's desires and crimes is perfectly exemplified by Matryosha's beating. The scene is actually nothing but the realisation of a most common wish-fulfilment fantasy described by Freud, in which "a child is being beaten" ("'A Child is Being Beaten'" passim). It gives options for multiple identifications with different roles and consequently is a source for both sadistic and masochistic pleasures, in which hidden incestuous and other sexual desires are fulfilled (cf. Easthope 127–129). Stavrogin, though

concretises Stavrogin's "illness" through metaphors of physical deformity: "Perhaps I really will become a nurse if I don't manage to die this very day; but if so, it won't be to nurse you, even though you deserve a nurse as much as any creature lacking arms and legs" (593).

[9] In his letter to Darya Pavlovna Stavrogin repeats the same idea when he himself characterises all his deeds as "trivial" (754) ("мелко" [Достоевский, *Бесы* 432]), which, especially in an emphatic opposition to "magnanimity" (754), refers to both ordinariness and literal smallness.

[10] Cf. Paul de Man's explication of Baudelaire's interpretation of the comic in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" (*Blindness and Insight* 211–17).

he openly takes the most sexualised position of the spectator (cf. Easthope 128), in his explication of the characters' motivation reveals his emotional identification with both the ashamed girl, and the mother with an irrational desire for an excuse to punish the girl for anything. Since the scene is also the metaphorical foreshadowing of the seduction and the girl's suicide, the motivations behind it can be analogically applied to those crucial elements of the narrative of Stavrogin's identity. The same hyperconsciousness resulting from multiple identifications also characterises Stavrogin on his watch during the girl's suicide: though he obviously is a spectator of the scene, he partly identifies with the girl, and also watches himself as a spectator. Consequently his perverted pleasure has sadistic, masochistic and narcissistic components, as well. Though Stavrogin stubbornly claims that he can perfectly control himself, that is, he is able to repress his desires, in these scenes he actually does appear as their plaything. What is more, since these desires seem to be shared by most people, only others can handle them more effectively, Stavrogin becomes "ridiculous" and "comic" in his own eyes not only because he is an *automaton* driven by desire but also because his conscience tortures him.

In sum, laughter threatens Stavrogin with annihilating his crime and/or his identity, that is, with metaphorical death. Laughter is, on the one hand, desirable and can be spoken about: it is liberating and includes the component of rebirth. It promises, similarly to Narcissus' death, the hope of finding his "true" identity by being unified with his admired image in the mirror (Kristeva, "Nárcisz" 55–8). This might be the reason for Kristeva's claim that Stavrogin is saved from being totally abject by his narcissism and laughter (*Powers* 19). On the other hand, his fear of laughter (Fehér 213–14), of being comic is an unspeakable part of Stavrogin's shame: he is afraid that laughter annihilates his crime and identity without any chance of rebirth, while eternalising the split in his consciousness and the contemplation of his own desired but unreachable mirror image it makes him living dead. As Maria Janion points out, paradoxically "being comic and ridiculous is both Stavrogin's greatest temptation and greatest fear" (123). He makes use of the confessional situation to become ridiculous and to escape laughter at the same time, since the confessor cannot laugh: Tikhon explains why Stavrogin's story is ridiculous without actually laughing at it. The oscillation between the desire for laughter and the fear of laughter results in the paradoxical confessional situation which combines speech and silence, writing and reading, laughter and its absence and, last but not least, literary and unliterary texts.

Narcissus in Analysis

Stavrogin and Tikhon's dialogue, like all confessions, can be interpreted in the context of the psychoanalytic situation (cf. P. Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*

35), which puts such elements in the centre of attention as the roles of the analyst and analysand, the issue of transference and the mirror with its metaphors. The latter relates the issue directly to the notions of narcissism. Their analysis reveals that the confession given in the frame of the confessional situation and the narratives included in it function as an infinite labyrinth of mirrors, which results in constant shifts of meaning in Stavrogin's narrative of his identity and ultimately in the phenomenon of chiasmus.

"Stavrogin's Confession" includes all the possible combinations of the roles of analyst and analysand played in the analytic situation. While his "voluntary" confession, the pamphlet handed over to Tikhon, casts the role of the analysand on Stavrogin, his much more interesting "involuntary" confession[11] expressed by his behaviour in the confessional situation reveals his actual rejection of the analysis:

> 'Listen, I don't like spies and psychologists, at least not the kind who pry into my soul. I don't invite anyone into my soul; I don't need any help; I can get along on my own. […] I want you to know that I won't reveal anything to you, no secret all, because I have no need of you whatsoever.' (459)

While Stavrogin rejects the analysand's role, the form of the confession makes it possible for him to usurp the analyst's position, in relation to both himself and Tikhon. On the one hand, by objectifying his confession in a printed document, Stavrogin deprives it of all its metacommunicative elements and makes his textualised identity the object of their common analysis. On the other hand, relying on Tikhon's analytic comments he starts to analyse Tikhon himself. In addition, Tikhon shows surprising similarities with Stavrogin: they both assign outstanding significance to the same Biblical quote and they are both able to give a comic reading of the confession. All in all, their mutual analysis and absolution and their mirror-like reflection of each other undermine the originally hierarchical power positions of the confessional/analytic situation and by subverting any authoritative interpretation prevent the closure of the potential meanings of the text.

Transference, the emotional relationship characteristic of both confessional and analytic situations (P. Brooks, *Troubling* 35), appears in Stavrogin's transferring all his affection towards his missing father, both biological and symbolic, on Tikhon, with all the ambivalences typical of this complex phenomenon. The fact that Stavrogin, behaving like all confessants and analysands, repeats a traumatic childhood experience and casts the role of a

[11] On the differentiation of "voluntary" and "involuntary" confession and the importance of the latter cf. (P. Brooks, *Troubling* 52–3).

parent on the analyst thereby hindering the analysis itself (cf. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* 240–46), is shown by his calling Tikhon "Father" twice at the end of his confession (482). The metaphorical sense of the apostrophe is not neutralised by Tikhon's priesthood, because if Stavrogin took it seriously, he would call him "Father" from the beginning of their dialogue. The elements of this ambivalent and complex emotional relationship are the simultaneous declaration and negation of Stavrogin's love, the fulfilment and rejection of Tikhon's presumable expectations, the casting of the roles of both the forgiving and the punishing father on Tikhon and finally the simultaneous declaration and negation of Stavrogin's need for him. First, Stavrogin flatly declares that he "likes Tikhon very much" (458), then goes back on his word and by calling him a psychologist and a spy (459) he indirectly expresses his hatred for him. Second, Stavrogin refuses to reveal any of his secrets exactly because he supposes that this is what Tikhon expects him to do (459), and then a couple of sentences later he hands him over his pamphlet. Third, Stavrogin conforms to Tikhon's assumable expectations with his words about absolution and his desire to forgive himself and at the same time casts the role of the forgiving father on Tikhon, which corresponds to the traditions of sacramental confession acting out the reacceptance of the repentant child into parental love through absolution (P. Brooks, *Troubling* 46). At the same time Stavrogin almost forces Tikhon to show him in a ridiculous light and thereby to act out the role of the judging and punishing father.

All these ambivalences gain a special importance with respect to Tikhon as a potential avatar of the Symbolic Father, an embodiment of Law and Language (cf. Lacan, *The Language* 23) in Stavrogin's eyes. Thus their dialogue metaphorically re-enacts the moment of the entry into the Symbolic, the moment of the emergence of the par excellence speaking subject, which at the same time is the annihilation of the transgressive incestuous symbiotic relationship with the mother. Tikhon's affinity to Language is exemplified by his stylistic analysis of the confession, while his role as the Law is illustrated by his passing judgment on Stavrogin with the words of the Bible and becoming the voice of sacred divine law. It is according to his role as the Law restricting the incestuous desires of the child that Tikhon points out the transgressive unity of mother and son, Stavrogin's "strong, inner, spiritual likeness" to his mother (454). Stavrogin refuses the idea "growing anxious again for no reason and insisting *excessively* without knowing why" (454, emphasis added), and it is this very disproportioned emotional reaction that implies the closeness of the neurotic nucleus. The identification Tikhon suggests is unacceptable because it means remaining outside the Symbolic and therefore the annihilation of any identity.

Consequently, Stavrogin and Tikhon's dialogue with the subversion of the analyst's power position, with the transference of the ambivalent feelings for the father on Tikhon and with the probing of the limits of language itself so apparent

in the style of the confession becomes a simultaneous acceptance and rejection of the power of the Father. The moment of acceptance is necessary, since the subject ceases to exist outside Language and even transgression only makes sense because of the existence of the Law. However, "in the world of the *Devils* the role of the father is unplayable" (Szilárd 27): Tikhon ultimately does not, cannot undertake the role of the father, but sends Stavrogin on to an elder. This visit eventually does not take place, the events of the novel, as Tikhon prophetically foresees, are heading for Stavrogin's unavoidable catastrophe: the crucial identification with the Symbolic Father is impossible, Stavrogin returns to silence after the confession, then finally leaves the realm of Language and Law[12].

Narcissus's Mirrors

Since in *Devils* the identification with the Symbolic Father and thus the overcoming of the dialectics of "to be or not to be" in the phase of primary narcissism (cf. Lacan, "The Mirror Stage" 68; Boothby 21–46) proves to be impossible for Stavrogin, the text of the confession – and of the entire novel – becomes a labyrinth of metaphorical mirrors. These mirrors show Stavrogin's alienated ego ideals, with whom he has a most ambivalent relationship: his feelings are characterised by a desire of both union and aggressive destruction at the same time. Strangely enough, actual mirrors are of little importance in the novel: playing the peacock in front of the looking-glass is allowed only to such half-comic characters as Stepan Trofimovich. The richer the novel is in metaphorical mirrors, out of which the confession highlights the text-within-the-text, the painting (work of art), the frame, the look and voyeurism (the eye), the window and the double[13]. The framed confession is structured according to the principle of the text-within-the-text in several ways and includes narratives mirroring each other which are organised by different metaphors of the mirror. The interpretation of these metaphors is only possible within their own context, therefore the present analysis reveals their reoccurrence through the individual analysis of the narratives. The apparently undividable inner nucleus of the framed narratives is Stavrogin's dream, which pretends to have the interpretative status of the sacred text and as such, can serve as the basis of a reading directed "outwards" and ending with the interpretation of the frame. Undermining this apparently linear reading, the metaphorical mirrors call attention to the interminable nature of not only analysis, but also of narrative identity (P.

[12] This reading of the dialogue is fairly consistent with my forthcoming analysis of Tikhon and Stavrogin's interaction in terms of a specifically narcissistic transference, a failed attempt at idealising the omnipotent object of love (cf. Kohut 37–73).

[13] On most of these as traditional metaphors of the mirror cf. (Beke 92).

Brooks, *Troubling* 53) and their effect is rather similar to Lévy-Strauss's metaphorical room of mirrors representing mythical thinking (Gould 107).

The dream forming the kernel of the confession does not close the phenomena of text-within-the-text and mirroring but rather makes them infinite with its metaphors. The vision of the Golden Age is embedded in multiple frames: those of the confessional situation, the chronicler's short introduction, the text of the confession, within that the narrative of Stavrogin's journey and finally the dream situation separating the vision from fictional reality. The apparent closure created by the myth, however, is undermined by several phenomena: on the one hand, frames themselves are blurred, on the other hand, the framed vision itself is a picture and a mirror, while picture and frame exchange positions.

Firstly, the undermining of boundaries plays a crucial role in the narrative of the vision, since the dream situation in itself embodies the passage between life and death and the conscious and the unconscious, while Stavrogin also emphasises that his dream seemed to be reality and it apparently continued in reality. By connecting the outside and the inside, the present and the past, the natural and the apocalyptic worlds the metaphor of the rays of the setting sun washes away spatial and temporal boundaries[14]. The dream of the Golden Age is inseparable from Matryosha's vision, which also undermines the binary oppositions of reality and imagination, life and death and the present and the past. Secondly, the myth of the Golden Age is also a picture transmitted through several reflections. The literary source of the myth, maybe originating in the collective unconscious (cf. Kirk 273–9), is the work of Hesiod. In Stavrogin's consciousness an actual painting, Claude Lorrain's *Acis and Galatea* is reflected as the image of this myth. However, the myth surfaces from his unconscious – triggered by the painting – to become an extended narrative. In addition, this mythic narrative, though it appears to be the nucleus of the confession, actually inverts hierarchical and spatial positions and plays the role of its external interpretative framework. This mythic interpretation of Stavrogin's identity, in its turn, with its strong ethical strain through the intricate meanings of the metaphor of the sun(light) undermines the binary opposition of ethics and aesthetics embodied in the perfect beauty of the Golden Age. First the rays come to signify the eye of God, divine wisdom[15], the luminous mirror[16] shedding light on the narrative of Stavrogin's identity, which appears as "a very small spot"

[14] Critics ever since Mikhail Bakhtin have called attention to the significant moments of passage, transgressing boundaries in Dostoevsky's texts – among them in Stavrogin's confession. For the latest interpretations cf. (S. Horváth 286; Kroó "From Plato's Myth of the Golden Age" 372).

[15] On the metaphorical relationship of the eye and the (sun)god cf. (Токарев et al. II/461).

[16] Ethnography treats the sun, the eye and the mirror as metaphors, while the latter two are seen as luminous (Virág 47–8).

(472), takes the form of the “tiny red spider” (472), then evolves into Matryosha’s vision leading to the emergence of the confession. Paradoxically, the sun is also a metaphor of Stavrogin’s identity, since he appears as the source and spectator of the dream, that is, as an eye/mirror both reflecting light and pretending to be its source. Though Stavrogin is forced to accept Matryosha’s story as the narrative of his “real” identity, the vision of the Golden Age keeps haunting him as the narrative of his desire for another alienated identity, lost forever in the moment of the fall. Thus the sacred text of the myth fulfils its interpretative function rather by opening up the potential closures of interpretation, by undermining binary oppositions and including metaphorical shifts and mirror-like inversions.

The three other narratives included in the confession appear as variations on some repeated motifs and thus mirror each other. Since the stories of Stavrogin’s theft and marriage emphasise some elements of the most elaborated narrative of Matryosha’s story, in itself structured on gradation and repetition, the narratives mutually read each other. The myth of the Golden Age retrospectively motivates the action gratuite apparent in all these narratives, that is, makes the narrative of identity transmittable and readable by plotting out its arbitrary metaphorical relationships as metonymies, logical connections in hindsight, reading from the end, from the moment of death (cf. P. Brooks, *Reading* 10–24). In Stavrogin’s reading it transforms Matryosha’s narrative into a mythical story of origins, the element closest to the neurotic nucleus and primal repression which can be revealed. Mythical thinking, magic causation come to dominate the narratives, which is indicated by the metaphorical connection of Matryosha’s three punishments and by the repetition of the magic number three in all Stavrogin’s deeds. This mythic interpretation is made necessary and possible by two obvious gaps in the narrative which make the unspeakable crimes of sexuality and death – and thus Stavrogin’s identity – a mystery to be solved for him.

Stavrogin fills the gap left by unspeakable sexuality with three metaphors which are interpretable in the context of his marriage. The description of the seduction scene is quite similar to the – missing – representation of Matryosha’s dead body in that it leaves the central element untold: after describing Matryosha’s kisses and “rapture” Stavrogin starts a new paragraph and claims that “When it all was over she was very embarrassed” (465). He first borrows Matryosha’s metaphor of “killing God” (465) to fill this gap, which supports his own mythic-metaphysical reading. He applies the second metaphor, “immense abomination” (465) („беспредельное безобразие” [Достоевский, *Бесы* 270]) to it in the elaboration of this interpretation. The Russian original of the expression contains the noun “образ”, meaning picture, image, shape, (religious) icon, with a privative suffix: Stavrogin’s deed is literally shape-less, icon-less, existing without an archetype created by God, it combines the aesthetic and ethic senses of ugliness. This reading is underpinned by the almost exact return of the

word in connection with his marriage: he wants to marry Marya Timofeevna, because "It was impossible to imagine anything more hideous" (470), that is, „Безобранее нельзя было вообразить ничего" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 273). The Russian adjective, depending on the stress, means both ugly, revolting and unpoetic, shapeless, and repeats the combination of aesthetic and ethic censure (cf. Jackson 37; Фришман 584). The third metaphor establishes a relationship of crime and punishment following the law of talion between Matryosha's story and Stavrogin's marriage. When he "conceived the idea of crippling [his] life" (470) („искалечить жизнь" [Достоевский, *Бесы* 273]), and married Marya Timofeevna, carrying on the metaphor of shape-lessness he executed his own symbolic mutilation for life, which is a part of the rites of passage and a memento of the descent to the underworld included in them (cf. Eliade 181–8). The crime to this punishment is identified by the other meaning of the Russian verbs калечить–искалечить, which is to corrupt morally: after "corrupting", "crippling" the child, as if to point out the causal relationship, Stavrogin inflicts the same sentence on himself. He does the same as Matryosha, who declares herself abject by committing suicide in "a tiny storeroom, no bigger than a chicken coop, *next to the lavatory*" (468, emphasis added) and executes the mythic punishment of expulsion from the human community on herself. Thus the reading reflected by the narrative of Stavrogin's marriage elaborates the mythic reading shaped by the vision of the Golden Age, according to which Matryosha's story is the moment of mythic fall, the metaphysical crime committed against God, for which the sinner should be punished eternally.

The other gap, left by death, draws attention to the motif of voyeurism, which is a structuring principle in Stavrogin's thefts. Since in the scene of Matryosha's suicide Stavrogin appears as a passive voyeur peeping through doors, windows and gaps, and waiting for her death so that he could fulfil his desire, the metaphor of the eye plays a crucial role here. It is also a structuring principle both in the story of the penknife and the stealing of the civil servant's salary, which is clearly motivated by Stavrogin's pleasure gained from his image reflected in the helpless victim's eyes: "Afterwards I enjoyed meeting his eye a few times in the corridor" (464). Stavrogin's desire that as a voyeur he could see himself in the eyes of the other (the Other), from a perspective otherwise inaccessible for him (cf. Easthope 153) is finally fulfilled in the moment of the epiphany, when, as the metaphors of the sun–eye and small spot–tiny red spider show, he is present both as the beholder and the person looked at. In comparison with that, his watch during Matryosha's suicide, which the vision of the Golden Age repeats metaphorically, is ominously bathetic: Stavrogin's attempt to cross the mythic boundary of the sacred space of hierophany (cf. Eliade 14-28) by committing a crime fails to become an epiphany, partly because he fails to notice the golden rays of the sun then, partly because he forgets – represses – the whole scene. It is an incomplete story which he unconsciously and compulsively

repeats to achieve completion and make the traumatic event conscious (cf. Freud, "Remembering" passim) in his other attempts to experience a moment of "insight": in his "all-night service at Mount Athos", his visit to Egypt and Switzerland, his course sat through in Göttingen (470). The story only seems to become complete with the vision of Matryosha standing at his door and shaking her fist at him, but even that image is deceptive: depending on the stress it is both ви́дение és виде́ние (Достоевский, *Бесы* 274), seeing and envisioning, a scene undermining binary oppositions instead of fixing meanings. What it makes obvious, though, is that Stavrogin keeps looking at his own inverted mirror image, his anima (cf. Jung 149–62) in Matryosha: while he is constantly searching for his own image in the other, he cannot escape his own reflection embodied in Matryosha, which he finds both pleasurable and disgusting. Their story repeats that of Narcissus and Echo (Holmes 22–4; cf. Ovid III 339–508). All in all, Stavrogin's voyeurism and narcissism transports Matryosha's narrative from the paradigm of ethics into those of epistemology and ontology, the problematic of his identity and selfhood becomes an ontological issue at this point.

The confessional situation framing the text of the printed confession repeats the metaphors of the text-within-the text, the double and the look (eye). The two Biblical quotations in the confessional situation form texts-within-the-text apparently with a similarly sacred interpretative function as the myth of the Golden Age and also inspiring a metaphorical reading of the narrative(s). Though both quotes repeat the ethical censure of Stavrogin's deeds preceding and following the confession, respectively – "I will spue thee out of my mouth" (458) and "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones" (479) – their authoritative status is undermined by the fact that both of them are introduced by Stavrogin himself and thus they obviously reflect his own reading. The motif of the double (shadow) appears in Stavrogin's visions of the devil and in his problematic relationship with Tikhon himself. On the one hand, Stavrogin's devil fits perfectly well into his mythical interpretation of the narrative of his identity: itself an element of mythical thinking (Токарев et al. II/215–17), with its nightly visits starting approximately at the time of Stavrogin's vision of the Golden Age, "[a]bout a year" (455) before the confession, this "apparition" (455) forms an antithesis of the Saturnine vision and as such, it is a demonic epiphany (cf. Frye, *Anatomy* 223). On the other hand, Stavrogin tries to rationalise his visions by interpreting the devil as his double – "It's all myself in different aspects, nothing more" (455) – but then the result is such an image of himself as "a disgusting, scrofulous little devil with a head cold, one of the failures" (310), which can result from the comic reading of his mythic fall.

In contrast, Tikhon and Stavrogin show so many similarities in the confessional situation and their relationship is characterised by mirroring so much that it is possible to treat them as doubles (cf. Криницын 220–22). This phenomenon can

explain partly their constant competition for the analyst's role, partly Tikhon's inability to overcome mirroring and to steer the confession/analysis to a successful end by getting beyond the phase of transference. The two doubles appearing in the confessional situation correspond to the shadow and the wise man (cf. Jung 139–62), though the latter role, as mentioned above, is unplayable in the world of the *Devils*. The motif of voyeurism and the metaphor of the eye appear in the confessional situation as the rejection of Tikhon's look and the fixing look of Stavrogin's imaginary would-be audience. As Bakhtin points out, Stavrogin's attitude to the look of others is almost comically ambivalent (*Problems* 244–5), which also becomes apparent in this situation. While he declares to Tikhon that "I have no need of you whatsoever" (459), Tikhon correctly recognises that the confession is actually a call for the others' attention with its "Let them look at me" (475). Simultaneously, Stavrogin himself exists only as a look: "how will you look at them?" (475). All in all, in the confessional situation the epistemological and ontological issues focussed in Matryosha's narrative are totalised in the vision of the other – the Other – as text, a mirror image and a look, thereby revealing the myth of Narcissus as the fundamental narrative of Stavrogin's identity.

Consequently, the myths of the Golden Age and Narcissus both have an interpretative and – via their central metaphors – a structuring function in the text of the confession. Based on mythical thinking, this fact makes the creation and reading of narrative identity problematic through the web of metaphors surrounding the motif of the mirror. As a result of the multiple reflections, the confession itself, which represents Stavrogin's "voice" in the polyphony of the *Devils*, is revealed as a disunited, split collection of polyphonic "voices". In this process of infinite reflection the undermining and inversion of binary oppositions and Stavrogin's (self)irony resulting in a constant shift of meanings create a narrative which questions the possibility of the union of polyphonic voices and threatens with the possibility of chiasmus instead.

THE SOLAR HERO'S MYTH IN DOSTOEVSKY'S *DEVILS*[1]

In Dostoevsky's *Devils* the myth of the Golden Age serves as the basic interpretative paradigm for both Stavrogin's character and the setting of the novel. As far as the first is concerned, the motif of the golden rays of the setting sun, which is established in Stavrogin's confession as a central element of the myth of the Golden Age and therefore of Stavrogin's narrative identity, is expanded into different versions of the solar hero's myth in the rest of the novel. Such a development also corresponds to the general interrelationship of the two myths, which V. V. Ivanov also points out: the solar hero's myth is connected to the myths of paradise, i.e. a version of the myth of the Golden Age, in many cultures. The traces of this relationship can also be found in Slavic fairy tales (Токарев et al. II/461–2). As far as the setting of the novel is concerned, it is also determined by elements of the solar myth: since the plot of the novel can be interpreted as the hero's descent into the underworld (a metaphorical descent into his psychic hell) and disappearance, it determines the place of the action as a carnivalesque underworld, the inversion of the myth of the Golden Age. As opposed to the temporary and optimistic nature of the medieval carnival, however, a grotesque world celebrating metamorphosis and hybridity (cf. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 126) threatens with ultimate chaos in *Devils* and the hero's reappearance becomes impossible[2].

From the point of view of the present analysis quite a number of features of the solar myth are relevant. Firstly, some of its versions identify the hero, among others, with the sun-god or with the son of the sun-god, who also is or becomes the earthly ruler. Consequently, the sun has become an attribute and symbol of the legitimate – rightful and sacred – king in many cultures (Токарев et al. II/461–2). Secondly, the solar hero is often a cultural hero as well, which connects the solar myth with hero myths in general, more particularly with the version featuring twin heroes (Токарев et al. II/461–2). Thus the myth might typically include two heroes: the (solar) hero and his demonic-comic dark twin

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[1] Originally a section of my doctoral thesis submitted in 2005 and entitled *A szándék allegóriái – Az identitás mítoszai Dosztojevszkij örökében* (*Allegories of Intent – Myths of Identity in the Wake of Dostoevsky*). First published as "The Solar Hero's Myth in Dostoevsky's Devils," *Slavica* XXXV (2006), 139–56. Special thanks to Charles Somerville for his careful linguistic editing of the English version. The preliminary research for the thesis was carried out with the assistance of the Eötvös Scholarship supplemented by a grant from the Hungarian Ministry of Education (OM).

[2] Cf. Julia Kristeva's and Michael André Bernstein's claims, according to which Dostoevsky's novels give a "bitter" reading of carnival, his novelistic world is the realm of the abject and abjection (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 2–18; Bernstein 20).

brother or double, a kind of trickster figure, who "clumsily imitates" him (Токарев et al. I/176; II/26). The straightforward division of appealing and repulsive characteristic traits between the two heroes marks this myth out as a source of the literary phenomenon of the Doppelgänger in mythic thought (Токарев et al. I/176; Мелетинский 53).

Thirdly, the solar hero's myth incorporates probably one of the most universal plots, as far as according to Northrop Frye it is the equivalent of the successful quest and as such, it is the *mythos* of romance. It has four aspects: "First, the *agon* or conflict itself. Second, the *pathos* or death, often the mutual death of hero and monster. Third, the disappearance of the hero, a theme which often takes the form of *sparagmos* or tearing to pieces. […] Fourth, the reappearance and recognition of the hero" or "*anagnorisis*" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 192). Indicating the close interrelationship of the two myths mentioned above, the aim of the solar hero's quest is often the (re)establishment of some ideal state and society, it is a search for a lost Golden Age. This *mythos* is typically embodied for example in the myths of dying and reviving gods and in the Christian Easter (*Anatomy* 187). Just like Ivanov in the case of solar myths (Токарев et al. II/461–2), Frye also emphasises the central thematic importance of "dragon-killing" in the "quest-romance" and associates the monster with "winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life and old age, and the hero with spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigour, and youth" (*Anatomy* 187–9). The hero's descent often forms a part of solar myths, since he "travels perilously through a dark labyrinthine underworld full of monsters between sunset and sunrise" (*Anatomy* 190).

It is by creating different versions of this solar myth that several characters in *Devils* try to interpret Stavrogin. Though they do so with the intention of creating "sacred texts" – texts that would bring the endless chain of signification to a closure (Gould 44–55) – their creations are revealed as the texts of their own narcissism and desire. Thus, similarly to Stavrogin's confession built on mythic narratives, the whole of the novel can be read as an attempt to bring the narrative of his identity to a closure in a mythic text, an attempt inevitably doomed to failure. It is this tragic overtone which is underpinned by the bleakly carnivalesque underworld of the setting in *Devils*.

Stavrogin's Identity: Versions of the Solar Hero

The characters of *Devils* are almost obsessed with trying to solve the mystery of Stavrogin's identity. At least six of them end up with narratives which can be read as different versions of the myth of the solar hero or the sun-god. It appears for Kirillov as the philosophy of the Nietzschean man-god, for Shatov as Slavophil ideology and *imitatio Christi*, for Lebyadkin as a comic inversion of the myth, for Marya Timofeevna as a Christianised version of the myth also interwoven with folklore elements, for Peter Verkhovensky as a political utopia

based on mythical logic, and last but not least for Liza it is myth displaced in literature as romance. In the course of the novel, however, all these narratives undermine their own authority and validity.

A fairly similar approach is represented in a study by Ryszard Przybylski. He analyses the narratives created about Stavrogin in the context of the tsar's "ideological myth" and also relies heavily on the central metaphor of the *sun*, however, without any reference to solar myths. Using cultural semiotics as a frame of reference, he interprets Stavrogin's relationship with the characters surrounding him through the myth of the tsar as a divine person and the notion of *proskinesis,* a ritual in Byzantine culture which paid homage to the Emperor as a god. In the course of this ritual, which was later also introduced in the tsar's court in a modified form, the subject who received audience "fell at the Emperor's feet and kissed them" ("Sztavrogin" 97). Przybylski claims that both Shatov and Peter Verkhovensky carry out the ritual of *proskinesis* verbally and supports his view with the curiously recurrent metaphors of the insect/worm and the sun characterising their relationship and communication with Stavrogin. For Przybylski the metaphor of the sun is fundamentally "the symbol of supreme power" which evokes Eastern despots and "political cults" just as well as the Heavenly Kingdom of Jesus or "popular beliefs" about fertility and eternity ("Sztavrogin" 98). Przybylski also emphasises the mythic nature of the verbal gesture ("Sztavrogin" 101) and how much Stavrogin is a creature of the other characters' mythically orientated imagination. For example, he claims that "Shatov and Peter [Verkhovensky] would want to push Stavrogin into the sphere of ideological myth" ("Sztavrogin" 104), while he is also "a plaything of Marya's imagination" since "the holy fool […] exist[s] in mythic time" and her vision of Stavrogin is the product of an "untainted religious consciousness" ("Sztavrogin" 106). Though by the end of the novel "she notices that his inclusion in the sphere of religious myth was absolutely unfounded" and in the "epiphanic" moment of their meeting exorcises him, she remains within the realm of a mythic discourse and its versions sustained in folktales all through the text – only the symbols turn into their opposites, like mythic light and darkness, for instance ("Sztavrogin" 104–6). Przybylski's excellent essay opens the way for further analysis in at least three directions: the exploration of the actual mythopoetic structure of these "ideological myths" and the related gesture of *proskinesis*, the possible inclusion of other "myth-makers" in the list and the deconstruction of these mythic narratives in *Devils*.

Kirillov's Nietzschean philosophy[3], though in his case the gesture of *proskinesis* is impossible, can be interpreted as the application of the solar hero's

[3] For a detailed analysis of Kirillov's philosophy see Ryszard Przybylski's other article ("Az Antikrisztus halála" passim). For a semantic analysis of Kirillov's speech and his role in the development of Stavrogin's narrative see (Kpoo 229–33).

myth to himself. His narrative of man's deification remains within the paradigm of the dying and reviving god[4], which is a version of the same myth. However, the narrative, which represents its story-teller as a superman, was originally delivered by Stavrogin and therefore pertained to him. Kirillov, as a true double (cf. Bakhtin, *Problems* 128), has simply taken Stavrogin's place as the main character of the story. He has become the signified of a "ready-made" narrative of identity, i.e. a signifier supplied by Stavrogin, thereby realising the apparently empty cliché he pronounces in the chapter "Night": "Remember, Stavrogin, how much you've *meant* in my life" (252, emphasis added)[5]. Stavrogin has turned into a sign for him, into an image of his ideal I, with which he has seemingly identified.

However, the unsatisfactory identification with the mythic identity represented by Stavrogin and therefore the instability of Kirillov's status as a subject is indicated by several elements in the text. The first is his very speech, which is characterised by a conspicuous irregularity, originating in his absolutely individual word order and a kind of minimalism. The second is the scene of his death, which, instead of giving ultimate verification to his philosophy and identity, contains a series of subversive moments, such as his waiving his right to choose the time of his suicide, his so uncharacteristic sudden garrulousness and his suicide note dictated by Verkhovensky, with special reference to the signature. As Przybylski points out, Kirillov's theory is fundamentally undermined by his relation to the organisation because he renounces in its favour the very role he wants to deserve by committing suicide: he "has renounced the time of his suicide on behalf of the organisation. Thus the moment of his death is appointed by a will which is *transcendental* in comparison with his own, as far as his person is concerned, it fulfils the function of *God* […]. He is aware that it is the biggest ass [sic!] he has ever known [Peter Verkhovensky] who measures out his life for him" ("Az Antikrisztus halála" 89, emphasis added). When Kirillov's time is up, with a talkativeness quite unusual for him, he "want[s] to say everything" (695) and stops writing with the exclamation "Wait!" (695) several times – as if he still wanted to postpone the moment of his death, after all. Finally, by writing the suicide note, Kirillov gives in Verkhovensky's hands not only his freedom, but also the right of saying the last word of the narrative of his identity, of determining the end from which the whole narrative will be read retrospectively (cf. P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* 33) and actually lets

[4] In her study Edith Clowes comes to the conclusion that both Nietzsche and Dostoevsky work out a new, "Christian-Dionysian fabula", which includes four phases: 1) moral rebellion 2) self-sacrifice 3) being torn to pieces and suffering 4) rebirth and new consciousness with a will to live (Клюс 496–500). Her mythopoetic approach results in a scheme which is strikingly similar to Frye's description of the quest myth.

[5] The present study relies on the 1996 critical edition of *Devils* (Достоевский, *Бесы*). The English quotations are all based on (Dostoevsky, *Devils*) and for this reason only the page numbers are indicated in parentethical notes after them.

Verkhovensky deprive it from the mythic content he has always wanted to express by his death. Verkhovensky has really "trained" him (Szilárd 35): he has turned Kirillov into a puppet. That Kirillov is absolutely conscious of the absurdity of the situation is shown by his ecstatic and grotesque hilarity: he bursts out in laughter and, with a final carnivalesque inversion of his earlier enunciations, he wants "to draw a face at the top with its tongue sticking out" (695). He keeps changing his potential signatures and multiplies them as if he were not sure who exactly he is, and finally the only word in the letter which is actually "his own" is the slogan of the French Revolution – a cliché. As Przybylski comments, the myth of the superman vanishes into thin air well before Kirillov's suicide turns into a parody ("Az Antikrisztus" 92).

Shatov interprets Stavrogin as his "personal saviour" in the context of the solar hero's myth and consequently "stands in" for him as victim in a series of profanised hierophanies. The mechanism of borrowing a "ready-made" narrative of identity seems to work in his case, just as well as in Kirillov's, which is indicated by an almost literal repetition of the latter's words: Shatov explains that he struck Stavrogin "because he meant so much to him in his life" (253). Having adopted Stavrogin's Slavophil prophecies, Shatov repeatedly acts out the role of the victim in scenes which are profane versions of the Christian story of the dying and reviving god or the repetitions of pagan rites of sacrifice. For example, when Marya Ignatievna gives birth to Stavrogin's child, Shatov becomes not only the child's official, but also his spiritual father, thereby acting out the role of a modern Joseph for Stavrogin – the Father – in this profane Holy Family. The scene can be read with elevated pathos as a "mystery" (665) or with liberating laughter, as the midwife's words reveal: "You've given me something to laugh at for the rest of my life. […] I'll be laughing even in my sleep. I've never seen anything funnier than you last night" (666). The possibility of the two diametrically opposed readings depending on the beholder's perspective evokes the figure of "the mocked Christ in the Passion" (Frye, *Anatomy* 221).

Apart from the role of the Father, for Shatov Stavrogin, as his name also indicates[6], embodies the role of the Son culminating in the ideal of voluntary self-sacrifice with equal force. For him Stavrogin is the Master to whom the disciple owes his rebirth, i.e. he is the realisation of the metaphors of "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14,6) expanded into narratives in Lazarus' resurrection (John 11.1–44) and in the parable of the corn of wheat (John 12. 24–33): "'Our' conversation never took place: there was a teacher who uttered mighty words and a student who was raised from the dead. I was that student and you were that teacher" (261). This attitude explains Shatov's reaction to

[6] Stavrogin's name includes the Greek word for "cross", which V. Ivanov interprets as the sign of being in possession of a mystical knowledge (Иванов 309–10), while in Léna Szilárd's reading it is an unequivocal reference to Christ (36).

Stavrogin's warning about the danger that threatens his life: "You are the one that matters, not me… I'm a man without talent and can only offer my blood and nothing more, just like any man without talent. And to hell with my blood!" (267)

The scene of Shatov's death and some events directly preceding it form the culmination of this fundamentally Christian narrative of self-sacrifice and combine it with elements of the ritual punishment of the scapegoat and the pagan building sacrifice. By doing so, they actually underline Shatov's role as Stavrogin's double (cf. Bakhtin, *Problems* 127), since this combination is in harmony with the dual metaphorical system evoked by Stavrogin's name. Apart from a reference to the cross, it also includes the word „рог", i.e. „horn", which both identifies Stavrogin as a demonic figure and associates the Biblical serpent (Szilárd 36). It serves as the starting point of the metaphorical chain horn–devil–serpent–dragon–chaos (cf. Eliade 47–50) which testifies to the fact that in Stavrogin's name Christian and pagan mythical thinking is inseparably intertwined. Shatov realises the implications of this metaphorical system, i.e. Stavrogin's defeat in his demonic role, first during the meeting of "our group", which also features as a profane Last Supper: he lets himself to be excommunicated like a scapegoat and, similarly to Judas in the Biblical scene, leaves the meeting. His murder is "a ritual sacrifice" (Сараскина 449), as the mythic number of the murderers – after Shigalov leaves, six of them remain there, who kill the seventh –, Lyamshin's scream "in a voice that was more animal than human" (678) and the murderers' ecstatic state, in which "all of them seemed to have lost control of part of their faculties" (678), imply. The murder can be interpreted as the "tearing to pieces" of the dying and reviving god (Иванов 311), just as well as the carrying out of the ritual building sacrifice (cf. Eliade 52–8). The most important element of the latter is the metaphor of "cement" (439) for Shatov's blood in the context of Peter Verkhovensky's apocalyptic utopia: it would function as the cohesive force in the "stone structure" (448) of Peter Stepanovich's new cosmos which he plans to form after bringing along the end of the present world. The rite is the repetition of the killing of the mythic serpent/dragon which symbolises chaos and it is also the source of the motif of the dragon guarding a hoard (Frye, *Anatomy* 192–3) – an element which clearly appears in the detail of the printing press Shatov has buried. Since on the level of metaphors Shatov plays the roles of the solar hero and the monster he has to kill simultaneously, as one of Stavrogin's doubles he reveals the paradox of the solar hero's role Nikolai Vsevolodovich is supposed to play.

Lebyadkin formulates the parodistic version of the solar hero's myth. Its parodistic quality partly derives from repetition itself (cf. Bergson Ch. I Part IV): in the continuation of the chapter "Night" segments of Stavrogin's dialogues with Kirillov and Shatov are pronounced this time by Lebyadkin in a totally different context and consequently they sound comic. Conspicuously, he also repeats a key sentence referring to identification with Stavrogin's model and

doubling, but in the context of carnivalesque clowning: “So what if they called me your Falstaff, from Shakespeare? *You meant so much to me* in my own life!” (278, emphasis added) He parodies the master–disciple relationship which is a central aspect of Kirillov and Shatov’s identification with Stavrogin as their ideal. It becomes apparent when he seemingly admires Stavrogin and expects him to “solve the mystery of life” (279) – read: to dissolve the misery of his life – though he can remember only one fashionable paradox from all his “teachings” in Petersburg. Since it is actually the garrulous captain who does most of the talking, just like in the past, when Stavrogin played the role of the grateful listener to his poetry, their communication also turns out to be a comic inversion of the master–disciple pattern which for Kirillov and Shatov forms a sacred mythic narrative. It does not hinder Lebyadkin, however, from echoing Shatov’s words about his resurrection owing to Stavrogin – in fact, he speaks of returning to Petersburg as if it meant regaining Paradise, a lost Golden Age: “I dream of Petersburg […] I dream of *regeneration*… Oh, my benefactor! Can I count on you not to refuse my money for the journey? I’ve waited for you all week as one waits for the *sun*” (281, emphasis added). His return to Petersburg acquires a mythic dimension through its association with rebirth. Since the fulfilment of his desire, however, depends on Stavrogin’s money, which, in turn, forms the basis for his comparison of Stavrogin with the sun, the myth of the Golden Age turns into its own parody, into a carnivalesque myth of material well-being, a myth of money. The food and drink Lebyadkin has prepared for Stavrogin – and from Stavrogin’s money – foreshadows this “earthly paradise”. It is money that could make Stavrogin Lebyadkin’s “benefactor”, the Messiah he has been waiting for a week, which is again a comic repetition of Kirillov and Shatov’s emphatic waiting over the years.

That Lebyadkin is actually Stavrogin’s double is indicated by his graphomania and the metaphor of the serpent. Przybylski claims that all Lebyadkin’s texts – including his ordinary speech – are actually stylisations, and bad ones, at that: since their creator mean to be serious, it is he himself who becomes ridiculous and not the parodied originals. A very similar, though less transparent mechanism works behind Stavrogin’s “unliterary” confession[7], therefore Przybylski interprets Lebyadkin’s graphomania as a comic version of Stavrogin’s literary ambitions and regards the two characters as doubles (“Sztavrogin” 107–8). Lebyadkin’s nostalgic remark about their days in Petersburg also indicates that their approaches to literary texts are not so dissimilar, after all: “I’ve even stopped writing poetry; at one time even you were amused by my verses, Nikolai Vsevolodovich, do you remember, over a bottle?” (280)

[7] For the full implications of Stavrogin’s confession as a Rousseau stylisation see (S. Horváth passim).

Lebyadkin's efforts to emphasise the similarities between Stavrogin and himself can be best followed in the fate of the metaphor he himself finds for Stavrogin, that of the serpent. Originally it is Liputin who relates the fact that Lebyadkin called Stavrogin "a wise serpent" (106) ("премудрый змий" [Достоевский, *Бесы* 65]), and then the same expression reappears as the title of the closing chapter of the first part (168), which describes Stavrogin's arrival and the scandal in his mother's house. The archaic word in the Russian metaphor is used almost exclusively with reference to the Biblical serpent or the mythic dragon symbolising chaos, thus underlining the mythic nature of Stavrogin's character in Lebyadkin's interpretation. During the scandalous scenes of Stavrogin's return the metaphor already appears in a downgraded, almost parodistic form: when Stavrogin enters the drawing-room "the captain shrank suddenly before him and froze on the spot, not taking his eyes off him, like a rabbit facing a boa constrictor ["удав" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 123)]" (205). The mythic serpent, a representation of archetypal evil, has turned into a horrifying, cold-blooded huge predatory animal. It is to this "demythologised" reptile that later Lebyadkin compares himself, claiming that he has been reborn and "grown a new skin like a snake ["змей" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 165)]" (279)[8]. When he applies the stylistically neutral "snake" to himself, he both downgrades the myth – what remains of the mythic quality is the power of rebirth – and reinforces the power positions implicated in the simile of the rabbit and the boa constrictor. Lebyadkin's character emphasises the ambivalent nature of the whole metaphorical complex of the serpent (Токарев et al. I/468–71), since in the application related to him it is not only an embodiment of chaos and the underworld, but also of fertility and power. Thus its semantic domain partly forms a counterpoint to that of the solar hero, partly overlaps the meanings associated with the sun-god. All in all, through the comic double realised in Lebyadkin's figure the mythic narratives associated with the sun and the serpent, which define Stavrogin's identity, appear on a material level as a result of carnivalesque downgrading, inversion and intermixture of contradictory elements, which undermines any unambiguous interpretation of his character as a hero.

Marya Timofeevna Lebyadkina's version of the solar hero's myth is a mixture of pre-Christian mythic, Christian and folkloristic elements. In the Symbolist mythopoetic reading originally formulated by V. Ivanov her figure is traditionally associated with the pagan and folkloristic Mother Earth (Иванов 308–9; Przybylski, "Sztavrogin" 103), the Eternal Feminine (Булгаков 495–6), the Mother of God or the Virgin (Przybylski, "Sztavrogin" 103–4). Her religious consciousness is evidently inseparable from the concept of the holy fool, from

[8] Cf. Léna Szilárd's reference to the multilayered symbolism of the „semantic row of премудрый змий–змий–гад–удав–червь" which, for example, allows Stavrogin to feature both as the mythic-folkloristic dragon and dragon-killer (35).

her „юродство” (Szilárd 28). This consciousness gains expression through the language of total metaphor (cf. Frye, *Anatomy* 141–4) with images borrowed from folklore. For example two of her metaphors for Stavrogin, the prince and the falcon flying towards the sun, can be clearly associated with the imagery of Russian folk-songs (Przybylski, “Sztavrogin” 105). Even Lebyadkina’s name is connected to the folklore figure of the swan-bride (cf. Савушкина 180–83), which has totemic origins (Токарев et al. II/441) and emphasises that she belongs to a different – a mythic – world.

For this mythic consciousness Stavrogin’s character can make sense only in mythic terms – either as the solar hero or as the demonic pretender to his role. As Przybylski also points out in his analysis quoted above, one of the central metaphors Marya Timofeevna uses to define Stavrogin’s identity is closely related to the motif of the *sun*. Continuing this train of thought, one can claim that it is Marya Timofeevna who, of all the characters in the novel, comes closest to literally carrying out *proskinesis*, the rite in tribute of the ruler revered as (sun-)god, before Stavrogin. The scene verging on grotesque takes place during their first meeting in Varvara Petrovna’s drawing-room. When Stavrogin goes up to Marya Timofeevna, she only wants to “fall on her knees before him” (194), and Stavrogin hinders her from doing so by rejecting the role of symbolic father figures – and of God: “Even though I’m your most devoted friend, I’m still a stranger, not your husband, nor your father, nor your fiancé” (194). When they are on the point of leaving, however, she has “a minor accident”: “she fell sideways on to the chair and if it hadn’t been there, *she’d have fallen to the floor*” (194, emphasis added). The outstanding importance of the scene is indicated by Marya Timofeevna’s later comment, in which she identifies it as the moment when Stavrogin was revealed as a “worm” for her: “When I saw your nasty face after I fell and you picked me up – it was as if a worm [“червь” (Достоевский, *Бесы* 173)] had crawled into my heart: it’s not *he*, I thought, not *he*! My falcon would never have been ashamed of me in front of any society lady!” (294) This “worm” clearly fits into the semantic row based on the motif of the serpent mentioned above (Szilárd 35). Similarly, the metaphors Marya Timofeevna uses for Stavrogin during their second, “epiphanic” meeting (Przybylski, “Sztavrogin” 106) can easily be arranged into actually two diametrically opposed semantic rows based on the two fundamental metaphors of the sun and the serpent, which define Stavrogin’s dual identity: (sun)god—(bright) falcon soaring, gazing at the sun—prince versus (blind) owl—shopkeeper—worm—impostor/pretender[9]. The metaphor of the sun joins the

[9] In the Russian text the second group of synonyms is much richer: солнце–(ясный) сокол на солнце взирает–князь versus сова слепая–филин–сыч–купчишка–червь–самозванец. The adjective “ясный” (bright) is an epitheton ornans of the falcon in Russian folk-tales (cf. “Перышко Финиста, Ясна сокола” [Савушкина 153–9]) and it is a connecting element between the metaphors of the falcon and the sun. The word “самозванец” associates rather a

two rows into one, since, as Léna Szilárd points out relying on Boris Uspensky's research, his followers called the pretender False Dmitry "праведное солнце", i.e. the "real sun" and "thereby endowed him with an attribute which is Christ's due" (Szilárd 22). Thus Marya Timofeevna simultaneously identifies Stavrogin as the solar hero and the trickster, his own comic double or, in this case, rather shadow (cf. Jung 139–62). For her mythic consciousness existing in an eternal present the possibility of change in time does not even occur, she experiences contradictory meanings in a paradox unity, syncretically layered on each other.

In Peter Verkhovensky's case the solar hero's myth turns into a political utopia[10] with the incorporation of Ivan the Tsarevich's legend[11]. In the chapter "Ivan the Tsarevich" Verkhovensky determines his own and Stavrogin's identity through the metaphors of the sun and the worm: "You're the leader, the sun, and I'm your worm" (444)[12]. However, he applies them in the utopistic context of bringing along an apocalypse in order to create "a brave new world", a new cosmos: "We'll spread fires…We'll spread legends… […] Well, sir, then the trouble will begin! There'll be an upheaval such as the world has never seen… Rus' will be shrouded in mist and the land will weep for its old gods… Well, sir, then we'll unleash… do you know who? […] Ivan the Tsarevich" (446–7). His utopia covers the full cycle of the quest myth complete with regaining a lost Golden Age at the cost of sacrificing the mythic dragon (Shatov), that is, establishing a new society with the solar hero as its "ruler".

Apart from Shatov's murder it is Peter Verkhovensky's figure that can be most directly associated with the dragon-killing motif of the solar myth on the plot level. Metaphorically Verkhovensky appears as the Biblical tempter and, as Léna Szilárd claims, the dragon of myths and folktales, in relation to whom Stavrogin actually plays the role of the "dragon-killer" (35). Conspicuously, in the chapter "The Wise Serpent" it is not Stavrogin but actually Verkhovensky who appears as a metaphorical snake, more exactly as the Biblical serpent which tempts Adam and Eve with his (far too smooth) words (Gen 3.1–5):

> He spoke quickly, hastily, but at the same time with certainty, and was never at a loss for words. […] His articulation was wonderfully clear […]. At first this was attractive, but later it became repulsive, precisely because of his excessively clear articulation, his stream of

pretender – with its manifold echoes in Russian cultural semiotics (cf. Успенский 149–96) – than a simple impostor, but this is the word Katz uses (294).

[10] About the relationship of political utopia with mythic thought cf. (Coupe 67–74).

[11] For an overview of Ivan the Tsarevich's legend see (Przybylski, "Sztavrogin" 99–100). Ivan the Tsarevich is also a folklore figure and the archaic analogies of the tales about him are myths about the son of the sun-god (Токарев et al. II/442).

[12] In Russian the word for "worm" is "червяк" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 258) here, which is not totally identical with Marya Timofeevna's earlier metaphor, as in the English text.

> ever-ready words. One began to imagine that the tongue in his mouth had a special shape, unusually long and thin, very red, with an extremely pointed tip, flickering constantly and involuntarily. (190)

Since out of Stavrogin's doubles Verkhovensky (cf. Bakhtin, *Problems* 127) is the one who shares only his negative qualities, he actually appears as Stavrogin's shadow (Мелетинский 17; Szilárd 36) or the dark twin brother of the solar hero (Мелетинский 17). Verkhovensky's demonic qualities and the Biblical context evoked by the snake metaphor allow for an interpretation of the "Ivan the Tsarevich" chapter as a restaging of Christ's third temptation (Matt 4.8–9), in which Verkhovensky offers Stavrogin worldly power and the fulfilment of his personal desires for acting out the role that he, Verkhovensky has written for him. As Szilárd explains, Stavrogin resists temptation and gains victory over Verkhovensky both spiritually and physically when he "hurls him to the ground with all his might" (440). His refusal of Verkhovensky's offer is the culmination of the series of "heroic" deeds consisting of his enduring Shatov's slap, his warning and his strange duel with Gaganov (Szilárd 35–6). In the solar hero's myth this moment corresponds to *pathos* or the death of the monster, i.e. with Verkhovensky's (temporary) defeat the division line between the metaphorical domains of the sun and the serpent is apparently clarified and the paradoxical situation outlined in Shatov's, Lebyadkin's and Marya Timofeevna's cases is eliminated.

For Liza the solar hero's myth appears in its literary form, displaced as romance. Frye comments on the special naivety of the genre that

> The romance is nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfilment dream, and for that reason it has socially a curiously paradoxical role. In every age the ruling social or intellectual class tends to project its ideals in some form of romance, where the virtuous heroes and beautiful heroines represent the ideals and the villains the threats to their ascendancy. (*Anatomy* 186)

In Liza and Stavrogin's plot literariness gains special emphasis: it surfaces in Liza's reading her own life, including Stavrogin's character in it, and shaping her wish-fulfilling fantasies according to models borrowed from romantic, sentimental, sometimes even melodramatic literature. This tendency culminates in the chapter relating her grand finale – her last scene with Stavrogin and her death. Even the title of the chapter, "The End of a Romance" (587), puts Liza and Stavrogin's love story quite ironically in the context of a literary genre. It is in this chapter that not only does Stavrogin refer to her as "poor" Liza (591) but also she herself asks Stepan Trofimovich to commemorate her in his prayers by this name (608), thereby emphasising the relationship between her character and

the Russian sentimental tradition (Топоров 261; cf. S. Horváth 284–92). Liza's own claims relegate the whole of their story to the realm of her "fantasy" (589), what is more, to a fantasy world rooted in melodramatic opera librettos: "I'm a young lady of the nobility; I was brought up on opera – that's how it all started, that's the whole explanation. [...] I'm a bad girl, capricious, seduced by that operatic boat" (591). In contrast to the other characters mentioned above, Liza and Stavrogin do not talk to each other in private apart from this final scene and consequently this wish-fulfilling romance-like plot, which is probably Liza and Stavrogin's joint construction, is not known in detail. Therefore in Liza's question "Where are we to go together? Somewhere 'to be resurrected' again?" (589) the expression in inverted commas, probably a quote from their earlier dialogues, is most revealing. Stavrogin's earlier words actually promised rebirth, the *anagnorisis* of romance, and in the face of reality and Liza's shattered dreams they cannot be cited without an irony which is incompatible with the genre. The same bitter irony culminates later in her exclamation: "I'll be laughing at you for the rest of your life..." (592)

Liza goes from one extreme to the other: if Stavrogin cannot feature in her romance as the perfect embodiment of social ideals, someone who can take her to Moscow and pay visits with her in high society, he must turn into the evil seducer of sentimental stories, or the villain of a typically romantic genre, the Gothic[13]. It is so even if it means that she must intentionally victimise herself and melodramatically "compress her entire life into one hour" (592). Since social compromise, which forms the denouement of romance, proves to be impracticable in Stavrogin's case, the wish-fulfilment dream turns into a "nightmare" (590) and the hero into the highly sexualised monster of the Gothic. Stavrogin appears as a "vampire" (592) and as Bluebeard. The latter role is implied by the verb used for "revealing" his secrets (592): "открыть" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 340) means "to open", at this point as a rather weak reference to the opening up of Bluebeard's secret doors only to reveal dead women behind them. It becomes much more significant, however, in the context of Liza's earlier slip, when she asks Stavrogin whether he has paid "for this new hope" "with his life or with someone else's" (589). When on entering Stavrogin's room Liza calls herself "a corpse" (588), she actually offers herself to this monster as a voluntary victim. In the last version of this subhuman monster she unconsciously recreates the metaphor of the fall – and at the same time Stavrogin's own metaphor – formulated in his confession: the "tiny red spider" (472) reappears enlarged into the horror of "an enormous, man-sized evil spider" that they "would gaze at […] till the end of their lives" (593) if they were to live together. After all, both Liza's readings – as romance and as a

[13] Meletinsky points to Stavrogin's direct relationship with the Gothic villain via such figures as Charles Robert Maturin's Melmoth (Мелетинский 48).

Gothic story – remain within the paradigm of Romanticism. An inversion similar to Marya Timofeevna's takes place in her interpretation of Stavrogin's character, but while the "holy fool" projects the two diametrically opposed versions synchronically on each other, for Liza the solar hero's myth displaced as the wish-fulfilment fantasy of romance is superseded by the demonic hero's equally mythic story.

In conclusion, there is a general tendency in the novel to read Stavrogin's character as a version of the solar hero's mythic figure. Consequently, at least six characters of *Devils* create such mythic texts which, analogically to the myth of the Golden Age in Stavrogin's dream and expanding its metaphorical system into narratives, are meant to function as narratives of his – and their – identity with the interpretative status of definitive, "sacred" texts. Stavrogin's earlier narratives of identity become the signifiers for whose signified they would like to stand. Their versions of the solar hero's myth, however, prove unmaintainable as narrative identities: they are subverted by carnivalesque inversion, by the coexistence of pathos and irony and by the actualisation of the potentials inherent in the ambivalences of the central metaphors related to the myth.

Setting: Descent to Hell

In the context of the solar myth the place of action in *Devils* is the space of the hero's descent, a mythic underworld featuring as the antithesis of the earthly paradise represented in the vision of the Golden Age. The most characteristic elements of this world emerge as a result of carnivalesque inversion, to create "a carnivalesque underworld" which is extremely rich in motifs of "external carnivalisation" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 180 fn. 31). Hypothetically, they can be categorised into four major groups. Firstly, as an antithesis to the childlike innocence of the world of the Golden Age, the world of *Devils* is dominated by make-believe and theatricality, it is an anti-world in which the division line between the stage and the audience, between fiction and reality is washed away – in fact, in which fiction pretends to be reality. Secondly, instead of angelic creatures it is populated by devils featuring in the role of the "шут", a character directly associated with carnivalesque clowning. Thirdly, as a result of carnivalisation the hierophanies embodied in the moments of Christ's life appear in *Devils* in profaned and parodistic forms, as hybrid images. And, last but not least, the novel is full of apocalyptic elements, which, however, are not followed by a moment of rebirth[14].

[14] The differentiation of the last two groups in itself might suffice to demonstrate how hypothetical in fact this categorisation is: apocalyptic motifs refer to hierophany and belong to carnivalesque imagery simultaneously. Several motifs listed below could be enumerated in more than one group.

In *Devils* make-believe comes to dominate everything, which results in the emergence of an anti-world. This, in turn, is traditionally related to the carnivalisation of the ideal world represented by the myth of the Golden Age in Russian cultural semiotics. Szilárd argues convincingly that in *Devils* "the motif of theatricality, make-believe […] appears as if it grew out of some creative impulse of the sjuzet". She actually talks of "total make-believe" as the "metatheme" of the novel and uses Uspensky's cultural semiotics as a frame of reference to demonstrate how a world that equals theatre can be nothing but an anti-world for the Russian consciousness (20–21). Applying the results of Bakhtin's carnival theory to cultural semiotics, Dmitry Likhachov points out that in Russian culture the imagery of the anti-world is related to the inversion of the ideal world via laughter and therefore it testifies to the existence of the ideal world out of which it has been created (Лихачёв 452–6). In his opinion the unreal, illogical and chaotic anti-culture of laughter historically reached the status of "official culture" during the reign of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great (Лихачёв 466). The reflection of the dominance of a carnivalesque anti-world over "reality" has a long tradition of Russian literature, of which *Devils* is an outstanding piece.

This anti-world is the realm of carnivalesque clowning, its characters are devils appearing in the form of the "шут". In the world of the carnival, which is dominated by popular grotesque, devils are not fearful: they are "the gay ambivalent figure[s] expressing the unofficial pint of view, the material bodily stratum" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 54). Probably a very similar view is reflected in the fact that in Russian one of the numerous popular euphemisms for the devil is the word "шут", i.e. "clown" or "fool" (Токарев et al. II/625). The most important embodiments of this carnivalesque clowning in *Devils* are the "scoffers" or "mockers", Semyon Yakovlevich as a "holy fool" and Stavrogin's parodying doubles, with special reference to Peter Stepanovich. The "mockers" handle the nameless little town where the action of the novel takes place as a fundamentally carnivalesque space: borrowing the name from Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin's satire (764) they regard it as "Glupov" (337) or "Stupidville" (764). Their innocent – and not so innocent – tricks are all based on the foregrounding of the material-corporeal aspects of life and carnivalesque downgrading and inversion. These often result in the emergence of grotesque hybrid images. The list of the most prominent examples includes the "respectable" book-pedlar who produces "a bundle of suggestive and obscene photographs" instead of "sacred books" (339–40), the hybrid which emerges out of the "cross-breeding" of "Marseillaise" and "Mein Lieber Augustine" (340–41), the live mouse smuggled behind the glass cover of the icon of the Virgin (342), Lyamshin who plays the "jester" and induces the others practically to laugh at death at the sight of the youth who committed suicide (346–7) and the whole group of "mockers" who

behave in the presence of Semyon Yakovlevich, the "holy fool", as if he were presenting a theatrical performance (348).

The last scene deserves individual treatment as the second independent example of carnivalesque clowning in the novel, since the "mockers'" visit throws into relief only the inherently carnivalesque nature of Semyon Yakovlevich's environment and figure. The room in which he receives his guests and which is "divided into two sections by a waist-high wooden latticed partition running from one wall to the other" (347) is actually a parody of Orthodox churches divided by a rood-screen – it is the scene of a comedy. Semyon Yakovlevich, who expresses his irrational and arbitrary judgements by handing out tea and sugar while he is having lunch, parodies divine judgement, and, what is more, he does so with the carnivalesque foregrounding of the materiality of life. His is "dressed in German style" (347), which in Russian culture definitely relates him to the world of masquerades and the traditional depiction of devils (Szilárd 21–2). All in all, presumably a "holy fool", Semyon Yakovlevich is much more of a clown or pretender and in that sense the "mockers" are his most appropriate audience – the ones who treat him as a fraud.

The third relevant aspect of the representation of carnivalesque clowning is the inclusion of Stavrogin's parodying doubles in *Devils*. Bakhtin relates parodying doubles in general to the victory of carnivalesque laughter over death, since the parodied character both dies and revives in them. He identifies Shatov, Kirillov and Peter Verkhovensky as such doubles in relation to Stavrogin in *Devils* (Bakhtin, *Problems* 127–8), and out of them it is in Peter Verkhovensky that carnivalesque clowning gains a most straightforward expression: Stavrogin calls him his "pet monkey" and Peter Stepanovich consciously undertakes "playing the fool" for him (598). His figure, however, also calls attention to the fact that in *Devils* carnival is conspicuously devoid of ambivalent laughter which both destroys and revives: while the novel culminates practically in a mass murder and Stavrogin's suicide, it is the most evil of his doubles, Verkhovensky, who stays alive and carries on as if nothing had happened. The bitter carnival associated with him and the mockers, a laughter which is not universal but restricted to certain individuals and therefore divides people into those who laugh and those who are laughed at, becomes permanent in the novel and questions the possibility of rebirth originally inherent in a carnivalesque attitude.

It is also in relation to Stavrogin and his doubles that several scenes parodying and/or profaning crucial moments of Christ's life, the central hierophany of Christianity, appear and form a typically carnivalesque aspect of the novel: the parody of sacred texts was the basis of several carnivalesque festivities in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 88–92). Quite a few of them have already been detailed above or in literature on *Devils*, such as the ambivalence of Stavrogin's name, the meeting of "our group" as a profane Last Supper, Shatov as Joseph and Judas and Christ and the dragon,

Kirillov's death "parodying Christ's death on the cross" (Przybylski, "Az Antikrisztus" 92) and Stavrogin's death, which is both an allusion to Judas's suicide and "a travesty of the stations of the Cross" (Szilárd 36). Two other scenes, to which comparatively less attention has been devoted, might also belong to this group. The first is Marya Timofeevna's rather comic and scandalous entry into the church. Bare-headed, with "an artificial rose" in her hair which is "used to decorate cherubs during the Holy Week" (161), she is a parodistic reminiscence of Christ's entry into Jerusalem and Palm Sunday. The second is Stepan Trofimovich's death, which can be read as a tragi(comi)c version of the events of the Holy Week (cf. Szilárd 7). Though it is possible to interpret the deathbed scene optimistically, as a resurrection[15], Stepan Trofimovich's fundamentally comic figure raises the reader's doubts about any univocal reading. For example this is his third "death" – and "resurrection" – in the novel. The first of the previous occasions is related to his roles as a citizen and a man of science: when "someone published a notice that he was dead and promised his obituary", he "was immediately resurrected and more dignified than before" (19). The second, no less comic occasion follows the fiasco in Petersburg when he goes abroad "for a rest" – and to "revive" (24). All in all, these ambivalent and grotesque parodies of hierophanic moments naturally do not discredit the sanctity of Biblical texts since, following Old Russian traditions (Лихачёв 452–3), they hold up to ridicule the situations depicted in the parodying text and not the parodied one. Nevertheless, they also stress that in the carnivalesque anti-world of the novel it is impossible to follow Christ's example, and thus the moment of rebirth, so central both in Christianity and in the notion of carnival (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 99), becomes emphatically bracketed in *Devils*.

There are quite a number of apocalyptic elements in the novel, which are significant not only because they refer to a fundamental hierophany of Christianity, but also because they form a crucial element of carnivalesque imagery. Just like in the Bible, the metaphorical apocalypse taking place at the end of carnivals is inseparable from rebirth and revival (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 90–91). In *Devils* there are such "classical" elements of the Biblical Apocalypse as natural disasters (perpetual rain and fires), epidemics (cholera and cattle-plague), the onset of chaos (Мелетинский 13) and the fire after the fête as metaphors of the end of the world, (bloody) murders corresponding to rivers of blood (Rev 16.4), the Antichrist, the dragon (Rev 12.1–9) and even the Woman Clothed with the Sun (Rev 12.1–6) on the level of metaphors. Several of them appear in a

[15] Cf. Tatyana Kasatkina's analysis of Dostoevsky's major novels in the context of Orthodox iconography. She claims that Stepan Trofimovich's deathbed scene realises one of the most important icons of the Holy Week, "The Myrrhbearing Women at the Tomb of Christ" (Касаткина 68), which is an equivalent of "Resurrection", traditionally not depicted in Orthodox iconography (Касаткина 92). Unfortunately, she totally neglects the comic elements of the novelistic scene, though.

carnivalised form, though, which is most obvious in the case of Yulia Mikhailovna's fête turning into absolute chaos. The complete irrationality of the events taking place there is probably best summarised by the chronicler's terse expression: he compares the night of the fête to "a hideous nightmare" (568). The masked figures of the "literary quadrille" (574) are carnivalesque enough even without "the publisher of the 'formidable periodical published outside Petersburg'" suddenly starting to walk on his hands "to represent how [it] constantly turned good common sense on its head" (577). Von Lembke obviously goes mad in the course of the evening, he actually wants to have his own wife arrested, who faints in her turn: the events correspond to the ritualistic exposure and death of the Carnival King or Fool King at the end of carnivals (cf. Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 197; *Problems* 124–5). At that point the chronicler simply calls the fête an "inferno" (579). As Meletinsky points out, the carnivalesque description of the fête lacks all positive qualities, even its "hilarity" acquires a "demonic-chaotic" tone (Мелетинский 128). The same holds true in respect of the whole conclusion of the novel. Such unmirthful demonic elements are, for instance, Stavrogin and Kirillov's appearance as pretenders or the Antichrist (Przybylski, "Az Antikrisztus" 88). In the scene of Marya Ignatievna's labour the ambivalent metaphor of the serpent evokes rather the dragon of the *Revelation*, while she herself corresponds to the Woman Clothed with the Sun. The hopelessness of apocalypse in *Devils* is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the "Woman Clothed with the Sun" – traditionally a symbolic representation of Russia's role as a God-bearing nation for Dostoevsky (Hajnády 251) – dies together with her son, the embodiment of the new Word. Though the hell of carnivals, like mother earth, can turn into a horn of plenty any time (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 90–91), it is not the case here: even the modest optimism of Stepan Trofimovich's "resurrection" is overshadowed by the closing image of *Devils*, Stavrogin's dead body.

This interpretation of the setting of *Devils* as a (carnivalesque) underworld defines the plot of the novel as Stavrogin's metaphorical descent to hell, which corresponds to a descent into his psychic space[16]. The metaphorical elements of his psychic journey turn this "compulsory" element of the quest cycle more specifically into descending by a "downward spiral" vertically and into wandering in a "labyrinth" horizontally. Thus realising the most pessimistic versions of the journey metaphor, *Devils* outlines a world of total metaphor which is nothing but the suicidal space of madness, Stavrogin's "personal hell".

In conclusion, the carnivalesque underworld represented in *Devils*, which is also the projection of the chaos and madness in the characters' psychic spaces, appears as the anti-thesis of the myth of the Golden Age appearing in

[16] About the metaphor of the journey, more specifically the metaphors of descent and ascent cf. (Frye, *Myth and Metaphor* 216–22).

Stavrogin's confession as far as its imagery is concerned, and therefore remains within the same mythic paradigm. Just as well as in the confession, myth appears in the course of the whole novel as a sacred interpretative text, but the emphatically metaphorical potentials of language work against the closing of the interpretative process by establishing any "definitive" meaning – most fundamentally, a definitive reading of Stavrogin's character and identity. In the more and more chaotic world of the novel it leads to tragic consequences: the apparently funny little carnivalesque devils, who can assume power in the world of the novel exactly because of the weakened status of sacred texts, bring along a death and apocalypse far too serious to be mirthful. The regenerating power of carnivalesque laughter is also brought to a minimum; it is limited to the "reduced laughter" implied by the chronicler's ironic tone (Bakhtin, *Problems* 164–6). Ambivalence and polysemy create a world threatening with madness, in which the subject might easily get lost exactly because of the metaphorical nature of language: the language of epiphany and demonic epiphany (cf. Frye, *Anatomy* 203–6, 223) can hardly be separated here from each other. In Stavrogin's descent to hell the apparently upward spiral of his journey paradoxically turns out to be identical with the downward spiral all of a sudden, while the apparently defeated mythic monsters of the underworld are not only identical with the hero, but they also seem to grow a new head for each one they lose, like the Hydra of Lerna. The solar hero's return and recognition proves to be impossible in *Devils*.

THE TRAGEDY OF NARCISSUS: DESIRE, IDENTITY AND NARRATIVE IN DOSTOEVSKY'S *DEVILS*[1]

The phenomenon of endless mirroring, which is so characteristic of "Stavrogin's Confession", is not limited to that relatively short section of Dostoevsky's *Devils*. Originally a central metaphor of the Narcissus myth, it comes to function in Stavrogin's self-narrative as a structural equivalent of the character's narcissism, and as such, it reappears in various forms throughout the entire novel[2]. On the one hand, it surfaces in two phenomena related to psychological narcissism: in the emphatic malfunctioning of the mother mirror in Stavrogin's "case study"[3] and in the extended network of doubles surrounding him. Analysed in the context of the mirror stage, both Stavrogin's image reflected in the mother mirror and in the doubles' (and lovers') mythic narratives about his identity appear to be fundamentally rooted in the beholders' desire. On the other hand, the metaphorical mirrors realised structurally in the multiple frames and "texts-within-the-text" (Лотман 112–7) of the "Confession" re-appear in the

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[1] Originally a section of my doctoral thesis submitted in 2005 and entitled *A szándék allegóriái – Az identitás mítoszai Dosztojevszkij örökében* (*Allegories of Intent – Myths of Identity in the Wake of Dostoevsky*). First published as "The Tragedy of Narcissus: Desire, Identity and Narrative in Dostoevsky's Devils," *Slavica* XXXVI (2007), 137–54. Special thanks to Charles Somerville for his careful linguistic editing of the English version. The preliminary research for the thesis was carried out with the assistance of the Eötvös Scholarship supplemented by a grant from the Hungarian Ministry of Education (OM).

[2] On the poetics of "narcissistic text-symptoms", including mirroring as a structural element, see (Смирнов, „О нарцистическом тексте – Диахрония и психоанализ" passim).

[3] As Meredith Skura's monograph on psychoanalytic literary criticism demonstrates, treating texts as "case studies" is one of the traditional and rather discredited psychoanalytic approaches to literature (29–33; cf. Brooks, *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* 21) – in fact, it is a special type of character study. Nevertheless, in the discussion of narcissism in literary texts it has such prominent representatives as Jeffrey Berman and dominates landmark volumes, for example the collection of articles edited by Lynne Layton and Barbara Ann Shapiro. As opposed to the Lacanian treatment of narcissism, this approach is informed predominantly by Heinz Kohut's views on clinical narcissism. The present study, bearing in mind the conspicuous contradictions between Lacanian and Kohutian views, still incorporates some notions of the latter in its scope. The most obvious reason for this is the fact that the Kohutian analysis of narcissistic personality disorders, more specifically his description of transference types as models for the narcissistic types' interpersonal relationships and his discussion of the disorder's developmental causes can shed new light on the desire that structures narrative(s) in Dostoevsky's text. It is in this context that references to Stavrogin's "case study" are always given hypothetically, in quotation marks. Nothing could be further from the aims of the present paper than the reduction of Dostoevskian characters – or dilemmas, for that matter – into clinical cases.

mottoes and abundant allusions of the novel. While the former establish a set of metaphors which problematise the very nature of language and thus the definition of identity through narrative (cf. P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* 33), the latter function as a means of "writing" and "reading" Stavrogin's enigmatic identity for the characters of the novel – including the narrator. This intricate interrelationship of desire, mirror-image, language and narrative identity creates a textual world shaped along the patterns of the Narcissus myth, in which reaching authentic selfhood tragically, paradoxically and unavoidably equals the elimination of the self in death, the moment which alone can put an end to the endless chain of signification.

The Mirrors of Narcissus

According to Bakhtin, characters of Stavrogin's type contemplate the reflection of their own psyche "in the mirror of the other's consciousness" (Бахтин, „Дополнения и изменения к *Достоевскому*" 307). "Stavrogin's Confession" quite neatly supports this claim. On the one hand, throughout the written confession he tortures himself with the observation of his textualised and therefore objectified and alienated self – to apply the terms of the mirror stage, his *imago* or ego ideal. On the other hand, in the frame situation of his visit to Tikhon he both presumes to recognise the Symbolic Father, an embodiment of Law and Language (cf. Lacan, *The Language of the Self* 23, cf. Wilden 172, Sarup 16; Füzesséry 56–57; Boothby 129–37) in his confessor and strives to project this image on him.

This crucial moment of establishing one's identity through entering the Imaginary via identification with a mirror image and later with the Symbolic Father is conspicuously repeated throughout *Devils*, though with an inverted scenario. It is Stavrogin, who becomes a mirror-image, the object of the others' desire and the sign of their Ideal-I, with whom they desperately try to identify themselves. It is especially true with respect to his doubles, but since the mechanism of Symbolic identification follows the pattern of the primary narcissism related to the mirror stage (cf. Füzesséry 56–7; Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* 105), the phenomena of the mother mirror and Stavrogin's "love affairs" also fit into this paradigm: Varvara Petrovna obviously contemplates herself in her son, just like Liza and Marya Timofeevna, who create stories about Stavrogin in which they can play a role that satisfies their desire. A crucial moment of this mechanism is the point at which they substitute the "real" – and unknowable – Stavrogin with a text born from their own desire,

so that they can cast the role of the Symbolic Father, the Other, on him and define their own identity with the help of his "mirror"[4].

In the case of the doubles this procedure leads to ironic contrasts: the mythic narratives functioning as the image of Kirillov's, Shatov's or Lebyadkin's Ideal-I obviously correspond to the signs of Stavrogin's own earlier ideals, which he

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[4] It is at this point that my interpretation of the mechanism of desire in the novel differs from earlier readings. Most treatments of the topic use personality models based on identification, without any mention of narcissism. Thus, René Girard's groundbreaking study in the field (*Deceit, Desire and the Novel*) reads *Devils* as a textbook case of mediated desire, which he treats as the novelistic desire *per se*. Girard assumes that novelistic desire is triangular in nature; that is, between subject and object there is always a third element interpolated: a "mediator", who can either be external – existing beyond the novelistic world – or internal, simply a novelistic character other than the subject. In his view, the latter is clearly the case in *Devils.* For Girard the mediator is basically a model, an example to be imitated – not far from being an idol. The subject can feel desire only for objects the mediator is longing for (or at least the subject thinks so), though this relationship never reaches its consciousness. Therefore, the subject views its own desire as a key to its originality, while, ironically, the one thing it secures is the establishment of a Doppelgänger relationship between subject and internal mediator. Consequently, the subject's attitude to the mediator is highly ambivalent: the mediator is both an adored idol, a model for identification, and a hated rival (1–15). Needless to say, for Girard Stavrogin is such an internal mediator in the fictional world of *Devils*, whom all the other characters try to imitate especially in his originality, which actually precludes imitation (59–64). They desire what he desires, or what *they think* he desires. Girard emphasises that mediated desire leads to the hardly imaginable overvaluation of the desired object exactly because it is the object of the model's, the idol's desire – the subject's view of it has in many cases nothing to do with its "real" qualities.

Among others, Jostein Boertnes has heavily criticised Girard's reading of *Devils* along the lines above. From the perspective of the present study his most important counterargument is that Stavrogin is not a model for all the other characters in *Devils.* To substantiate his point, he analyses Varvara Petrovna and Stepan Trofivitch's relationship, which is clearly analogous to the relationship between mother and son. He points out that the model in Varvara Petrovna's case is not Stavrogin, but (the portrait of) Kukolnik – the woman's (imaginary) childhood love object. Accordingly, Boertnes sees both him and Stepan Trofimovitch rather as mysterious objects of desire – objects that gain value through their actual or potential similarity to a real or imaginary model. By analogy, the other characters also see "the incarnation of [their] mental prototype" in Stavrogin. Though these prototypes are different, they are "in actual fact variants, positive and negative, of a single prototype" (54–63).

Though Léna Szilárd's study is not focused on the dynamics of desire, the conclusions of her Jungian analytical approach are highly relevant to the issue. The more so, because her starting point – similarly to Boertnes's argument – is also Varvara Petrovna and Stepan Trofimovitch's relationship and her insights seem to support his views. Tracing down the mechanisms of idolisation in the novel, she comes to the conclusion that Stavrogin can be "the psychological centre of his environment", "an object, on which the others' unconscious attempts at compensation can be projected", because he can cover with various masks the "emptiness" resulting from the "lack of selfhood", "the missing centre of personality" (25–33). Meanwhile, she also asserts that Stavrogin's scandals, role changes, and – last but not least – his suicide are "the outbursts of selfhood (самость)" (32). Cf. Girard's comment on originality, quoted above, and Michael André Bernstein's claim about the lack of originality characterising and plaguing the abject hero (105–8).

has alienated and shed as a snake sheds its skin[5]. In this sense Stavrogin's doubles really are his "emanations" (Бердяев 519–20). By the time of the story, however, in the course of a multiple mirroring procedure the doubles have become both the frozen mirror-images of Stavrogin's previous roles and beholders contemplating their own images in the mirror represented by Stavrogin. In comparison, Pyotr Verkhovensky's case is much simpler: his text is undoubtedly created only by his own desire and the object of his desire is literally Stavrogin's desire. Therefore his "idolisation" is much more reminiscent of Stavrogin's entangled love relationships[6] and endows Nikolai Vsevolodovich with Narcissus' explicitly bisexual attraction (cf. Holmes 24). The whole stuffy atmosphere of *Devils*, permeated with eroticism, aggression, hidden desires and their scandalous outbreaks, also evokes the myth of Narcissus. Owing to the intricate procedures of mirroring, the "empty centre" or "void" represented by Stavrogin, which is traditionally subject to moral condemnation as a demonic phenomenon[7], can also be interpreted as a tragic case of extreme self-reflexivity – the tragedy of Narcissus.

Stavrogin's "case study" involves a malfunctioning mother mirror and a dysfunctional surrogate father as the keys to the emergence of his narcissism, and thus parallels the actual clinical cases that Heinz Kohut describes as the outcome of a combined Oedipal[8], and a much more important pre-Oedipal trauma (cf. Kohut 53). The latter is related to the mother mirror, which Iván

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[5] Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin's interpretation, according to which Stavrogin's narrative identities physically embodied in Kirillov and Shatov are actually the products of his own desire:

> All of them [Shatov, Kirillov and Pyotr Verkhovensky] think that he spoke with them as a mentor speaks with a pupil; in actual fact he had made them participants in his own inescapable internal dialogue, in which he was trying to convince himself, not them. Now Stavrogin hears from each of them his own words, but with a firm and monologised accent. He himself can now repeat these words only with an accent of mockery, not conviction. He had not succeeded in convincing himself of anything, and it is painful for him to listen to people whom he has convinced. On this base Stavrogin's dialogues are constructed with each of his three followers. (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 260)

Nevertheless, as Szilárd's reading of *Devils* clearly indicates, this interpretation cannot be accepted without reservations in Pyotr Verkhovensky's case (cf. 27–33).

[6] Sergei Bulgakov and Nikolai Berdyaev seem to share the opinion that „all the [characters] of the novel, both men and women, are more or less in love" with Stavrogin (Булгаков 493; cf. Бердяев 520).

[7] The theologically based interpretation of Stavrogin as a demonic embodiment of non-being and emptiness is a crucial point of Dostoevsky's critical assessment. Several authors have argued for it in a more or less sophisticated and direct manner since the turn of the century (cf. Бердяев 521; Булгаков 492, 498; Долинин 549) and very often it can also be discovered as a pivotal point of contemporary readings (cf. Мелетинский 15–26; Przybylski, "Sztavrogin" 110–17; Szilárd passim).

[8] Cf. the Oedipal reading of *Devils* in (Смирнов, *Психодиахронологика* 120–30).

Ignusz describes in the following terms: its essence is that "the mother contains the emotions projected by the baby like a vessel and thus the process of thinking is started 'about a thought without a thinker'". It results in internalisation which leads to the emergence of "psychic contents" related to narcissism, "the self" or the "personal I". The notion of the "self" comes into being from a meaning of the "I", the sense that "we are personally ourselves and not someone else" (cf. Kohut 124). The malfunction of the mother mirror takes place when the mother, because of her "depressive personality, cannot reflect the feelings of her baby" and "no emotions appear on her face at all" or "she can express only her own emotions" (Ignusz 81–2; cf. Kohut 117–8). Kohut argues that the prime cause of narcissistic disorders is the parents' – most importantly the mother's – wounded narcissism, which can result in the behaviour patterns described above. He also adds that the effect of such traumatic experiences can be alleviated if the child can find shelter in the other parent – the father. A crucial condition of that beneficial influence is the possibility to idealise the father, which prevents repeated frustration and disappointment in the omnipotent object of the child's love. If the resolution of the Oedipal conflict is unsatisfactory, if the idealisation of the father and identification with him become impossible, however, the child is left without any support to strengthen his own self – an Oedipal trauma is written over the hidden text of disappointment in the most archaic of objects, the mother (cf. 53–65).

In *Devils* both kinds of malfunction are clearly detectable in the parental figures of Varvara Petrovna and Stepan Trofimovich. While the former is characterised by the lack of empathy that is the sure sign of a dysfunctional mother mirror, the surrogate father, who due to a reversal of power positions and gender roles[9] behaves in an effeminate manner[10], could not be further from an idealised object. In fact, with respect to Stepan Trofimovich, it is the child who is forced to show empathy and behave like a mirror of the other's emotions. As to the mother-child interaction, the chronicler gives a description of the appallingly cold relationship between Stavrogin and Varvara Petrovna in his childhood: "The boy knew that his mother loved him very much, but he hardly loved her at all. She spoke to him very little and rarely interfered with him in any way, but somehow he was always morbidly aware of her intense gaze fixed on

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[9] Cf. "Dostoevsky has X-rayed sexual, moral, and religious abjection, displaying it as collapse of paternal laws. Is not the world of *The Possessed* a world of fathers, who are either repudiated, bogus, or dead, where matriarchs lusting for power hold sway?" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 20)

[10] Stepan Trofimovich's femininity is demonstrated most eloquently by his own hardly translatable blunder on the occasion of Varvara Petrovna's proposal for him to marry Dasha: "я... я никогда не мог вообразить, что вы решитесь *выдать меня... за другую... женщину*!" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 48, emphasis added). To top it off, he simply faints from the shock of such a suggestion.

him" (40)[11]. The mother's gaze is like a blank mirror; it does not reflect or transmit emotions, which is clearly shown by the emphatic lack of communication between her and the child. Instead, her painfully scrutinising look is singularly directed at Stavrogin, who, in his turn, reacts with a slightly paranoid psychic condition verging on illness.

In contrast, when "his mother entrusted his entire education and moral development to Stepan Trofimovich" (40), she gave an opportunity to Stavrogin's tutor to pour all his emotions over the child, even in the dead of the night: "They'd throw themselves into each other's arms and weep" over the man's "wounded feelings" (40). This implies that the normal mirroring procedure is inverted and it is the child who reflects the adult's emotions. Through this rather sickly internalisation of a grown man's feelings – the chronicler actually assumes that "the tutor upset the pupil's nerves to some extent" (40) – the youth prematurely experiences a strange form of desire:

> Stepan Trofimovich had succeeded in touching his young friend's deepest heartstrings and evoking in him an initial intimation, as yet undefined, of that eternal, sacred yearning [„тоска" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 27)] which some chosen souls, once they've tasted and known it, never ever exchange for any cheap pleasure. (There are some devotees who value the yearning even more than the most radical satisfaction of it, if such a thing were to be believed). (40–41)

Since this "yearning", similarly to Narcissus' desire for his own reflected self, is insatiable, it is also a source of perverse satisfaction. These phenomena imply that in Stavrogin's case Varvara Petrovna and Stepan Trofimovich as parental figures exclude the possibility of the emergence of healthy narcissism, although it would be essential for the establishment of "good self-esteem" (Holmes 9–10; cf. Kohut 18–22).

The malfunctioning mother mirror and father figure call for an interpretation of Stavrogin's "case study" in terms of clinical narcissism. Most conspicuously, Stavrogin's adult behaviour parallels the elements of two types of narcissism, which can be traced back to the combined traumatic experiences outlined above. In Jeremy Holmes's interpretation the mythical Narcissus is a representation of a clinical form of narcissism: he is the "oblivious narcissist" who "appear[s] to have little understanding of others' feelings and ride[s] roughshod with [his] arrogant and self-serving ruthlessness. [He is] grandiose and exhibitionistic" (23–4). Holmes traces the origins of this behaviour, which might "involve […] the absorption of some of the functions of the necessary Other into the self" (51),

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[11] The English quotations from Dostoevsky's novel are based on (Dostoevsky, *Devils*) and are indicated only by page numbers in parenthetical notes.

back to the "blank and unresponsive" mother mirror (48–9). The grown-up Stavrogin appears to be a classic example of this type: he experiments freely with other people's feelings, he is incapable of emotional commitment, though he is an object of intense desire – for both men and women. The mentor's role, which he undertakes in his relationship with Shatov and Kirillov, can be interpreted as the absorption of the function of the Other, even if he only tried to convince himself when verbalising his most contradictory teachings. The "unresponsive" mother mirror, the core of the problem, can be easily discovered in Varvara Petrovna's face.

Nevertheless, as Holmes also points out, there are no strict division lines between the "oblivious" narcissist and its inverse, the "hypervigilant" type, which is embodied in the myth by Echo. Her narcissism gains expression in her extreme "sensitivity to rejection or criticism", her shyness and clinginess (19–20), which implies that in her case the mother mirror reflected not the child's, but the mother's feelings. As opposed to Narcissus's, Echo's behaviour is centred around the "projection" of the Other's role on the object of her clinging and caring (48–51) [12]. In many respects Stavrogin, for whom Stepan Trofimovich acts out the role of a self-centred "mother figure" instead of a masculine father, also reveals the characteristic features of this hypervigilant type. As his "Confession" shows, at the core of his voyeurism there is a fundamental insecurity and a painful dependence on the gaze of the other (Other), while his exhibitionism is coupled with a horror of becoming a laughingstock. His self-assurance is disclosed as a mask (Szilárd 31) whose primary function is self-defence[13].

The roles established for Stavrogin through the parental models are twofold: he is to fulfil others' narcissistic desires either by realising their dreams or by being their audience. Just like Stepan Trofimovich, who was also Varvara Petrovna's "daydream" (13) earlier, he is to become everything she could not become: on his return from school "her son had now appeared before her almost in the guise of some new hope, or even in the aspect of some new dream. […] many times she'd stare at her Nicolas unnoticed, pondering, trying to comprehend something" (45). In the Russian text the descriptions of the early mother-child relationship, of Varvara Petrovna's feelings for Stepan Trofimovich and of her

[12] Holmes's typology is a relatively simple one, but it has the advantage of clearly paralleling the two major behavioural patterns Kohut has identified in clinical cases of narcissistic transference: the behaviour of the "oblivious" narcissist is characterised by the activation of the grandiose self (i. e. forms of mirror transference, Kohut 105–42), whereas the "hypervigilant" narcissist by the activation of the omnipotent object (i. e. casting the role of the Other on the analyst, idealisation, Kohut 37–73).

[13] The mask-like quality of Stavrogin's face, which is a recurrent argument for his demonic nature in Dostoevsky criticism, is far from being unambiguous. When Stavrogin, after four years of absence, returns to his hometown, the chronicler emphasises that his face can "no longer be said to resemble a mask", perhaps because there is "some new idea gleaming in his eyes" (192). A little later, however, the famous "wax figure" (242) simile occurs.

new hopes related to Stavrogin are connected by exact textual repetitions: "мечта" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 12, 30) appears for both "daydream" and "dream", whereas "пристально" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 27, 30) is the adjective characterising her gaze or stare in both cases. It implies that for Varvara Petrovna the same emotion – realising her desires through the agency of others – is at stake all three times. And probably it is because of the "narcissistic wound" (cf. Holmes 19) caused by her son's failure in this respect that she declares even before his death that "she has no son" (743). Stepan Trofimovich's "yearning", just like his constant need to pour out his emotions and test their effect on others, is probably only a part of his generally rather narcissistic character, which (also) gains material expression in his playing the peacock in front of the mirror. In his one-man-show he needs an empathic (or empathic-looking) audience, a looking-glass – and this is what Stavrogin learns to play. As the two roles outlined here are the ones which Stepan Trofimovich and Varvara Petrovna play for each other, the grown-up Stavrogin's behaviour also shows traces of the compulsion to repeat the patterns they have established. It is not by chance that Varvara Petrovna – though at that point absolutely mistakenly, projecting her own feelings on him (Szilárd 29) – "recognises herself in Nicolas" (202) during the scandal on his return. The feature that they really share, though, is their narcissistic horror of laughter, since "There was nothing Varvara Petrovna feared as much as humour" (10). This might throw a new light on Tikhon's claim that "there is strong inner, spiritual likeness" (454) between mother and son: Stavrogin's mask-like face is exactly such a blank mirror as his mother's, while his eyes only keep searching for his own image in the gaze of the other, like Stepan Trofimovich's.

It is not surprising, that Stavrogin's manifestly narcissistic adult emotional relationships evolve along similar patterns. While he himself seems absolutely self-centred and self-sufficient on the surface, the narratives formulated by the women in love with him are variations on the theme of desire, more exactly the desire to become the object of his desire: they are fundamentally wish-fulfilment fantasies shaped by the women's own narcissism. Marya Timofeevna's constant daydreaming is certainly an expression of her narcissism[14]. Her often-mentioned little mirror and heavy make-up, which, what for her being a holy fool, really make her clown-like (Przybylski, "Sztavrogin" 111), are all the most palpable signs of her femininity – and narcissism. She wants the prince of her dreams and thus the epiphanic scene in the chapter "Night" is also the staging of a major blow to her narcissism. Similarly to the Narcissus myth, whose plot revolves around eyes – an organ of erotic desire – and seeing the object of desire (cf. Kristeva, "Nárcisz: az újfajta téboly" 51–2), her meeting with Stavrogin is also

[14] "Marya Lebyadkina, who constantly remembers the moments she spent – or imagines to have spent – with 'Prince Harry', is the greatest example of narcissistic behaviour in *Devils*" (Fehér 449).

about eyes and looks: about Stavrogin's "penetrating gaze", which "perhaps expressed aversion" (288), and Marya Timofeevna's "lowered eyes" and "swift, comprehensive glances" (289). She either does not dare to face the mirror image Stavrogin shows her and therefore forbids the other to look at her, or expressedly orders him to do so (289, 291). Even the antonym of her central metaphor for Stavrogin, the "falcon gazing at the sun", must be a "blind owl" (293) – blind, because it cannot or does not desire to see Marya Timofeevna, or it does not see her the way Marya Timofeevna wants it to. Because Stavrogin feels only shame when the cripple almost falls flat on the floor. And because, although he makes a solemn promise to fulfil her desire and become her ideal listener ("every evening you can tell me stories as you did in Petersburg in those places you lived. I'll read books to you, if you like" [292]), he cannot and does not want to fulfil her greatest desire: he cannot desire her. The severity of the narcissistic wound is implied by the fact that Marya Timofeevna identifies her fall in the drawing-room and her noticing Stavrogin's shame as the moment of revelation (294), when she recognised Stavrogin's "real" character. The wound is only rubbed in when Stavrogin actually offers to hide her in Switzerland.

It seems rather more astonishing that Stavrogin is also unable to commit himself to the charming Liza, just like Narcissus, who cannot be seduced even by his most beautiful admirers (Ovid III 357–8) – though at a closer look the scenario is just the same. She also casts the role of "Prince Charming" on Stavrogin, partly in the fatal wish-fulfilment fantasy of her "romance", partly in its adaptation to contemporary high society circumstances: if Stavrogin cannot take her to visits in Moscow, if she cannot be a real high-society dame beside him, she does not need him at all. She had known all this, however, well before the fatal night, so it is highly probable that it is rather Stavrogin who finds the real reason for her desperate state in their final scene: "'Last night she guessed somehow that I don't love her at all… it's something she knew all along, of course'" (598). Liza's disappointment is also rooted in her inability to become the object of Stavrogin's desire – by the end of the novel, as she has foreshadowed in her hysterical scene in the drawing-room (208), she comes to share Marya Timofeevna's fate, which is clearly implied in her metaphorical and literal "fall" (604).

Darya Pavlovna is in manifest contrast with both other women, but only because her dream – a story of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice – is the only one which proposes for Stavrogin his only "authentic" role, the role of Narcissus. She almost becomes an apotheosis of silence in the novel, about whom Stavrogin claims that "he could never work out what she wanted" (309). Nevertheless, she still repeats one single desire of hers in their conversations: when all ends, Stavrogin should call her, and call her as soon as possible (308). Meanwhile, Stavrogin tramples on her self-esteem with the greatest ease, just like on her brother's, or like Narcissus on Echo's (cf. Ovid III 370–406), whose

role Darya Pavlovna is most likely to play (cf. Ovid III 494–508). As a modern version of the nymph echoing Narcissus's words, she also functions as a mirror for Stavrogin, since "only in her presence could he speak about himself out loud" (753). Therefore Stavrogin, just like the mythic Narcissus, can call only her before his death, since the two other women's narcissism clashes with his own "oblivious" narcissism.

Similarly to the lovers' stories, the mythic narratives of Stavrogin's doubles[15] – mirror images[16] – about him are also shaped, though indirectly, by their own narcissism and desire. Kirillov's, Shatov's, Lebyadkin's and (with some reservations) Pyotr Verkhovensky's cases may be interpreted as representations of the identification with the mirror image which takes place in the mirror stage. For them Stavrogin may be claimed to embody the Ideal-I they want to identify with, the person whose (earlier) narratives might be their means of self-definition and entry into Language – ultimately, their means to establish themselves as subjects. However, similarly to the *imago* in the mirror, which is actually only the alienated reflection of the child, Stavrogin's various narratives are also shaped in accordance with each double's narcissistic desires.

The term "negative narcissism", which implies "a constant state of self-dissatisfaction" and "self-hatred", therefore the individual's permanent preoccupation with himself or herself (Holmes 13), can be appropriately applied to Kirillov's, Shatov's and Lebyadkin's behaviour. Kirillov's political/philosophical suicide and Shatov's self-destruction, realised through self-humiliation and self-sacrifice, fall quite neatly into this pattern of self-hatred, actually the abjection of the self (cf. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 19–20). As Przybylski points out, "the fact that Kirillov takes on himself the sin of the organisation is rather of secondary importance. It only testifies to his exceptional self-hatred. What is more, Kirillov unconsciously also desires self-humiliation to a certain extent, because he considers mere existence an obscenity and absurd" (Przybylski, "Az Antikrisztus halála" 89). Shatov practically confesses his love for Stavrogin, as if he wanted to provoke the humiliating answer: "'I can't tear you out of my heart, Nikolai Stavrogin!' 'I'm sorry that I'm unable to love you, Shatov,' Nikolai Vsevolodovich said coldly" (269). As far as Shatov's generosity to his unfaithful wife is concerned, the chronicler must remark that „[h]e was chaste and incredibly bashful; he considered himself a terrible monster; he hated his own face and character; he compared himself to a freak"

[15] Though the term "double" is another recurrent notion in Dostoevsky criticism, its use is far from being unanimous; moreover, it sometimes appears to be fairly confusing. Cf. (Bakhtin, *Problems* 127–8; Булгаков 501–4; Przybylski, "Sztavrogin" 106–10; V. Tóth 29; 50). Szilárd uses the related Jungian term of the "shadow" pertaining to Pyotr Verkhovensky (36)

[16] The close (metaphorical) relationship between the mirror image and the double has been established in several contexts, e.g. in psychoanalysis (Wilden 162), ethnology (Beke 92) and cultural semiotics (Лотман 112–17).

(640). Taking this into consideration, it is not surprising at all that Shatov embraces so voluntarily Stavrogin's Messianistic-Slavophile teachings with their underlying mythic narrative of Christian self-sacrifice. For Lebyadkin, the "poet", Stavrogin could be the ideal audience in Petersburg who did not ruin his image of himself, because this image, similarly to Stavrogin's character, also includes a desire for being laughed at: "He had immeasurable respect and admiration for his own poems, but also, because of a certain roguish duplicity in his nature, he also liked the idea that Nikolai Vsevolodovich was always amused by his verses and would laugh at them, sometimes splitting his sides" (280). In other words, he naturally accepts the Falstaffian role Stavrogin appoints for him. In general, these characters appropriate Stavrogin's earlier narratives of identity and accept the roles defined in them because the stories reflect their own desires – they are actually created by these desires to a great extent.

In contrast, Pyotr Verkhovensky *consciously* wants to create Stavrogin's narrative – and identity – to make him play a role that Verkhovensky himself is unable to fulfil (Szilárd 35). It is his narrative which is most explicitly formulated by desire: while he is practically in love with the "idol" he has created, he wishes to make Stavrogin's desire – literally – the object of his own desire. It is not only in the chapter "Ivan the Tsarevich" that he promises to fulfil Stavrogin's most secret (and rather unknowable) desires ("Listen, tomorrow I'll bring you Lizaveta Nikolaevna. Do you want her? No? Why don't you answer? Tell me what you want and I'll do it. Listen, I'll give you Shatov if you like" [441]), but also on the fatal day following the festivities: "You're a free widower and could marry her tomorrow, couldn't you? She still doesn't know – allow me, I'll arrange everything for you" (597). As if Verkhovensky did not see that he is attempting the impossible: by that time Stavrogin's desires are directed exclusively on himself.

Since Stavrogin's earlier narratives, which the pupils/doubles have appropriated, are also created by their own desires, by voicing them they tell their "authentic" stories, even if indirectly. Kirillov, Shatov, Lebyadkin and Pyotr Verkhovensky equally "dance around naked" (267) before Stavrogin, as Shatov does not fail to notice, since by reciting his teachings or telling their self-created utopian dreams they reveal their most secret desires to him. However, Stavrogin does not or does not wholly acknowledge his earlier narratives as his own, and as for the role Verkhovensky offers to him, he refuses it twice. As his letter to Darya Pavlovna shows, he is "disgusted" by them (754), that is, in the process of his search for self-definition, he has cast out and alienated his earlier desires, which now fall under negation and are conceived as abject (cf. Kristeva, *Powers* 1–8). His doubles, like Narcissus, recognise themselves in the mirror images presented by Stavrogin, whereas he himself is unable to identify with his alienated images embodied in his doubles – and find himself.

In sum, the analysis of the phenomenon of the mother mirror, the lovers' wish-fulfilment fantasies and the doubles' narratives leads to the conclusion that most characters in *Devils* wish to interpret Stavrogin as the object of their desire and this results in the myths surrounding him. The formation of the individual variants, however, is crucially influenced by the characters' own narcissism. For them Stavrogin, who appears in the "Confession" as Narcissus enchanted and enamoured with himself, functions rather as a silent and passive mirror.

Textual Mirrors – Writing and Reading Stavrogin

Since the characters of the novel primarily want – and suppose – to define their own identity through Stavrogin, they are almost obsessed with "reading" the cryptic text of Stavrogin's identity, or actually with "writing" the text that would narrate it. Apart from the mythic stories most of them create, the former tendency also surfaces in the abundance of literary reminiscences related to Stavrogin. Allusiveness – one form of the "text-within-the-text" in *Devils* – evokes a work of art, maybe an entire genre as a frame of reference for interpreting him. The latter tendency is realised in "epidemic" graphomania, which results in the inclusion of texts written by a significant number of characters in the novel, that is, in the conspicuous presence of another form of the "text-within-the-text" in *Devils.* These narratives show how the attempt to draw Stavrogin's portrait grows into an attempt to differentiate the nameless small town where most of the action takes place from the hundreds of similar settlements in Russia, and ultimately into an attempt to give an image of Russia herself – to define Russian national identity. Owing to the effects of the endless reflection produced by the numerous textual mirrors[17] in *Devils* such an effort is inevitably doomed to failure. The novel, however, also demonstrates that the awareness of this futility is not an excuse for making no attempt at all: without the self-reflection embodied in the Narcissus myth consciousness itself cannot exist.

The deciphering of Stavrogin's identity is represented through the metaphors of reading and writing, which are associated with Shatov, Pyotr Verkhovensky and Varvara Petrovna. As for Shatov, in the chapter "Night" he metaphorically reads Stavrogin's earlier teachings, that is, his narrative identity. "Allow me to repeat your own fundamental idea at that time… Oh, only ten more lines ["строка" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 156)] or so, only the conclusion" (263), he begs him before starting his summary. The words "line" and "conclusion" definitely refer to a narrative, moreover, a written narrative. More significantly, in Pyotr Verkhovensky's case writing, more exactly the writing of fictitious narratives is the fundamental metaphor of speech itself, as Stavrogin's words reveal:

[17] For a theoretical overview of the relationship between textual mirrors – the *mise an abyme* – intertextuality and the double see (Szekeres passim).

> I guess what kind of tale he [Pyotr Stepanovich] composed for you here. Compose he does [“строчит” (Достоевский, *Бесы* 123)], when he tells a story; he keeps an entire record office in his head. Observe that as a realist he’s incapable of telling lies; truth is more important to him than the success of his tale… except, of course, for those particular circumstances when success is more important than truth. (206)

The Russian word Stavrogin uses for his friend’s verbal activity is both etymologically related to Shatov’s “lines”, and has a similar, but rather pejorative meaning as the English “compose” – something like “scratch”.

The implications of this trope are far-reaching: Pyotr Verkhovensky’s “artistic” creativity is a recurrent motif in the novel. Fedor the convict is the first to remark about the younger Verkhovensky that he “has an easy time of it because first he gets his own picture [“представит” (Достоевский, *Бесы* 162)] of a man and then that’s what he always sees” (274). This sentence, however, is later (intentionally?) misquoted by the chronicler, who uses the verb “сочинит” (Достоевский, *Бесы* 223), meaning “compose, write” instead of Fedka’s original, loosely standing for “represent, imagine”[18]. This is particularly interesting, because Fedka’s words are in quotation marks, so they are meant to be a literal quote. The use of this synonym results in a slight semantic shift in the direction of creation and writing (literary texts), since “сочинить” can equally mean “invent” or “compose a text or music”, though it is also used to mean “fib”, which relates it to the pejorative register associated with “строчить”. Therefore, it represents Pyotr Verkhovensky as an author, not so much picturing or visualising, but actually creating people. The same semantic field is activated by the word “выдумал” (Достоевский, *Бесы* 260), i.e. “make up, invent”, which Pyotr Verkhovensky himself uses in relation to Stavrogin: “I invented you when I was abroad; looking at you, I invented it all. If I hadn’t watched you from my corner, none of it would ever have come into my head!” (448). The verb “сочинить” also occurs in Verkhovensky’s own words, at a rather significant moment: before entering the meeting of “our group” he asks Stavrogin to “compose his countenance” (“Сочините-ка вашу физиономию” [239][19]), and in explanation he adds that he always does so himself. This phrase clearly evokes Varvara Petrovna’s creative activity, who is, as Szilárd points out, Stepan Trofimovich’s metaphorical puppet-master, and “composed (’сочинила’) his suit and the interior of his room” (29). The implication is that in the world of *Devils* human faces, teachings, and ultimately identities are rather fictitious texts, which can be and on occasion definitely should be written – and read.

[18] In the English translation the two sentences (274, 383) are literally the same.

[19] The English text here includes the expression “compose yourself” (409), but the literal translation is much more suggestive, I think.

The writing and reading procedure, however, relies rather heavily on ready-made texts, which is best exemplified in Stavrogin's case. Other characters in *Devils* read his identity through numerous allusions[20], which evoke not only particular literary texts, but in some cases also entire generic traditions. Varvara Petrovna and Stepan Trofimovich formulate readings, which, due to their rather specific relationship, cannot really be differentiated from each other. They evoke both Prince Harry (Shakespeare, *Henry IV*) and Hamlet as reference points[21], just as well as the genre of the medieval romance, since on the basis of Pyotr Verkhovensky's tale of Stavrogin's relationship with Marya Timofeevna his mother characterises him as "an eccentric", who is "always lofty in his sentiments, noble and chivalrous" (206). Stavrogin, in his turn, must also have read the story of his life in Petersburg in the context of *Henry V*, since – according to Verkhovensky – he used to refer to Lebyadkin "as his Falstaff" (196). Liputin mentions Stavrogin as one of "these lady-killers *à la* Pechorin" (108), and thereby places his character in the context of Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time.* The adjective "сердцеед" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 66), which literally means "heart-eater", however, implies a rather vulgar reading of the demonic romantic hero, which focuses on his erotic, and probably also Gothic aspects[22]. Liza's desperate attempts to conceptualise Stavrogin include references to different genres, such as the (medieval) romance, the Gothic and operatic melodrama, while Marya Timofeevna's imagination is equally suffused with mythic and folklore-like plots. Her narratives of Stavrogin, nevertheless, are also related to medieval romance, as implied by the little booklet laid on her table, which is "a collection of light, edifying stories, for the most part set in the age of chivalry, intended as a Christmas present or for schoolchildren" (287).

The allusions incorporated in the chronicler's text deserve special attention because they seem to have an authoritative status as far as the interpretation of Stavrogin's identity is concerned. Anton Lavrentyevitch actually highlights at least two reminiscences by putting them into the position of chapter heading: the Shakespearean "Prince Harry" (40) and the Biblical/mythic "wise serpent" (168), which – according to Liputin – is originally applied to Stavrogin by Lebyadkin (106). Alexandr Krinitsin argues convincingly that the former allusion reflects an attempt to interpret "the outrages Stavrogin commits as a foreshadowing of his future heroic deeds". He also points out, however, that the source of the analogy, Stepan Trofimovich, is a comic character, and Stavrgogin's acts ultimately disappoint the optimistic expectations implied in it. Therefore, the chronicler's use of the reminiscence as a chapter title becomes

[20] Szilárd even speaks of "templates" and "clichés" with reference to the alternative role models appearing in the novel (31–2).

[21] About Shakespearean allusions in the novel cf. (Криницын 356–70).

[22] On the interrelationship of the Gothic and Romanticism in terms of the abject cf. (Williams 1–24).

inevitably ironic (Криницын 361). As far as the motif of the "wise serpent" is concerned, the inherently ambivalent metaphor and its related images feature in several narratives created about Stavrogin in *Devils*, to form the potential core of his practically deconstructive readings in criticism (cf. Szilárd 35).

Apart from these two "prioritised" allusions, the chronicler repeatedly attempts to interpret Stavrogin in the context of literary texts and other phenomena of literary history. First of all, he represents him as a Romantic, demonic Byronic hero – partly to reinforce one metaphorical meaning associated with the "serpent" motif, that of the rebel against divine law and social norms[23]. On the one hand, Stavrogin shows some of the general features of this type, such as a powerful sex appeal, mysteriousness, the potential for transgression and unforgivable sins, and an ambivalent, but rather demonic, dark beauty:

> Our ladies were all mad about the new arrival. […] Some people were particularly fascinated by the idea that his soul might harbour a fatal secret; others positively relished the notion that he was a murderer. […] his bright eyes a bit too clear and serene, his complexion a bit too fair and delicate, his colour a bit too fresh and pure, his teeth like pearls, his lips like coral – he seemed to be a paragon of beauty, yet at the same time there was something repulsive about him. (43–4)

On the other hand, the chronicler's extended comparison of Stavrogin to L—n (216–7) evokes Lermontov's figure directly, and *A Hero of Our Time* indirectly.

Secondly, some elements of the Gothic, a typically Romantic genre, also feature in the chronicler's text, just like in Liza's reading. Thus, for example, the implied metaphor of the werewolf for Stavrogin's character appears in such recurrent expressions as "bestial behaviour towards a woman of high society with whom he was having an affair" (41–2), "the wild beast suddenly unsheathed its claws" (44; 45)[24], and finally "In another instant the poor old man would surely have died of fright, but the monster took pity and released his ear" (52). The excerpts above, as the last one most clearly shows, are predominantly related to the "impossible outrages" Stavrogin "perpetrated" (45) in the small town and the chronicler's tone involves a fair share of irony in it. The same is implied by his bathetic story of Stavrogin's furious outburst in the prison and its

[23] In the English Gothic/Romantic tradition, with which Dostoevsky was familiar through *Melmoth the Wanderer,* there is a straight line leading from Milton's Satan – a hero of sublime failure – to the Gothic/Romantic villain, as Maggie Kilgour, among others, points out (40–41; cf. Мелетинский 48).

[24] While in the English text the same expression appears twice, originally it is a modified repetition: "вдруг зверь показал свои когти" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 29) and "зверь вдруг выпустил свои когти" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 30).

outcome: after such most pathetic descriptions as "with unnatural strength he wrenched off the iron grating", suddenly "it turned out that he was suffering from an acute attack of brain fever. They took him home to his mother ["*к мамаше*" (Достоевский, *Бесы* 34, emphasis added)]" (52). Characteristically for the ambivalent world of the novel quite a number of the roles the characters' and the chronicler's allusions appoint for Stavrogin seem to converge in rather romantic images – that of the chivalrous knight, the repentant youthful prince promising a virtuous king, or the demonic Byronic hero – which, on the one hand, are mutually exclusive, on the other are also undermined by the narrator's irony. Stavrogin's mysterious identity seems to discredit any reading relying on prefabricated clichés – and any attempt to create a narrative identity along these lines, for that matter[25].

Most characters' urge to tell their narrative results in an "infectious graphomania", an almost universal obsession with writing (literature) in *Devils*, which reaches probably its most sophisticated form in the chronicler's desire to write the novel itself. In *Devils* almost everybody has literary ambitions, or at least at crucial moments of their life they cannot resist a "compulsion" to write, an urge to turn from readers into authors. Reading and writing appears to be the same in the act of (self-)interpretation, most often it is a narcissistic moment of heightened self-reflection. For example, Stepan Trofimovich is not only "passionately fond of writing" (12), but his lengthy poem and all his letters are only segments of the unstoppable lifelong verbiage, which is the most obvious evidence of his constant narcissistic preoccupation with himself – his very essence. Lebyadkin's poems offer just another most evident example, though, as the chronicler's parody reveals, the texts created by Karamzin, the professional writer, also contain nothing but self-adulation. Lembke writes a novel (now that he is forbidden to make a miniature Scottish kirk), Shatov has written an

[25] Katalin Kroó's analysis of Stavrogin's relationship with his "pupils", based on the exploration of the intertextual and metatextual levels of the text, arrives at a similar conclusion, though with a pronouncedly different evaluation of Stavrogin's suicide. She treats the pupils' characters as fundamentally textual phenomena, what is more, as a result of mistaken interpretative practices aimed at finishing Stavrogin's unfinished old text and giving its "true" representation. The pupils' failure is inevitable, since their interpretation, their representation does not have an "original", on the one hand, and their philosophical/ideological interpretative practices are based on ellipsis, on the other. She suggests that Stavrogin's – successful – attempts to round off his "old" story with a new ending are manifested in his "*new*", "*personal*" and "*artistic*" word: in the text of his "Confession" and in his suicide. She draws the conclusion that while Dostoevsky's novel demonstrates that the only escape from the suffocating enclosure of the "devil's space" is narration, the artistic word, textuality itself, the crucial texts in this respect are always equally connected to the motifs of the *devil* and *god*, to the moments of transgressing the threshold between the devilish and divine spaces. Therefore the narrative repeatedly "washes away" and "firmly establishes" the border between them, setting into motion a practically endless game of meanings which also dominates the metatextual level of the novel (Кроо 227–61).

unreadably long letter to Stavrogin, Kirillov is overtaken by irresistible garrulousness when writing his suicide note – as if he, like Sheherezade, could remain alive only as long as he can narrate. Pyotr Verkhovensky forges a poem about himself in Herzen's name, so that his "noble character" (371–2) can be attributed to a sufficiently authoritative author. Stavrogin prints off three hundred copies of his confessional narrative; what is more, he wants to get it published in the newspapers, though he says to Darya Pavlovna "in annoyance, almost in disgust" that he "can't write" (308). The recurrent motif of "disgust" implies that for him writing, the desire for the textualisation and contemplation of his own alienated identity, has already become abject.

The literary ambitions Liza wants to realise with Shatov's help gain special significance because they outline the chronicler's ars poetica (cf. Matlaw 38): as the consistent use of the genre of the chronicle shows, both Liza and the narrator of *Devils* aim to rewrite the (already discredited?) Grand Narrative of History (Cobley 187–9, 232) through their alternative historiography. The documentary nature of Liza's project is rooted in the proposed technique: her annuals would be compiled from newspaper articles, i.e. they would be written in a manner which, similarly to the incorporation of generically fundamentally different texts in Menippean satire (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 13), would result in heterogeneous, "polyphonic" texts. The avoidance of any "tendentiousness" and insistence on "complete impartiality" (136) would vouchsafe for the equality of the individual "parts" or voices, though, as Shatov quite rightly points out, selection in itself is almost impossible without the suggestion of some tendency (136). All along, the aims of the "literary enterprise" are set in the metaphorical terms of drawing a portrait: it would "constitute an *outline* of Russian life", "express[…] the personal, moral life of the people, the *character* of the Russian nation", and it would be "a *picture* of the spiritual, moral and inner life of Russia" (135–6, emphasis added).

This picture of Russia is actually embodied in the narrative of *Devils* as the picture of a typical – and therefore nameless – Russian small town, more particularly as Stavrogin's personal portrait. Since the thematic scope of the novel practically corresponds to the one that Liza outlines – it includes "unusual incidents, fires, public subscriptions, all sorts of good and bad deeds, various pronouncements and speeches, perhaps reports about the flooding of rivers" (135) – *Devils* functions like a realisation of her plans. The "picture drawing" she envisions is carried out via the morphologically and etymologically established interrelationship of face, personality, being different and distinctive feature coded in the Russian language: the words expressing them (лик–личность–отличаться–отличие) all have the same root. Faces – and identities – are created by establishing a difference within the sign system, by signs, by texts. Accordingly, the chronicler attempts nothing but the retelling of a significant story – the creation of a difference, a sign – for the insignificant little

town which is “completely undistinguished” (3) from the hundreds of similar settlements. That is, before Stavrogin disturbs its quiet life and introduces enough transgression and deviance into it to supply material for the creation of a plot (cf. P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* 54). Therefore, it is Stavrogin’s (narrative) identity which supplies a face and difference (“лик” and “отличие”) for his “доселе ничем не *отлич*авшийся город” (Достоевский, *Бесы* 7, emphasis added). By analogy, his narrative also becomes the text of the (undefinable) identity of Russia[26].

In contrast with official – presumably scientific and objective – historiography the impelling power of story-telling for both Liza and the chronicler seems to be desire itself. Liza’s “literary enterprise” may be only an excuse to approach Marya Timofeevna through Shatov. This, in turn, is obviously motivated by her desire to discover Stavrogin’s mysterious past, to test the “feasibility” of her own wish-fulfilment fantasies centred on him, and ultimately to put together the image of a coherent identity – both for him and herself. Similar motives might be hidden behind the chronicler’s enterprise, who tries to decipher and arrange into a meaningful story the mysterious events of the recent past to “work through” the unspeakable experience of the beloved woman’s death – and maybe even more significantly, to come to terms with the figure of his “victorious” rival after a major blow to his narcissism. The narrative of History is rewritten in *Devils* both as a compilation of journalistic pieces composed by a chronicler always lagging behind the events[27], and as a fundamentally narcissistic project, a personal history focused on the “historisation” of the unconscious (Lacan, *The Language* 23) and desire.

Therefore the narrative and the metaphorical chain of signification can be brought to a closure only by Stavrogin’s death – or maybe not even by that. Just like Narcissus, who keeps looking at himself even in the mirror of Styx, the river of the Underworld (Ovid III 494–508), Stavrogin also continues the process of endless reflection with his last words, his short suicide note. As an echo of the Narcissus myth, his short letter, in which he announces his suicide in his characteristically dry, ungrammatical and elliptical style, ends with the nuclear unit of solipsistic enclosure: ”я сам” (Достоевский, *Бесы* 433)[28]

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[26] About the relationship of narrative, identity, and especially national identity cf. (Cobley 37–41).

[27] The parallel between the chronicler and a journalist is most convincingly established in (Карякин 243–319). Karyakin also suggests that *Devils* might have been written as “a conscious *answer*” to the publication of Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* in 1869 (Карякин 334). Though he goes on to explore the implications of this hypothesis in moral terms, with respect to the underground type, his idea actually inspires a reading of *Devils* as a conscious answer to the *historical novel* as embodied in *War and Peace.* The whole section of Karyakin’s essayistic book which is devoted to *Devils* and puts it in the context of reporting contemporary history (Карякин 201–342) actually suggests this idea.

[28] The English translation, with a bit of pedantry that normally characterises the chronicler – but not Stavrogin – supplies the missing verb: “I did it myself” (756).

UNDER THE (IMPOSSIBLE) GAZE OF THE WEST: JOSEPH CONRAD'S VISION OF RUSSIANNESS[1]

Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* – a spy novel featuring, with the single exception of the anonymous English narrator, only Russian emigrants living in Switzerland – is unquestionably the Polish writer's most Russian text as far its theme is concerned. More particularly, its focal point is the identity formation of the central character, Kyrilo Sidorovitch Razumov, which inevitably acquires a national and heavily politicised nature. As Razumov exclaims: "But Russia *can't* disown me. She cannot! [...] I am *it*!" (Conrad 176)[2]. Thus the issue of Razumov's identity equals the issue of Russian national identity: Russianness is superficially defined in a set of oppositions centred around East and West, as the title of the novel clearly implies. The same title, however, also emphasises the significance of eyes: as Andrew Long points out, "this novel is about looking", about "Razumov's search for the right 'eyes' to look at him, that is, for an appropriate subjectivising gaze" (498). An attempt to disentangle the bedazzling web of gazes influencing Razumov's identity formation has led me to claim that though the novel represents Russian identity as determined by the ideological construct defining East and West, it also embodies a criticism of the self-same construction at two levels. On the one hand, it deconstructs the notions of "Eastern" and "Western" at the discursive level by revealing the untenable nature of the dichotomies it is built on; on the other hand, Conrad's novel unmasks the fantasies this construct works with.

East and West Gazing at Each Other: the Ideology of Russianness

Under Western Eyes tries to define Russian national identity within the discourse of East and West, thereby relying on two heavily ideological discourses (the Enlightenment ethos of the West and Slavophil ideology) which mutually sustain each other.

Russians are represented in the novel as the radically different Eastern Other of Western culture: they are shown as an exclusive diaspora in a setting

[1] First published as "Under the (Impossible) Gaze of the West – Joseph Conrad's Vision of Russianness," *Slavica* XXXIX–LX (2010–11), 247–65. Special thanks for his careful linguistic editing to Charles Somerville.

[2] All references to *Under Western Eyes* are based on (Conrad) and will be indicated in the article only by the parenthetical page numbers.

representative of the Enlightenment and by an allegedly incomprehensive English narrator. Much of the novel is set in Geneva, a city emblematic of the West (cf. Gilliam, "Russia and the West in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*" 224) and Enlightenment thought. The latter connection is emphasised through the figure of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Razumov even visits his statue to write under it. Russians are emphatically alien to this environment – they form a closed community into which, with the sole exception of the narrator, no Westerner is allowed. He is an elderly English language teacher, who, however, repeatedly warns readers that he is unable to understand the Russian temperament: from the perspective of Western rationality he sees it as paradoxical (Gilliam, "Russia" 219–20)[3] and incomprehensibly passionate[4]. From this point of view, as Gilliam demonstrates, Russian identity seems to be tied to the "Eastern" component in a series of dichotomies labelled as "Eastern" and "Western". To name only a few: spirituality vs. materiality, simplicity vs. sophistication, "irrational union of extremes" vs. their "rational reconciliation" characterise Russians and Western Europeans, respectively ("Russia" 222).

The 19th- and 20th-century Slavophil discourse of Russian identity is, however, also based on the opposition of East and West[5]. Therefore, it is not surprising that some of its major components are evidently present in *Under Western Eyes*[6]. First and foremost, Razumov, the fatherless and motherless student of philosophy, who following his betrayal of the anarchist assassin Haldin has to leave Russia for the West, fits into the Dostoevskian vision of the Russian intellectual as an uprooted, homeless wanderer (cf. Dostoevsky, "The Pushkin Speech" 44). Razumov's telling name and his insistence on the power of Reason also confirm this image. In the Slavophils' opinion the Russian intellectuals' homelessness was caused by Peter the Great's Western reforms (Hajnády 173); thus it is associated with the philosophy of the Enlightenment,

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[3] According to Harriet Gilliam the central Russian feature for the narrator is "simplicity", which means an ability to switch abruptly from one "extreme state" to its opposite (e.g. from emotionality to rationality, from animal-like behaviour to heightened spirituality). This is why for the narrator Russianness is characterised by "a series of paradoxes" ("Russia and the West in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*" 219–20).

[4] Here I agree with Tom Rice's conclusions. He asserts that although in *Under Western Eyes* the "key-word" the narrator applies to grasp the "mystery" of Russianness is "cynicism", the term that really fulfils this function in the novel is "passion" (136–7).

[5] On Slavophilism cf. (Hajnády 130–78).

[6] Slavophilism emerged in the 1840s among Russian intellectuals and in the literary field. It reached one of its culminations in Dostoevsky's famous "Pushkin Speech" delivered in 1880. Some of its elements were absorbed into mystical notions gaining ground in Russian political thought and arts at the turn of the century. Born in 1857, Conrad left behind Russian Poland at the age of seventeen. However, research surrounding the unfinished fragment *The Sisters* provides evidence that Conrad was familiar with Slavophil and Pan-Slavic ideology from his youth (P. Kaye 137).

with the belief in the supreme power of Reason, with the appearance in Russia of the Faustian hero questing for knowledge and longing for action (Хайнади 162). As Zoltán Hajnády emphasises, Russians see this mentality as diametrically opposed to the Russian ideal of sainthood, passivity and contemplation (Хайнади 177). Therefore, the Russian wanderer is often a demonic one (Хайнади 181) – a type Razumov with his overall appearance, his role of a spy and traitor and with his constant deceptions clearly conforms to. This association of the wanderer with Western cultural and philosophical influences might also explain why, as Harriet Gilliam notes, the narrator – and, let me add, the reader also – perceives Razumov as the most Western character among his compatriots ("Russia" 229). In addition, Razumov's passionate negation of his being a revolutionary also reflects the same Slavophil ideology in its rhetoric, and ironically reveals how close to home Razumov feels the charge. Influenced by Western ideas, absorbed in philosophical thought, the young intellectual is only at one remove from the demonic and un-Russian anarchist:

> 'I am *reasonable*. I am even – permit me to say – a *thinker*, though to be sure, this name nowadays seems to be the monopoly of hawkers of revolutionary wares, *the slaves of some French or German thought – devil knows what foreign notions. But I am not an intellectual mongrel.* I think like a Russian.' (81, emphasis added)

If Razumov, the male wanderer is one dominant image for Russia in the novel, there is also another, even more powerful, feminine imagery in the text, which is equally related to Slavophil discourse. The central idea of pochvennichestvo – a return to the Russian soil, the *mother*land as a key to spiritual and national revival –, which gains prominent expression, for instance, in Dostoevsky's writings, also spectacularly features in *Under Western Eyes*. Thus, Razumov's decision to inform on Haldin is made in a moment of "grace" inspired by his vision of the "passive", "white", "inert" and "sacred" land of Russia (35–6), which has been described earlier as "inanimate, cold, inert, like a sullen and tragic *mother* hiding her face under a winding-sheet – his native *soil*!" (34–5, emphasis added). The adjectives clearly refer to a Virgin Mary-like imagery, while the narratorial comments can be read as all but overt references to Slavophil thinkers, probably Dostoevsky as well:

> Razumov stood on the point of conversion. [...] In Russia, the land of spectral ideas and disembodied aspirations, many brave minds have turned [...] to the one great historical fact of the land. They turned to autocracy for the peace of their patriotic conscience [...]. Like other great Russians before him, Razumov, in conflict with himself, felt the touch of grace upon his forehead. (35–36)

In Dostoevsky's vision the motherly image of the land is complemented by the "apotheosis of the Russian woman", a counterpoint to the Russian wanderer. "A type of positive beauty" (Dostoevsky, "The Pushkin Speech" 48), she "has something solid and unshakeable upon which her soul may bear" – she is rooted in her past and her motherland (Dostoevsky, "The Pushkin Speech" 52). The close connection of the two images – the mother and the beautiful young woman – is indicated by the fact that the discourse of turn-of-the-century Russian Symbolism blurs them together: the reverence of Eternal Femininity is also the veneration of the Eternal Mother, the wet mother soil (Hajnády 254). This "apotheosis of the Russian woman" is no one else but Nathalie Haldin[7], whose function in the novel is – in a somewhat superficial reading – to save Razumov from the moral corruption and disintegration his betrayal and homelessness entail:

> [Razumov] raised his face [...]. [T]hat look in his eyes of dull, absent obstinacy [...] began to pass away. It was as though *he were coming to himself* in the awakened consciousness of that *marvellous harmony of feature, of lines, of glances, of voice,* which made of the girl before him a being *so rare, outside, and, as it were, above the common notion of beauty.* (283, emphasis added)

The third component I would like to mention is related to both conservative Slavophil thought and later anarchist, left-wing ideology: it is an emphatic turn to the people as the preserver of an authentic connection to the Russian land and therefore the bearer of authentic national identity (Hajnády 174). Accordingly, it features on both sides in Conrad's text. As Andrew Long convincingly argues, Haldin's anarchism is based on the Russian soul, "organically linked" to the motherland, and embodied in the sledge driver Ziemianitch (502). This "organic link" could gain no better expression than the very name of Haldin's potential accomplice: it is derived from "земля", the Russian word of feminine gender for "soil" (cf. Lewitter 658–9), therefore union with him is nothing but a union with the motherland. While Razumov can conceive Haldin's pathetic mention of Ziemianitch as the 'bright Russian soul' only ironically (32–3), he also experiences "union" with the people through contact with Ziemianitch:

[7] To counterbalance this idealised image, *Under Western Eyes* is merciless with regard to Peter Ivanivitch's "feminism". His discourse of "the admirable Russian woman" (105) is satirically undercut by the great refugee's treatment of Tekla, a real specimen. With all his high rhetoric, the "great feminist" allegedly does not restrain himself from either verbal or physical abuse of the weaker sex (142–3). While one is tempted to see Peter Ivanovitch as a parody of Dostoevsky in this respect, a case could also be made for the ironic, even satirical representation of the cult of Eternal Femininity in his ideas.

> ’Is not this my country? Have I not got forty million brothers?’ he [Razumov] asked himself [...]. And the *fearful thrashing* he had given the inanimate Ziemianitch seemed to him a sign of *intimate union*, a pathetically severe necessity of brotherly love. (36, emphasis added)

This turn to the people in Slavophil ideology was part and parcel of rejecting the declining, mechanical civilisation of the West and expecting a renewal of culture through a return to the national core. The idea soon evolved into a vision of worldwide renewal with the lead of the Russian nation: the idea of the Messianistic mission of Russia emerged (Hajnády 174). In Conrad’s novel the anarchist Haldin’s rhetoric reproduces the same hardcore conservative train of thought:

> [The soul] works for itself – or else where would be the sense of *self-sacrifice, of martyrdom* [...]? [... When I die] [m]y spirit shall go on warring in some Russian body till all falsehood is swept out of the world. The modern civilization is false, but *a new revelation shall come out of Russia*. [...] The Russian soul that lives in all of us. [...] It has a *mission* [...]. (25–6, emphasis added)

However, as some of the above examples might have suggested, neither the Western, nor the Slavophil version of Russian identity bears close scrutiny in Conrad’s text. Not only are they heavily ideological but they also seem to be inseparable from the gaze of the Other as a structuring force of (national) identity. Therefore I find Slavoj Žižek’s Lacanian explication of identification and his related criticism of ideology extremely fruitful in the interpretation of Conrad’s text. Žižek’s reading of the Lacanian graphs of desire describes a model of identification which ultimately allows for a comprehension of the key terms of any ideology as the “signifying representatives” (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 96) of *objet a,* and ideologically determined identification as imaginary or symbolic identification influenced by the gaze of the Other (*objet a*). Žižek contrasts imaginary identification (mirror stage) and symbolic identification (identification with the Symbolic Father, formulation of the subject in language) as identification with the image and the gaze, respectively (*The Sublime* 105). Nevertheless, he also points out that imaginary identification is equally motivated by “*a certain gaze in the Other*” (*The Sublime* 106). Thus, for example, “hysterical theatre” in fact is nothing else but the subject’s “offering” of itself as the object of desire to the Other, that is, usually to “a masculine, paternal” subject who is the embodiment of the Other for the hysterical. In Žižek’s system the Other corresponds to ideology, which therefore is also sustained by a structuring lack, desire and *jouissance*. The object-cause of this desire (*objet a*, the gaze) belongs to the Real, therefore it is only through the

agency of a "pure signifier" (a signifier without a signified, a "rigid designator" [*The Sublime* 95]) that it can fulfil its structural function in ideology. While it apparently "gives unity and identity to our experience of historical reality" and "totalizes an ideology by bringing to a halt the metonymic sliding of its signified" (*The Sublime* 97–9), it does not actually serve as a fixed point of reference; in fact, it is only a signifier of difference. The desire of the Other is constituted in and masked by a fantasy (*The Sublime* 124). It follows from Žižek's train of thought that the subject, while defining itself via identification with ideology, identifies with a signifier without a referent, with a marker of difference, with nothing. At the same time, as Žižek emphasises, the subject can only hope to enter the field of the Other's desire (identify with its gaze) if it enters "the frame of [its constituting] fantasy" (*The Sublime* 119). However, "the phantasmic narrative always involves an impossible gaze, the gaze by means of which the subject is already present at the act of his/her own conception" (Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* 16). As Žižek's examples reveal, "the impossible gaze" in an ideological context is the "gaze of the innocent observer" which is "in a way nonexistent, since this gaze is the impossible neutral gaze of someone who falsely exempts himself from his concrete historical existence" (*The Plague* 18). Žižek differentiates two interrelated ways or levels of criticising ideology – a deconstructive, "discursive" one based on detecting the totalising gaze of the Other and the pure signifiers of difference, which determine identification, and another one based on "inverting" the same gaze and revealing the fantasy masking its central lack and desire, "to detect, in a given ideological edifice, the element which represents within it its own impossibility" (*The Sublime* 125–7).

In my reading, Conrad's text realizes both interrelated forms of criticism. As for his discursive criticism, in *Under Western Eyes* the very words Western and Eastern prove to be signifiers of pure difference, which, however, are conceived as identity. The factors contributing to this effect – such as the issue of Conrad's own national identity, the novelistic tradition that Conrad continues and the representation of the narrator and the main character as doubles – undermine the binary opposition of East and West by problematising the gaze on behalf of which symbolic identification takes place.

The Impossible Gaze I: Conrad's Western Eyes

In trying to detect the "subjectivising gazes" offered to Razumov, the most obvious choice seems to be the gaze associated with the focalisation of the novel – the narrator's "Western eyes". By using the English professor of languages as a participant narrator, Conrad attaches the Western gaze to a character and thereby emphatically distances it from the authorial position. The step draws attention to the problematic nature of the "Western" textual subject *Under Western Eyes* creates: in contrast to the narrator's apparently unproblematic

"Western" identity, Conrad's own is fraught with controversies. The novel records an attempt to capture the birth of the Russian subject as the object of the impossible Western gaze of Joseph Conrad, an Easterner, thereby also deconstructing this basic dichotomy as far as the textual subject is concerned.

The attempt to create a Western textual subject, an emphatically Western gaze giving focus to Conrad's narrative parallels the writer's lifelong and somewhat futile struggle to become an unquestionably English writer, even if it was constantly counteracted by the English audience's reception of his works as those of a Slavic author and by his own obsession with Slavic themes. As Peter Kaye's study demonstrates, Conrad went to great lengths in denying even his understanding of the Russian language and in insisting "that his work could *only* be understood within the proud lineage of the English language and French novelistic artistry" (124, emphasis added). That this is clearly not the case is attested not only by contemporary reviews comparing him to Dostoevsky and stressing his Slavic origins (P. Kaye 130), but also by the fact that Slavic themes and characters keep returning in his writings – like the repressed (cf. P. Kaye 119) – and inspiring readings based on Russian intertexts or cultural-historical phenomena (cf. Gilliam, „Russia" passim; Lewitter passim).

The same ambiguous relationship can be observed between the professor and his narrative: while English is his mother tongue and he has mastered the English literary tradition so much that he teaches English through reading it with Nathalie Haldin, he must retell a Russian narrative, Razumov's story rendered in his Russian diary. Apparently he relies on his expertise in the Western literary tradition and targets a Western audience. The result, however, is a text which occasionally acquires an indeterminable identity in terms of language and culture, and seems to belong to both an Eastern and a Western textual subject – or neither. For example, the narrator – as a translator of Razumov's text – reproduces the words of the watchman who chases away Haldin from a wood-yard with the following attack: "Take yourself and your ugly eyes away" (23). The purely aesthetic reason for the watchman's antipathy is so lame that it even requires an apparent reinforcement, Haldin's forthcoming comment: "He did not like my eyes" (23). The words of the watchman gain much more sense if they are translated back into Russian[8] as "дурной глаз". It is an idiomatic phrase, which, though literally meaning ugly eyes, properly translates as "the evil eye". The watchman's fright is thus revealed to be much more profound than a dislike of uncomely features: he is afraid of a spell cast on him, of losing his self to a demonic power – the demonic gaze of the Other. In this light, the scene gains a totally different meaning: a pure man of the people, the watchman recognises the alien and demonic quality traditionally associated in Russian culture with the

[8] This approach is suggested by the glaring cases of Russicisms in the text, like the forms of address "little father" (батюшка) and "little pigeon" (голубчик).

anarchist and immediately rejects it. But who knows the Russian idiom and the ideology demonising the anarchist? Definitely not the narrator, who even mistranslates the phrase. This knowledge belongs to a textual subject which is neither exclusively Western, since it incorporates Slavic linguistic and cultural components into the text, nor exclusively Eastern, since it effaces them almost beyond recognition.

The narrator's Western gaze implies not only the impossible identification with the Western literary discourse, but also a necessary critical distance from the heavily ideological positions of the novel's Russian characters. On account of Conrad's well-known bias against Russians based on his family history and national identity, distancing this "neutral" observer's gaze from the authorial position seems to be an absolute necessity: for Conrad this is an impossible gaze. His parents were involved in anti-Russian political activities, which resulted in their exile and untimely death, and ultimately in Conrad's leaving his homeland behind for good (P. Kaye 118). In a wider context, anti-Russian feelings – fuelled by anti-Polish, imperialist Russian ideology – have constituted a large definitive segment of Polish national identity since the 1600s, which was intensified by the historical events of the 19th century. Accordingly, Eloise Knapp Hay "locates the novel's politics in Conrad's experience with Polish nationalism" (qtd. in Long 494). Therefore, the novel doubly undermines the idea of neutrality: on the plot level by discrediting the idea of the narrator's "unbiased mind" (92) – being Razumov's double[9] and rival he cannot be neutral[10] – while on the level of the textual subject through an ambiguous ideological debate with Dostoevsky. Let me address the latter issue first.

The Impossible Gaze II: the Gaze of the Literary Father

> "But there was no tragedy there. This was a comedy of errors. It was as if the devil himself were playing a game with all of them in turn. First with him [Razumov], then with Ziemianitch, then with those revolutionists. The devil's own game this..." (237)

If it is problematic to unambiguously define Conrad's text as Western (English) on the basis of its language and cultural background, it is equally so on the basis of the literary tradition it follows. Although Conrad's rejection of Dostoevsky's novels on an ideological basis (cf. P. Kaye 118–20) is legendary, *Under Western*

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[9] This Doppelgänger relationship is a matter of critical consensus. Cf. (Gilliam, "Russia" 231; Levin 211–13; Rice 138; Szittya 819).

[10] Cf. "The double is always a figure of *jouissance*: […] somebody who enjoys at the subject's expense" (Dolar 13).

Eyes is the text most clearly connected to Dostoevsky's oeuvre of all Conrad's writings[11]. So much so, that for example Peter Kaye reads it as a systematic rewriting of *Crime and Punishment* (145–55). However, as far as the working of (national) ideology is concerned, I find the novel's polemics with *Devils*[12] even more revealing than the above parallels. Though Conrad insists on his status as a Western writer, his critique of the Slavophil discourse of Russian identity is realised as a rewriting and confirmation of Dostoevsky's most dialogic version of this narrative formulated in *Devils.* If the Western gaze of the novel's textual subject is an impossible one, it is partly owing to the fact that "the subjectivising gaze" determining its identity belongs to a Symbolic/literary father who apparently embodies the Slavophil discourse of Russian identity Conrad is fighting to refute. I would like to emphasise three major points of intersection here.

Let me only briefly refer to the first and most obvious parallel: the two novels' political intrigue – the unwinding of an anarchist plot featuring the murder/mutilation of a suspected or actual informer – is so similar that in terms of its politics *Under Western Eyes* seems to be much more a rewriting of *Devils* than of *Crime and Punishment.* More importantly, the representation of the anarchist circle in Conrad's text, though updated to involve the mystical elements fashionable around the turn of the century, is just as satirical as in *Devils.* As L. R. Lewitter explains:

> *Under Western Eyes* indirectly (and perhaps gratuitously) dismisses as sheer Utopia of Stepan Trofimovich's vision, in the last chapter of *The Devils*, of a Russia exorcised of the demon of revolution. […] The revolutionists depicted in *Under Western Eyes,* together with their beliefs, aims, and methods, bring to mind the atmosphere and villainous characters of *The Devils* even if Conrad's material is supplemented by more up-to-date information derived from reading and personal observation of the political activities of expatriate Russians in London and Geneva. (661)

I would like to argue, however, that Lewitter's reading takes Stepan Trofimovich's vision at face value and monologises *Devils.* It fails to consider that the major political intrigue of *Devils* is connected with Pyotr Verkhovensky, and he, of all the anarchists, leaves the scene after the destruction of half a town

[11] Peter Kaye mentions *The Sisters*, *Nostromo,* and *The Secret Agent* as clearly showing Dostoevskian influences, but for him "the writing of *Under Western Eyes* [is] the culmination of Conrad's creative response to Dostoevsky" (120).

[12] For example L. R. Lewitter lists a number of sporadic similarities between *Devils* and *Under Western Eyes* – notably a parallel between Razumov and both Stavrogin and Shatov (661) – but without interpreting the function of this Dostoevskian intertext in Conrad's novel.

and the death of several people as if nothing had happened. Conrad's depiction of the anarchists thus fully confirms Dostoevsky's bleak vision, including the only saving grace: as Alexandr Etkind points out, in *Devils* the anarchists do not come from the people, leaving intact the Slavophil idea that their politics are alien from the nation (Эткинд 399). *Under Western Eyes* treats the Slavophil image of the nation with bitter irony: the only man of the people potentially involved in the anarchist activities of the novel, the "bright soul" Ziemianitch is represented as a beastly drunkard, suggesting that the anarchists live with an idealised image of the nation and their union with it is illusionary. This ironic treatment, however, does not change a major Dostoevskian point: whether it is a result of a conscious act of will or of an accident (drunken impotence), "the man of the people" (233) does not play an active role in the anarchist conspiracy.

The second point I would like to make is that Conrad applies a narrator who is a strange combination of Dostoevsky's incompetent chronicler and Stepan Trofimovich, the Rousseauesque father figure of *Devils*, a liberal. Thereby he merges in one dubious figure of authority Dostoevsky's incompetent begetter of a literary narrative[13] and his representative of the discourse of a weak ideology – the malfunctioning Symbolic Father. In my opinion the parallels between Anton Lavrentyevitch and Conrad's anonymous narrator are fairly obvious: both of them minor characters, observers who like to think they are not involved in the events they relate, they write their narratives to come up with a coherent, transmittable version of the chaotic events they do not actually seem to understand. While doing so, they inevitably delude readers on one major point: apparently living in a permanent delusion themselves, they pretend not to know the outcome of their story, the end that interprets their whole narrative in hindsight, but feign to discover it together with readers, like self-appointed detectives[14]. In other words, they are not simply figures of authority, embodiments of the Other *who is supposed to know* (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts* 233–43; Žižek "The Truth Arises from Misrecognition" 189), they actually possess information – Anton Lavrentyevitch is mysteriously in possession of Stavrogin's confession presumably at the beginning of the writing process, while the professor is in possession of another key document, Razumov's similarly confessional diary. Nevertheless, instead of assuming the position of the Other, they pretend *not to know*. This make-believe, staging the impossible gaze of the story-teller who does not know what he actually does, is of course part and parcel of the convention of the participant narrator. What I find more important is that Conrad, just like Dostoevsky, is not only reluctant to

[13] For summaries of recent critical views on the narrator's figure in *Devils* cf. (Matlaw passim; Moore passim).

[14] Cf. Alissa Hamilton's comment on the narrator of *Under Western Eyes* who "plays the detective only to be deluded" (142). For a most insightful analysis of how duplicity works in the novel both at the level of narration and theme see (Szittya passim).

assume authority over a narrative of Russian identity, but goes out of his way to raise doubts in his readers: what if there is always a residue of meaning associated with this narrative that even a figure of authority giving its fullest possible account – the only one readers can have – cannot grasp? The Other, after all, is someone who is at best *supposed* to know. Can we do without this supposition?

The answer to this question in both novels is clearly no: the father figures associated with Western thought, the heritage of the Enlightenment epitomised in Rousseau and the weak ideology of liberalism cannot represent the "proper subjectivising gaze" for either main character. These features are evident in Stepan Trofimovich's character, the malfunctioning (surrogate) father of the whole younger generation in *Devils*. Conrad's narrator as a minor character, however, fulfils an analogous function: also a teacher, by definition a Westerner, an advocate of Reason and a mild-voiced adversary to autocracy who lives in a town associated with Rousseau, he behaves like a self-appointed father figure first to Nathalie Haldin, then to Razumov. His show of selflessness, like Stepan Trofimovich's meddling with Dasha and Stavrogin, is tainted by a love-interest from the very start. For Dostoevsky, Stepan Trofimovich's failure as a Symbolic Father is rooted in his ideological convictions: in his Rousseauesque pose (Miller 80–6), in his being a liberal, in his failure to know, to give convincing solutions for the metaphysical queries of the younger generation. He is the reason why a whole generation end up as playthings for devils – "hawkers of revolutionary wares" (81). Similarly, Razumov rejects Conrad's professor as a Symbolic Father straight away. This rejection takes place right at their first meeting on the grounds of questioning the professor's authority, his cocksure insistence that he *knows* more than Razumov, that he is "in possession of something [Razumov] cannot be expected to *understand*!" (157, emphasis added). What at first seems to be an empty turn of phrase on Razumov's part [Who the devil are you?" (158)], later evolves into a rejection of the professor not only on an epistemological, but also on a moral basis: "He [the professor] talked of you [Nathalie Haldin], of your lonely, helpless state, and every word of that friend of yours was egging me to the unpardonable sin of stealing a soul. Could he have been the devil himself in the shape of an old Englishman?" (296–7) If Conrad's text inverts the Russian novel's cause-and-effect relationships here, it also presses the Dostoevskian point that the malfunctioning of this Symbolic Father is rooted in the weakness of Western ideology: in its mistaken reliance on human knowledge and the concomitant transgression of moral laws.

Finally, the fate of Razumov, who can be read as a rewriting of Stavrogin's figure, brings into relief at least two central elements of Russian identity as represented in *Devils*. One of these reinforces Slavophil ideology: it is the ideological uprootedness and insecure identity of the Russian intellectual embodied in the above-mentioned image of the wanderer. The other, however, is

a critique of the same discourse: both texts emphasise the untenable nature of identity formation for Russians through identification with any of the available ideological discourses – with any Symbolic Fathers – but neither offers the Slavophil solution, union with the motherland, as a viable option. In point of fact, for Razumov even more than for Stavrogin, it is realised as a castrating experience.

The two main characters, Stavrogin and Razumov, share a large number of features which can be grouped together around the central image of the wanderer – the uprooted Russian intellectual existing in a permanent identity crisis. Firstly, both of them are young intellectuals whose apparently mysterious identity is a cover for their inability to define themselves by identifying with the available ideological discourses. This indeterminate identity is best expressed by silence: Stavrogin, though he professed diametrically opposing ideas simultaneously in the past, is characterised by conspicuous reticence in the present; Razumov, skipping the first stage, stays silent throughout the novel. The only exception to this rule in both novels is confession. The problem of both characters' insecure identity is posed in the general context of masquerade, both narrative and thematic[15]. Complying with a central element in the literary interpretation of the wanderer, both "masked" characters are perceived as demonic: Razumov does not simply fall into the type of the demonic Byronic hero because of his appearance, just like Stavrogin – he is actually taken for the devil by Ziemianitch. Readers might hear a specifically Dostoevskian echo, though, when his face is compared "to a face modelled vigorously in wax" (13), evoking the famous "wax figure" simile (Dostoevsky, *Devils* 242) describing Stavrogin. What is even more striking, is the sameness of the other characters' attitude to the "mystery" Stavrogin's and Razumov's hidden identity presents in the two novels: both of them are obsessively read like texts and misread as models for identification, Symbolic Fathers, embodiments of the powerful Other, bearers of the gaze and therefore irresistible objects of desire[16]. This is why Haldin seeks Razumov's help, why "madcap Kostia" and the "red-nosed" anarchist bend backwards to fulfil his unspoken desires and why Nathalie feels irresistibly drawn to him. The representation of these insecure, questing characters involves a critique of Western Enlightenment thought, especially

[15] While Léna Szilárd in her seminal study speaks about masquerade and role-playing as the "metatheme" of *Devils* (20), Penn R. Szittya makes a very similar point about the "narrative masquerade" dominating *Under Western Eyes* (817–8). Both relate it to the insecurity of the main character's identity (Szilárd 31–2; Szittya 826).

[16] Razumov speaks about himself as a text continuously read and misread: "All these days you have been trying to *read me*, Peter Ivanovitch" (192, emphasis added). The phenomenon is so characteristic of the novel that it has allowed Szittya to reach the following conclusion: "The novel is a chronicle of interpretive failures; its epigraph might well be Razumov's complaint to Mikulin, 'I begin to think there is something about me which people don't seem to be able to make out'" (830).

Rousseau, not only through their malfunctioning "father figures", but also through the direct connection established between Rousseau and their respective confessions. For both Stavrogin and Razumov Rousseau is a model as far as writing is concerned[17]. The instability of their identity and their epistemological uncertainties are indicated by their having a number of doubles, including a ghostly or demonic one. While Stavrogin has his own petty devil, Razumov is persecuted by Haldin's phantom, which increasingly becomes merged with the living sister, Nathalie Haldin[18]. As a reference to their intellectual and emotional deadlock, both Stavrogin and Razumov are characterised with terms of paralysis, stasis, even invalidity, which later culminates in the offer and acceptance/realisation of a castrating sexual relationship: these are the dominant motifs of Stavrogin's relationship with Darya Pavlovna, just like Razumov's with Tekla[19]. Neither can find a way out of this dead end: they both reach ultimate stasis in an openly or covertly suicidal manner[20].

Significantly, both texts represent the wanderer as narcissistically obsessed with himself: his insecure identity is reflected in a constant concern with being the object of the others' look. "Stavrogin's Confession," the key text of his narrative identity clearly represents identity formation as dependent on the look of others – a view temptingly similar to the Lacanian concept (cf. Etkind passim). This phenomenon dominates the whole of Conrad's text: practically every exchange of words Razumov is involved in is complemented by a similarly – if not more – significant exchange of looks, gazes. The representatives of the anarchist circle spectacularly refuse to look at Razumov: they cover their eyes to resist penetration (Haldin hides behind his hands; Peter Ivanovitch wears smoked spectacles), do not look at him (Madame de S- gives her "intense stare" to "something which was visible behind him" [189]), or give him a squinting

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[17] Allan Hepburn emphasises "that the model for [Razumov's] double writing [confession and spy-report] is Jean-Jacque Rousseau" (285).

[18] Cf. (Szittya 818–9; Karl 316–8). Razumov, just like Stavrogin, is also absolutely conscious of an internal split: "He [Razumov] felt [...] as though another self, an independent sharer of his mind, had been able to view his whole person very distinctly indeed" (193).

[19] Cf. (Szilárd 26). As far as Razumov is concerned, I find Gilliam's and Julian B. Kaye's comments particularly insightful. The former emphasises Razumov's stasis, paralysis after Haldin's intervention into his life ("Time in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*" 430–34). The latter characterises Razumov's fate as a "return [...] to a state of infantile dependence on maternal care" with Tekla as "a foster mother to defeated adults" (63).

[20] If Conrad's novel is read through this Dostoevskian intertext, the sharp criticism addressed to its ending – for example Frederick R. Karl considers the second confession to the anarchists redundant and the whole ending "aesthetically destructive" (321) – becomes pointless. Razumov's yearning to "perish", emphasised by Gilliam and Tony Tanner, for example (Gilliam, "Time" 434), is an inevitable component of the Dostoevskian vision Conrad confirms. As a matter of fact, the "exact" repetition of Stavrogin's suicide is carried out by Ziemianitch: he, too, hangs himself, like Judas, the archetypal traitor, and his act is pathetically misread by the anarchists as a re-enactment of the Biblical story.

look (Sophia Antonovna). Their denied "subjectivising gaze" is replaced by the hallucinatory "eye of the social revolution" – the eyes of not the real, but the phantom Haldin:

> The eye of the social revolution was on him, and Razumov for a moment felt an unnamed and despairing dread, mingled with *an odious sense of hallucination. Was it possible that he no longer belonged to himself?* [...]
>
> [...] he happened to glance towards the bed. He rushed at it, enraged, with a mental scream: 'It's you, crazy fanatic, who stands in the way!' [...] Nothing there. And, turning away, he caught for an instant in the air, like a vivid detail in a dissolving view of two heads, the eyes of General T- and of Privy-Councillor Mikulin side by side fixed upon him, quite different in character, but *with the same unflinching and weary and yet purposeful expression* ... servants of the nation! (250–51, emphasis added)

As the quote above implies, the eyes associated with the state power are also united in one gaze, this time clearly directed at Razumov and, as Andrew Long's impressive Althusserian reading shows, apparently contributing to his successful subjectivisation (491–5). But only apparently: for the most important point about Razumov's meetings with Councillor Mikulin is that they help rationalise his visions of his own phantom-double, Haldin – as if subjectivisation was nothing but curing a strange eye illness:

> Councillor Mikulin was the only person on earth with whom Razumov could talk, taking the Haldin adventure for granted. And Haldin, when once taken for granted, was no longer *a haunting, falsehood-breeding spectre*. [...] Razumov knew very well that at this *oculist's* address he would be merely the hanged murderer of M. de P- and nothing more. (253, emphasis added)

And in a way, it is: identification with the gaze of the Symbolic Father (Councillor Mikulin) is meant to cure the permanent blur in Razumov's vision caused by the castrating experience of his union with the mother land. Razumov receives the call for this union – a call most clearly represented in the voice and tragic plot line associated with Marya Lebyadkina in *Devils* – when Haldin sends him to talk to Ziemianitch. The Freudian symbolism of the scene is rather obvious: he has to enter a dark underground stable, has to penetrate into a womb-like space to find the "prostrate", completely inert and senseless, beastly drunk Ziemianitch there – a passive, therefore effeminate figurative representation of both the Russian nation and land. The scene implies that union with the nation and land

means deathlike stasis. Razumov himself later interprets his reaction to this sight – beating up Ziemianitch with a phallic symbol, a *stick*, to move him to action – as a rejection of this union and opting for identification with the state autocracy, with the powerful paternal figure of the "master":

> Ziemianitch's passionate surrender to sorrow and consolation had baffled him. That was the people. A true Russian man! *Razumov was glad he had beaten that brute* – the 'bright soul' of the other. Here they were: the people and the enthusiast.
>
> [...]
>
> It was a sort of terrible childishness. But children had their *masters*. 'Ah! *the stick, the stick,* the stern hand,' thought Razumov, longing for *power* to hurt and to destroy. (33, emphasis added)

However, Razumov is not allowed to have this choice: the stick breaks and Razumov comes to see Ziemianitch's unseeing eyes. Both refer to a castrating experience, but the second is the cause of the permanent disturbance in Razumov's own vision. Ziemianitch presents Razumov with a sight that is the scopic equivalent of the absence of the maternal phallus, and not only because being blind is traditionally read as the symbolic equivalent of being castrated: "His eyeballs blinked all white in the light once, twice – then the gleam went out" (33). Ziemianitch does not seem to have irises for a moment – Razumov both sees his eyes and does not. This is the moment of castration for Razumov as Samuel Weber specifies it in his rereading of Freud's "The Uncanny": it is a moment of "negative perception" which "confronts the subject with the fact that it will never again be able to believe its eyes, since what they have seen is neither simply visible nor wholly invisible" (1113). It is the core of uncanny experiences – "another repetition, the articulation of difference which is equally a dis-articulation, dis-locating and even dis-membering the subject" (1114).

Therefore, it is quite understandable that Razumov's experience with Ziemianitch, reinforced by his later sublime identification with the Russian land quoted above, marks the beginning of unstoppable repetitions in *Under Western Eyes*, in the course of which almost all the major characters start to appear as each others' doubles. More specifically, this is the event that triggers off Razumov's first vision of Haldin's phantom – a vision of his own Doppelgänger:

> Suddenly, on the snow, stretched on his back right across his path, he saw Haldin, solid, distinct, real, with his inverted hands over his eyes [...]. He was lying out of the way a little, as though he had selected that place on purpose. The snow round him was untrodden. (38)

The image is a summary of all the clashing desires and anxieties influencing Razumov's concept of his own identity. Haldin, like all doubles, is a rival who has something Razumov desires: lying in the snow, he is united with the motherland in an anaclytic, unbreakable bond indicated by the "untrodden" snow. Like all doubles, he is Razumov's mirror image with a difference – with objet *a*, with the gaze, an unrepresentable element of the real (Dolar passim). However, his eyes are hidden as an expression of Razumov's ocular anxiety, a concomitant of the castrating experience: he is afraid of seeing too much. Haldin's "ugly eyes" are "the evil eye," Razumov's own gaze, the lost object, the lack, which must lack to "make it possible to deal with a coherent reality" (Dolar 13). Razumov's fear is momentarily relieved when he identifies with Councillor Mikulin, tellingly not because his sight becomes clearer, but because it is *obscured*: "The dimness of Councillor Mikulin's eyes seemed to spread all over his face and made it indistinct to Razumov's sight" (85). Identifying with the paternal gaze saves Razumov from seeing too much, but only temporarily: the experience of castration entailed by a union with the mother(land) can never be erased, just as seeing one's double is a sign of irreversible psychosis (Dolar 11). Mikulin's often-quoted question about where exactly Razumov wants to retire (89) in this context refers to one very specific location: the spot from which the double cannot be seen. And that spot is the exact location of the double, which can be taken only by identifying with him. This is the option that Razumov finally takes when he confesses to the anarchists, even if it involves self-mutilation. Tellingly, he starts his confession with the words "I am come here [...] to talk of an individual called Ziemianitch" (301).

Thus, the haunting and resounding voice of the literary father is painfully clear in Conrad's novel. Or, to be true to the spirit of the text, one can say that authorial identity is constructed under the most penetrating – and most "unwestern" – gaze of the literary father in *Under Western Eyes*. Just like Dostoevsky's *Devils*, this text also reveals an abyss – political, metaphysical and psychological – looking into which shakes the (textual) subject at most fundamental levels. Similarly to the Russian writer, Conrad traces the origins of the main character's most painful dilemma in the malfunctioning Symbolic Father, but that does not hinder him from trusting his text to exactly such a parent of doubtful authority – being a Modernist and facing the 20th century human condition he has no other choice. Once the authority of the paternal figure is weakened, narcissistic crisis rears up its ugly head, just like in Stavrogin's narrative: complete with failed identifications, unstoppable doubling and self-destruction, Razumov's story is a memorable echo of the Dostoevskian identity crisis.

The Impossible Gaze III: East and West under the "Trustful Eyes" of the Androgyne

Apart from the dubious Western identity of the textual subject, the dichotomy of East and West is also rendered meaningless by a thematic element in Conrad's text: the depiction of the Western narrator and the Russian main character as doubles. While it obviously washes away the boundaries between Eastern and Western ideology[21], this fact also results in a hitherto ignored phenomenon: narrator and character not only gaze at each other reciprocally, as Alissa Hamilton points out (139), but also formulate their identity on behalf of a third, equally impossible gaze: the androgynous, incestuous, ghostly and ideology-free gaze of Nathalie, the representative of a Russian identity which is neither Eastern nor Western.

The language teacher and Razumov can see mirrored in each other their squinting look directed at a third person, their object of desire, Nathalie Haldin. She is like a blind spot in the text: though everyone wants her – both the narrator and Razumov declare their love for her; Peter Ivanovitch orders Razumov to seduce her into the anarchist circle – she is ignored once motivations are discussed. The narrator never reveals why he starts to write his story, but his love for Nathalie antedates his meeting with Razumov – he takes up an interest in the otherwise aggressively rejective young man only to fulfil Nathalie's desire. The two men's ambiguous first dialogue quoted above deserves a re-reading in this context. Razumov's angry outburst is also a declaration of jealousy, of his rage at the language teacher's cocksure assertion of being "in possession" of an unnameable "object" – by implication Nathalie: "'Talking about an admirable Russian girl. [...] What are you at? What is your *object*?'" (157, emphasis added). "Talking about an admirable Russian girl" is exactly the narrator's object: she, and not Razumov is what the story-teller aims to possess by turning her into a narrative. Similarly, Razumov's declaration of love comes as a shock at the end of the novel – he does everything to prove the opposite, most significantly, he avoids seeing Nathalie as long as possible. As if no one dared to look at her directly, or name her as the object of desire – and writing. But why? The Doppelgänger relationship mentioned above offers one possible explanation: the sight of Nathalie, a woman, par excellence a reminder of castration, as Mladen Dolar emphasises, must be avoided by the anxious doubles obsessed with their own mirror image and gaze reflected in each other. She can only be the "sideshow" (cf. Weber 1121–2).

Nathalie's case, however, is somewhat more complicated: for the narrator she needs to be doubly castrated, because she is androgynous. The professor keeps

[21] Gilliam speaks about the "collapsing" of the dichotomy of the Eastern and Western in the novel ("Russia" 231).

emphasising that the otherwise beautiful Nathalie is different from other women: “Her voice was deep, almost harsh, and yet caressing in its harshness. [...] She gave the impression of strong vitality” (92). These masculine qualities are reinforced by the comment that she has “something else than the mere grace of femininity” (92) and then she is immediately compared to a “young man” with a “direct,” “trustful,” and, most importantly, “intrepid glance” (92). The narrator’s reaction to this (male?) gaze is that of renunciation (castration?). It is later repeated by Razumov: “He had responded, as no one could help responding, to the harmonious charm of her whole person, its strength, its grace, its tranquil frankness – and then he had turned his gaze away. He said to himself that all this was not for him” (143). Her masculinity is so emphatic that she is subjected to figurative castration at the moment of receiving the news of her brother’s death: “I did not imagine that a number of the *Standard* could *have the effect of Medusa’s head*. Her face went stony in a moment – her eyes – her limbs. The most terrible thing was that being stony she remained alive” (99, emphasis added).

This interpretation on the narrator’s part implies an incestuous bonding between Nathalie and her brother and identifies her gaze with his – a reading Razumov confirms by *not* looking at Nathalie because for him she is Haldin’s haunting double:

> The most trustful eyes in the world – your brother said of you when he was as well as a dead man already. And when you stood before me with your hand extended, I remembered the very sound of his voice, and I looked into your eyes – and that was enough. […] Hate or no hate, I felt at once that, while shunning the sight of you, I could never succeed in driving away your image. I would say, addressing the dead man, ‘Is this the way you are going to haunt me?’ (296)

Thus, between the two of them, the language teacher and Razumov construct Nathalie’s impossible gaze. First of all, it is the gaze of a “young man yet unspoiled by the world’s wise lessons,” but “capable of being roused by an idea” (93). In other words, it is a gaze yet ideologically indeterminate. Secondly, it is also a gaze determined by Haldin, as Nathalie’s reading of Razumov demonstrates. For her he is an “[u]nstained, lofty and solitary existence” (118) on the basis of her brother’s letter received well before ever meeting Razumov. Even in choosing Razumov as an object of desire she identifies on behalf of her brother’s gaze and with her brother’s gaze – Razumov is meant to be a substitute for her lost object. Thirdly, Razumov sees in her eyes Haldin’s gaze. Nathalie’s gaze is thus the impossible gaze of Haldin *before* his ideological identification with the anarchists; she is the impossible Russian subject who is not determined by any ideology.

Such a combination makes her strictly unreadable and unrepresentable, on the one hand, and identification with her gaze strictly impossible, on the other. It is reflected in Razumov's reaction to seeing Nathalie during their last meeting as a result of her symbolic unveiling. This somewhat theatrical element needs to be understood together with its complementary scene, Razumov's veiling of his diary-confession, his own narrative identity into Nathalie's veil of mourning. Nathalie unveils herself while she is speaking about her peregrinations to find Razumov – the scene starts as a seductive revelation of female desire, Salome's dance. The final dropping of the veil, however, corresponds to her mention of Haldin, more exactly the danger of her mother's "*seeing* him" (287). As if she was suddenly transformed into the woman behind the veil in Gothic novels (cf. Kilgour 128–32): the sight of what is behind the veil – Haldin's ghostly sight and gaze – evokes unimaginable horror in Razumov. The only way he can interpret it is the gaze of the phantom Haldin – and it demands self-sacrifice from him, it calls for his union with the mother land. Razumov succumbs to this imperative by becoming the woman behind the veil – by stealing Nathalie's garment of mourning and wrapping his diary into it. The rest – his often criticised, redundant-looking confession to the anarchists, the bursting of his eardrums and the accident that leaves him a cripple – is purely functional: it is Razumov's way of committing suicide and assuming the identity Nathalie's gaze ascribes to him. It is that of Haldin – the dead Haldin. Ironically, Nathalie gives the diary to the professor, offering Razumov's story for his possession instead of her own (person).

Inverting the Gaze: Clashing Fantasies

I have tried to illustrate how Conrad's text represents Russian identity as a shaky ideological construct sustained by the opposition of East and West, spectacularly present in the Enlightenment ethos of Western culture and the Slavophil discourse of Russianness. Trying to detect the gazes determining the subject's identification with these discourses, however, has revealed the impossibility of the opposition. The very concepts of "Eastern" and "Western" have proved to be pure signifiers of difference, which, in Conrad's critique of both discourses, simply collapse into each other. The reasons and process of this collapse have already thrown light on the central fantasies sustaining the ideological construct of Russianness from both sides. As for the West, the Enlightenment ethos and its legacy of positivism entail a vision of universal humanity that is an object of scientific enquiry and rational understanding. To what extent it is a utopia is illustrated by the narrator's fantasy of being "in possession" of that "admirable Russian girl". But the failure is already coded in the discourse: Russianness, much to the analogy of the Orient, is constructed in the ideology as a concept involving irrationality and passion – causes of the rational Western mind's

inevitable failure to grasp it. As for the Slavophil discourse, it is the union with the motherland, the soil as saving grace which is the major target of Conrad's criticism. The fantasy of establishing identity, subjecthood through this union is sustained by the image of the wanderer, the in-built safety-belt of the discourse. In Slavophil ideology the Westernised intellectual's identity crisis is caused by the failure to return to the soil, and it is his otherness that obstructs the utopian formation of a united Russian nation, also a self-sacrificing saviour of the world. Conrad also inverts cause-and-effect relationships here: in his novel it is the realisation of this union that leads to the irreversible crisis and annihilation of the individual. If the intrusion of Western thought is an obstacle to this union, it is just as necessary as the Name of the Father. Without it Russian passion for the motherland inevitable turns into a futile Passion.

HUXLEY'S "LITTLE STAVROGIN" – FIGHTING DOSTOEVSKY'S *DEVILS* IN *POINT COUNTER POINT*[1]

> "The monks of Thebaid […] got to the stage of being *devils*. Self-torture, destruction of everything decent and beautiful and living. That was their programme. They tried to obey Jesus and be more than men; and all they succeeded in doing was to become the incarnation of pure diabolic destructiveness. They could have been perfectly decent human beings if they'd just gone about behaving naturally, in accordance with their instincts. But no, they wanted to be more than human. So they just became *devils*." (Huxley, *Point Counter Point* 416, emphasis added)[2]

It is an accepted assumption in literary criticism that one of the major characters in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (1928), Maurice Spandrell, was modelled on Dostoevsky's Stavrogin (Baker 113). It is based on a direct reference, on a comment made in the novel: Spandrell is called derogatively "the little Stavrogin" (417). Far from wanting to ignore the manifold references inherent in Spandrell's figure, I would like to point out that the implications of this connection with Dostoevsky's *Devils* (1871) have not been thoroughly explored in Huxley criticism. Though comparisons of *Point Counter Point* with other novels abound (e.g. Firchow, "Mental Music" passim), it has not been interpreted from a most obvious perspective: as a systematic and polemical rewriting of Dostoevsky's text. What seems to be only an emphatic parallel between two fictional characters, on closer inspection turns out to be a sustained similarity of genre, structure and plot. Despite these similarities Huxley's approach to Dostoevsky seems to be rather ambivalent. While he apparently learns a lot from the Russian writer as far as the art of the novel is concerned, by rewriting Stavrogin as Spandrell he harshly criticises Dostoevsky's insistence on spiritual quest. This overt rejection of Dostoevky's ideological/philosophical stance is, however, subverted by the power of Huxley's Dostoevskian character, since Spandrell's role and representation also reinforce and actualise Stavrogin's

[1] First published as "Huxley's 'Little Stavrogin' – Fighting Dostoevsky's *Devils* in *Point Counter Point*," *Slavica* XXXVII (2008), 133–52. Special thanks for his careful linguistic editing to Charles Somerville.

[2] All quotations from the novel are based on (Huxley, *Point Counter Point*) and will be indicated only by the page numbers in parenthetical notes.

significance as a foreshadowing or even embodiment of the twentieth-century human condition. Consequently, Huxley's rewriting – maybe against the explicit intent of the text – balances critical irony with unquestionable reverence for the obsessively powerful original.

Competing Ideals: Dostoevsky vs. D. H. Lawrence

Huxley's ambivalent approach to Dostoevsky's art might be better understood in the context of the English writer's lifelong fascination with his novels and his relatively brief, but very intense relationship with D. H. Lawrence. Dostoevsky was one of Huxley's favourites and his art was a model for the English writer. Nevertheless, the publication of *Point Counter Point* coincides with the writing of Huxley's most passionate attack against the Russian novelist in his non-fiction – and with his closest association with D. H. Lawrence.

Though Dostoevsky is hardly ever mentioned in Huxley criticism, even the sporadic evidence testifies to Huxley's lifelong admiration for the Russian novelist: he regarded Dostoevsky as an embodiment of true modernity, obsessively reread his novels, and produced texts which show curious similarities with Dostoevsky's works. Huxley shared the interest of most major English Modernist writers in Dostoevsky's art, which was fostered by the publication of Constance Garnett's translations of his major novels in the decade following 1912 (P. Kaye 18)[3]. Peter Firchow points out how in the heyday of this "cult-like" popularity (P. Kaye 19) Huxley in his essay "What, Exactly, is Modern?" defines his sense of modernity through Dostoevsky's example: "What was really modern, what was really new, were intelligence, sensitivity, spirituality, tolerance. Hence, for him the most modern novelist was not Joyce or Gide or Cocteau, but Dostoevsky" (*Aldous Huxley* 39). On the evidence of his reading habits, Huxley's fascination seems to have lasted till the end of his life: his recent biographer, Nicholas Murray recalls that *The Brothers Karamazov* was among the books he liked to reread all through his life (370). Though one would imagine that such admiration could not pass without leaving some palpable traces in Huxley's own work, the question seems to be almost untouched in Huxley criticism. Significantly, Peter Kaye, who maps the attitude

[3] Constance Garnett's translation of *Devils* was first published in 1914 with the better-known, but slightly misleading English title *The Possessed*. Most of the quotations from Dostoevsky's novel are based on this translation, now available as a searchable e-text. Therefore, the references to this source as (Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*) will not contain page numbers. This version, however, did not include "Stavrogin's Confession", which was first published in English in 1922 as a separate volume. For this reason quotes from that section will be indicated as (Dostoevsky, *Stavrogin's Confession*), with the relevant page numbers. The reason for using these translations is purely philological: Huxley was obviously familiar with these versions of the text, and he also mentions the novel as *The Possessed.* I myself will refer to Dostoevsky's novel by the more appropriate title *Devils*, which was used in Katz's 1958 translation (cf. Dostoevsky, *Devils*).

of all major English Modernist writers to Dostoevsky in his excellent monograph *Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900–1930*, does not even mention Huxley's name. It is only Firchow who, after the tongue in cheek remark that "Huxley, to be sure, never did become a Dostoevsky", goes into some length to point out a number of general similarities in the two authors' works. Most importantly, he mentions the reflection of their spiritual quest, which shows the same pattern: "Like the great Russian novelist, Huxley went through a period of doubt and search, and came out at the other end with a great urge to proselytize". He also puts down to Dostoevsky's influence the "notorious focussing on gruesome details" in Huxley's writing, just like the appearance of the double in his early fiction (*Aldous Huxley* 39–40). Apart from these similarities and Stavrogin's rewriting in *Point Counter Point* the other well-known and obvious intertextual relationship between the two authors' works is the "revision" of the Grand Inquisitor episode in *Brave New World* (e.g. Firchow, *Aldous Huxley* 126–7).

As opposed to this very positive approach to Dostoevsky, Huxley's opinion at the time of writing *Point Counter Point* is dramatically different: summed up in his essay on Baudelaire, it is both a rude attack against the Russian writer and an obvious misreading of his works. Huxley's "Baudelaire" was originally published in 1929, in the collection of essays entitled *Do What You Will*. Since this volume was written parallel to *Point Counter Point*, it is usually read together with the novel as an important set of intertexts reflecting Huxley's philosophical stance at the time. From the perspective of this study the first most significant point is a curious common trait of the fictional and non-fictional texts: in both of them Dostoevsky is inseparably connected with Baudelaire. Drawing on the biographical elements of the French poet and the fictional characters (!) of the Russian writer Huxley practically identifies the two artists in the single type of the Satanist, the "looking-glass Christian" (*On Art and Artists* 183) in both writings.

Because of its particularly aggressive attitude and tone it is worth expanding on the argumentation of the essay at some length. For Huxley Dostoevsky's whole art, his major characters – whom he obviously identifies with the author – and more specifically the "extraordinary and horrible" *Devils* demonstrate "[w]hat happens when the intellect and imagination are allowed to break away completely from the wholesome control of the body and the instincts". He claims that the Russians, as "parvenus of intelligence and consciousness", are simply too new to European culture to be able to control their intellect – which he clearly treats as a synonym of the spirit – therefore, "[u]nrestrained by the body, their intellect and imagination have become at once licentious and monomaniacal". As a result, any "decent physical relationship" with nature or with other human beings has become impossible for them. Locked up in their private worlds, they are for Huxley "self-made madmen", "emotional onanists" engaged in endless "masturbations". When they attempt to break out from their

solipsism and establish a relationship with their environment, the consequences are tragic: they only realise their "wild" and "monomaniac imaginings" and "go and commit suicide, or murder, or rape". For Huxley, however, these tragedies seem to be both "stupid and grotesque" and "ludicrous and idiotic", even "absurd". The reason for this is that in his view they could be avoided by the establishment of normal – and not perverted – (sexual) relationships with women (with special reference to Stavrogin's masochistic intercourses with "women he detested") and/or with nature. He concludes by claiming that "[t]he horrors that darken *The Possessed* and the other novels of Dostoevsky are tragedies of mental licentiousness. [...] these tragedies are nothing but stupid farces that have been carried too far" (*On Art* 178–9). In the rest of the essay Baudelaire, Dostoevsky, ascetic Christians, all Platonics and the Marquis de Sade come to be parts of the same logical sequence – a group showing striking similarities with the list of characters representing 'modern' romanticism in Huxley's philosophy by the end of the 1920s (cf. Baker 25). In Robert Baker's analysis it is exactly a "sustained attack" on this romanticism that "governs Huxley's social satire" in his major works (4).

The same charges are repeated ad verbatim in *Point Counter Point* by Mark Rampion, addressed to intellectuals and ascetic Christians in the same breath:

> 'You and your intellectual, scientific friends. You've killed just as much of yourselves as the Christian maniacs. Shall I read your programme? [...] No body, no contact with the material world, no contact with human beings except through the intellect, no love [...]. You stick to your conscious will. [...] And the connections must be purely mental. And life must be lived [...] as though it were solitary recollection and fancy and meditation. An endless masturbation, like Proust's horrible great book.' (412)

The final conclusion of this tirade, however, is directed singularly against Spandrell – and Dostoevsky:

> 'Pardon my saying so, Spandrell; but you really are the most colossal fool. [...] Smiling like all the tragic characters of fiction rolled into one! [...] Laugh away, old Dostoievsky! But let me tell you, it's Stavrogin who ought to have been called the Idiot, not Mishkin. He was incomparably the bigger fool, the completer pervert.' (417)

Both texts verbalise the same charges and use practically the same images: that of psychopathology (perversion, abjection, masochism, solipsism/narcissism and monomania) and theatricality (tragedy vs. farce).

The comparison of Huxley's Dostoevsky critique with D. H. Lawrence's opinion about the Russian writer suggests a close relationship between the Laurentian influence on *Point Counter Point* and its harsh attack against the Dostoevskian spiritual quest. The facts that Huxley's bitter outburst against Dostoevsky seems to be a temporal phenomenon and that it is formulated by Rampion in *Point Counter Point* call attention to its possible relationship with D. H. Lawrence. Rampion is obviously a fictional representation of Lawrence and endorses a simplified version of his philosophical ideas (Ferns 39; Bowering, *Aldous Huxley* 78). As for example Keith Cushman's detailed analysis of the two English writers' relationship (passim) shows, Huxley was most deeply influenced by Lawrence's ideas about sexuality and "blood consciousness" and by his consequent rejection of spirituality at the end of the 1920s, when their relationship was at its closest – until Lawrence's death in 1930. It is customary to allude to this period only as a "passing phase" (Bowering, *Aldous Huxley* 20) in Huxley's own spiritual quest, a phase which is obviously incongruous with Huxley's own attitude, as a "way station on his journey to mysticism and spirituality" (Cushman 19). C. S. Ferns also points out that the temporary acceptance of Lawrence's theories resulted in bitter outbursts against writers whom Huxley followed in his own art as his masters but who were not compatible with Laurentian philosophy, for example against Swift (39; cf. Huxley, *On Art* 168–76). The joint attack against Baudelaire and Dostoevsky – two authors Huxley was deeply influenced by – might be parts of the same campaign.

In fact, Huxley's critique of Dostoevsky cited above contains definite echoes of Lawrence's views about the Russian writer. Quite tellingly, Kaye sums up Lawrence's "misreading" of Dostoevky in terms of "prophetic rage and rivalry". As he points out, "Lawrence viewed Dostoevsky as a victim and carrier of the modern disease of 'mental consciousness'", which is "the characteristic disease of the modern age". The dominance of "mental consciousness" – intellectual capacities not differentiated from spiritual aspirations – becomes a disease, in Lawrence's opinion, when "it separates man from [...] 'pure blood consciousness'", in other words, when it dictates an abnormal repression of the body and its instincts. All in all, Lawrence – just like Huxley, and most of their English contemporaries – washes away the boundaries between Dostoevsky and his fictitious characters and comes to the conclusion that both "were mind-obsessed". For him, "Dostoevsky [...] represents the entire hospital of modernity, with its wards of Christian enthusiasts and murderers, ostrich-philosophers and fallen sensualists: all diseases gather in his name" (44–5). The key term of Lawrence's interpretation, "mental disease" caused by and reflected in the complete rejection of the body and its instincts, is clearly echoed in Huxley's insistence on reading *Devils* in terms of psychopathology resulting from the unhealthy liberty and dominance of intelligence.

In conclusion, even on the basis of his non-fiction Huxley's assessment of Dostoevsky reflects a strange ambivalence. The assertion of Dostoevsky's modernity seems to be a double-edged sword. Dostoevsky is modern because of his intellect, sensitivity and spirituality. But because of his intellect, sensitivity and spirituality he also embodies all the diseases of modern man summed up for Huxley in the terms of "romanticism" and "new" or "inverted romanticism", and associated, among others, with the characters of Baudelaire and the Marquis de Sade. At the time of writing *Point Counter Point* this ambivalence seems to be temporarily resolved in open antagonism under Lawrence's influence, at least as far as Huxley's non-fiction is concerned. The case of the novel, however, appears to be more complicated.

Rewriting Devils: Historical Characters, Clashing Ideas, Musical Analogues and Political Murders

In the Baudelaire essay Huxley's attack is concentrated on *Devils*, as a novel embodying all the maladies of Dostoevsky's works and of modern man. Nevertheless, in *Point Counter Point* he creates a text which shows striking similarities with that particularly "hateful" novel, as far as genre, structure and plot are concerned. Together with the direct reference to Stavrogin they imply a systematic rewriting of Dostoevsky's text.

The first generic similarity is that both novels are *romans à clef*[4]. Yet the historical characters and/or events function differently in the two texts. While *Devils* models some of its major characters *and* events on historical facts – and probably it is needless to relate all the details of the Nechaev case and Ivanov's murder here (cf. Сараскина 435–9) – *Point Counter Point* relies on the *characters* of Huxley's intellectual circle rather than on concrete events associated with them. Apart from depicting Lawrence as Rampion, it is worth pointing out that Huxley himself appears in the novel through the two highly autobiographical characters of Philip Quarles and Walter Bidlake (Firchow, "Mental Music" 530). A number of the other characters have also been identified with some of Huxley's contemporaries (cf. Roston 383; Firchow, "Mental Music" 530), notably Denis Burlap with John Middleton Murry (Roston 381) and the leader of the British Freemen, Everard Webley with the English fascist Oswald Mosley (Cushman 3). As a result, while in Dostoevsky's novel the real political events in the background supply the basic plot and give opportunity for occasional attacks on contemporary literary life, the situation is exactly the opposite in Huxley's text, since he focuses

[4] This fact is a commonplace in literature on Dostoevsky and Huxley, cf. (Сараскина 435–9) and (Firchow, "Mental Music" 531; Cushman passim).

on the characters of artists and intellectuals[5], and launches only occasional attacks on contemporary politics.

More significantly, as far as their genre is concerned, both *Devils* and *Point Counter Point* are satirical novels of ideas[6]. An often-cited metafictional section of *Point Counter Point*, in which the writer Quarles outlines the plan of his novel – recognisably the novel one is reading –, locates Huxley's text in the tradition of the novel of ideas:

> Novel of ideas. The character of each personage must be implied, as far as possible, in the ideas of which he is the mouthpiece. In so far as theories are rationalizations of sentiments, instincts, dispositions of soul, this is feasible. [...] The great defect of the novel of ideas is that it's a made-up affair. Necessarily; for people who can reel off neatly formulated notions aren't quite real; they're slightly monstrous. Living with monsters becomes rather tiresome in the long run. (303)

The difficulties of the genre pointed out here evoke Peter Kaye's comment on the assessment of the master of the novel of ideas, Dostoevsky, as an "exhilarating monster" in English Modernism (6). The tradition of the genre was represented in Britain by the half-forgotten and somewhat outdated novels of Peacock – the writer whose influence is usually emphasised in Huxley monographs (e.g. Bowering, *Aldous Huxley* 2). One of Huxley's personal letters also testifies to the fact that he regarded Dostoevsky as a master of the genre – in fact, that he found it difficult to write a good novel of ideas without the "elevated genius" of a Dostoevsky (Murray 377).

Devils and *Point Counter Point* not only belong to the same generic tradition, but also show the clash of conspicuously similar ideas, though with a definite shift in emphasis. It is relatively easy to draw a parallel between the nihilistic ideas informing the reading of Dostoevsky's novel (cf. Смирнов, *Психодиахронологика* 120–30) and the same tendencies embodied in Spandrell; between the political anarchism of Pyotr Verkhovensky and its small-scale representation in the clownish Illidge; between the Nietzschean ideas of Kirillov and their twentieth-century fascist revival in Huxley's "tinpot Mussolini" (46),

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[5] In fact, though Huxley's text apparently shows encyclopaediac pretentions with its multiplicity of aspects and "human fugue", it has been repeatedly criticised as elitist in its depiction of "a small intellectual circle" (Bowering, *Aldous Huxley* 6; Grosvenor 13).

[6] As Mikhail Bakhtin connects the Dostoevskian novel to the Menippean satire in the long run (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 121–2), Northrop Frye also ascribes *Point Counter Point* to this tradition (*Anatomy of Criticism* 308–9). No detailed analysis of the novel as a Menippean satire has been formulated yet. Peter Bowering emphasizes the satirical potentials of the novel of ideas as a genre, since it is "traditionally a vehicle for satire; and this occurs when the predominating idea becomes obsessional" (*Aldous Huxley* 9).

Everard Webley. Shatov's Slavophil ideas and the voice of Dostoevsky's holy fools can be partly regarded as the victims of an unsuccessful cultural transfer: they are not relevant in the British context. Moreover, Christianity is one of the most important targets of satire in the novel, therefore the seriously modified revival of these voices can be recognised in the caricature of the good Christian (Burlap) and the figure of the "inverse" Christian (Spandrell). With the addition of the focus on intellectuals and artist figures (Quarles, Walter and John Bidlake) and the hedonism of the aristocratic Lucy Tantamount, the difference in the emphasis of the two novels becomes obvious. The most important dissimilarity, however, is the presence of a detailed and positively – almost prophetically – advocated philosophy in Huxley's novel: Tikhon's tentative direction is substituted by the harsh "gospel" and authoritative voice of Rampion's Laurentian preaching (cf. Firchow, *Aldous Huxley* 108–9). To return to one of the starting points of this study, this is probably one of the features which make Dostoevsky in fact "more modern" than Huxley. As Harold H. Watts points out, "It is not the particular message, not Huxley's particular gospel in this novel, that would lead many modern readers to be sceptical of its claim on our attention. [...] What is objectionable in *Point Counter Point*, what precludes full modernity for it, is the fact that confident admonition is indeed offered" (415).[7]

The structure of the two novels is traditionally characterised with two strikingly similar musical analogues, those of polyphony and counterpoint. However, Mikhail Bakhtin's post factum musical analogy implies in many ways much less and much more than Huxley's self-conscious "musicalization of fiction" (301). It implies less, because – according to the testimony of another metafictional excerpt from Philip Quarles's notebook – Huxley consciously uses the musical analogy as the fundamental principle of formulating his characters, ideas, themes and episodes:

> Musicalization of fiction [...] in the construction. Meditate on Beethoven. The changes of moods, the abrupt transitions. [...] More interesting still the modulations, not merely from one key to another, but from mood to mood. The theme is stated, then developed, pushed out of shape, imperceptibly deformed, until, though still recognizably the same, it has become quite different. (301–2)

These ideas, allegedly inspired by Gide's *Counterfeiters* (Firchow, *Aldous Huxley* 115–16), once put into practice, result in Huxley's probably most ambitious and genuinely Modernist formal experiment (cf. Hobby 13–17)[8]. On

[7] Firchow, on the other hand, evaluates the phenomenon positively, pointing out that with this novel Huxley turns toward writing "predominantly constructive satire" (*Aldous Huxley* 117).

[8] For detailed analyses of the musical structure of Huxley's novel see for example (Bowen, "Allusions to Musical Works in *Point Counter Point*" passim; Watt passim).

the one hand this experiment involves a very conscious and artistic organisation of several variations on a fairly limited number of themes (cf. Firchow, *Aldous Huxley* 97). In fact, Firchow highlights three such subjects – love, death and religion (*Aldous Huxley* 98) – while Donald Watt even contends that only two of these, love and death formulate the "subject" and "countersubject" of Huxley's "fugue" (511). On the other hand, Huxley's musical organisation – similarly to Dostoevsky's polyphony – means the inclusion of several perspectives, voices, even styles. The impersonal narrator enters the consciousness of several characters and the overall effect of Huxley's narrative is somewhat similar to the Jamesian point-of-view technique. Apart from this, there are not only characters discussing their ideas in the novel, but their "authentic" pieces, together with a lot of other "texts" characterised by a great stylistic variety, are also inserted in their own right. To give but a few examples, *Point Counter Point* includes Quarles's metafictional notebook, Lucy's letters, excerpts from Baudelaire poems in French, numerous cases of ekphrasis (cf. Bowering, "'The Source of Light'" passim) and an almost independent semiotic subsystem of references to musical pieces (cf. Bowen, "Allusions to Musical Works in *Point Counter Point*"passim). Nevertheless, Huxley's counterpoint still implies less than polyphony, because not only is the hypothetical equality of the voices overtly shattered by the didactically propagated Laurentian "gospel", a voice which seems to be the mouthpiece of the (implied) author, but thereby the independent subject status of the other characters is also endangered (cf. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 21–2). For the same reason it is also very difficult to speak about the interaction or dialogic relationship of the ideas/characters in the Bakhtinian sense (cf. *Problems* 40).

The most convincing similarity of the two novels, nevertheless, resides in their plot. *Point Counter Point* does not abound in events, but whatever actually happens in the novel is by and large a repetition of *Devils.* Since Huxley draws on his contemporary society for character rather than for plot, and he is mostly concerned with ideas and their modifications in his rather numerous characters' mind, he seems to be left with only a sparse sequence of events for action. This is true to such an extent that one of his monographers, Laurence Brander was inspired to give a parodistic retelling of the novel with an emphasis on the abundance of characters and lack of events by way of analysis (31–8). With some necessary simplification one can claim that the story includes a ball, a political murder and the suicide of the murderer, Spandrell, masquerading as another political murder. The ball itself is a sequence of snapshots and episodes, but because of its obvious satirical take on contemporary society it is still reminiscent of the memorable social gatherings in *Devils*: the meeting of Verkhovensky's political associates, and of course the fatal ball at the end of the novel. The murder combines elements of Kirillov's forced and farcical suicide

with Shatov's killing, while Spandrell's suicide clearly corresponds to Stavrogin's death by his own hand.

The possibility of giving a mythical interpretation to the events in *Point Counter Point* and their obvious apocalyptic bent gives further emphasis to the similarity of the two plots. In Dostoevsky's text Stavrogin's return is metaphorically associated with Palm Sunday, which relates the events to Easter and activates the solar hero's myth (cf. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* 187), with special emphasis on death (*pathos*), disappearance (*sparagmos*) and potential reappearance (*anagnorisis*) (cf. Frye, *Anatomy* 192). The chaotic and apocalyptic ball, the fires, the murders and Stavrogin's death shatter all hopes for rebirth, however. The time of action in Huxley's novel is set somewhat later, but evokes the same myth: it takes place "between Easter and Whitsun" (230). There is not much hope that resurrection might come at the end – as Rampion points out, "Different kinds of death – the only alternatives" (138). Nevertheless, the reference to Easter – as if time progressed backwards – is repeated at the end of the novel, when a glimpse of hope is given that little Philip Quarles, dying of meningitis, might recover: "Luncheon that day was like a festival of resurrection, an Easter sacrament" (431). This hope of resurrection is soon shattered, and the novel ends – similarly to *Devils*, which includes the death of thirteen people (Сараскина 453) – with a number of actual or impeding deaths: Webley is murdered, just like Spandrell, Ethel Cobbett commits suicide, little Phil suffers a most painful and cruel death, and Sidney Quarles pretends to be dying while John Bidlake is dying of cancer in good earnest. Though with the exception of Phil's death, which is "a particularly gratuitous horror" (435), none of them are as horrible as the deaths depicted in *Devils* [Webley's turns into a "clownery" (403), Spandrell's is overshadowed by his sublime experience], the quiet everyday horror they suggest is none the less terrifying. The actors of the story, just like those of Dostoevsky's novel, are devils – at least if one can give credit to Rampion's statement quoted above that men wanting to be more than human become subhuman and inhuman, that is, *devils* (416). Their rightful location – the metaphorical setting of *Devils* as hell – is indicated in Rampion's prophetic remarks about all the political parties leading people equally to hell (307). Similarly, the apocalyptic implications of the end of *Devils* are repeated in Rampion's prophecy about the impending world war and the end of the present political and social constitution within a decade (323). All in all, the downplaying of the significance of the central Christian myth seems to be a part of the general demythologising strategy of the novel, which, nevertheless, is counteracted by the inevitably apocalyptic bent of the plot and the mythologising nature of Rampion's – Lawrence's – "authoritative" reading of events and characters.

It can be concluded that the major generic and structural qualities of the two novels allow for a reading of Huxley's *Point Counter Point* as a systematic

rewriting of Dostoevsky's *Devils.* Huxley, by the very fact of using some of the formal devices of Dostoevsky's novel, and notably by reproducing its plot testifies to its actuality and relevance in the Britain – and Europe – of the late 1920s and in the context of Modernist art.

Rewriting Stavrogin: A not so Stupid Tragedy

The recreation of Stavrogin as Maurice Spandrell is the major device of criticism against what Huxley perceives as Dostoevsky's ideological stance in *Point Counter Point.* There are, in fact, two references to their relationship in the novel, both given by Rampion. Chronologically the second, more simplistic and direct comment, containing the key phrase of "the little Stavrogin", explained as a "morality-philosophy pervert" and an "idiot" (417), has been quoted above. In an earlier, indirect, more detailed and sophisticated but nonetheless equally derogative remark Rampion characterises Spandrell as

> …a permanent adolescent. […] He's Peter Pan à la Dostoevsky-cum-de Musset-cum-the-Nineties-cum-Bunyan-cum-Byron and the Marquis de Sade. Really deplorable. The more so as he's potentially a very decent human being. (139)

This self-explanatory list of literary sources for Spandrell's character is completed by his recital of Baudelaire's poetry during his first appearance in the novel (137) and thus unanimously points to an easy dismissal of Stavrogin's (Dostoevsky's) figure as pathological and (romantically) theatrical – to a verbatim repetion of Huxley's critical stance in his essay. Stavrogin's and Spandrell's detailed comparison, however, shows a much more desperate fight with Dostoevsky's spirit and an ambivalence of feelings. Huxley's strategy of rewriting includes two slightly different procedures. On the one hand, his text reproduces some iconic features of Stavrogin's character without significant modifications, which set the context for interpreting Spandrell in the light of *Devils* right from the beginning, even without the help of Rampion's clues. On the other hand, some of Stavrogin's features appear in a still recognisable, but seriously modified – not to say distorted – form in Spandrell, much in accordance with the Baudelaire study. Huxley's critical reading of *Devils* is embodied in these explicit changes, whereas his text also contains significant elements which implicitly counter their effects. Strangely enough, after all these manoeuvrings Spandrell – just like Stavrogin – remains the most memorable character of the novel, whose spiritual quest and pathetic failure seem to be more human than Rampion's dated and didactic Laurentian gospel.

As far as the "unmodified" repetition of features is concerned, Spandrell's appearance clearly evokes key metaphors associated with Stavrogin. The central

elements of his first description through Mary Rampion's eyes parallel the dominant features of Stavrogin's depiction. The demonism suggested by the "particularly intense black" of Stavrogin's hair and by its sharp contrast with his "peculiarly light" eyes and "peculiarly soft and white" face; the "mask"-like quality of his complexion, which evokes in the Russian context notions of the theatre, the carnivalesque and of the demonic (Szilárd 21); the deathlike look inherent in the famous "lifeless wax figure"(Dostoevksy, *The Possessed*) metaphor, even the special focus on his sensuous lips are all apparent in Spandrell's portrait:

> Like a gargoyle [...] in a pink boudoir. There was one on Notre Dame in just that attitude, leaning forward with his demon's face between his claws. Only the gargoyle was a comic devil, so extravagantly diabolical that you couldn't take his devilishness very seriously. Spandrell was a real person, not a caricature; that was why his face was so much more sinister and tragical. It was a gaunt face. [...] The grey eyes were deeply set. In the cadaverous mask only the mouth was fleshy – a wide mouth, with lips that stood out from the skin like two thick weals. (101)

Similarly, the most important elements of Spandrell's narrative correspond to those of Stavrogin's. First of all, he introduces himself by telling an anecdote of his "regular technique with the young [women]" (102), i.e. with a braggingly magnified version of his single adventure with a young girl called Harriet Watkins (cf. 121–2), which repeats a central theme of "Stavrogin's Confession", that of emotional experimentation through the sadistic abuse of women. The story is later retold through Spandrell's consciousness as a much less vainglorious affair – in fact, as a baffling combination of sadism and masochistic self-torture, a source of disappointment and self-hatred (226–7). Though Harriet is a young adult who does physically survive Spandrell's "education" (102), because of his insistence on the corruption of innocence and (self)torture the story is still clearly reminiscent of the Matryosha episode (Dostoevsky, *Stavrogin's Confession* 40–61). What gradually evolves as Spandrell's narrative after this overture is a restaging of Stavrogin's life in Petersburg: he sponges off his mother and devotes himself to debauchery, but all this in a nihilistic stupor of self-destruction, which is ultimately aimed at provoking God to reveal Himself. This spiritual quest (cf. Bowering, *Aldous Huxley* 91) is also the central motive behind Stavrogin's experimentation, journeys to Mount Athos and Göttingen (Dostoevsky, *Stavrogin's Confession* 62), his visit paid to Tikhon and his futile attempts to reform his life. Even the metaphors of the two characters' emotional state and self-destruction are similar. Just like Stavrogin, who is repeatedly associated with the images of the "invalid" or "crippled creature" in need of a

"nurse" (Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*), Spandrell is also disabled by a strange emotional "paralysis" (227). The outcome of Spandrell's quest, his suicide intertwined with political motifs and literally staged at the very end of the novel, also parallels the closing scene of Dostoevsky's novel.

Huxley's criticism, embodied in the simplification, peripherisation, demystification and further demonisation of Stavrogin's character in Spandrell, does not result in the easily dismissible, farcical image that his Baudelaire essay suggests. If anything, it highlights the compromise involved in giving up the spiritual dimension of human existence and situates Dostoevsky's more equivocal and less didactic novel as a more modern text.

The first major modification is that Huxley emphasises the Oedipal implications of Stavrogin's character, which results in a relatively simplified rewriting: Stavrogin is reduced to a Freudian case study in Spandrell. Stavrogin's narrative contains only implicit references to an unresolved Oedipal crisis: his inability to establish a working heterosexual relationship and his improportionate reaction to Tikhon's remark about his similarity to his mother (Dostoevsky, *Stavrogin's Confession* 26–7). Though a "case study" of clinical narcissism seems to be feasible, and the sense of abjection permeating the novel also suggests an unresolved traumatic moment (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 18–20), psychology and, indeed, psychopathology are rejected as irrelevant simplifications of Stavrogin's metaphysical quest in the novel. While *Devils* rather calls for a Lacanian analysis focussing on language and the subject than a classical Freudian one, it is exactly the latter which is overtly carried out in Huxley's novel (224–7). The gaps in Stavrogin's "case study" are filled in with Charles Baudelaire's biographical elements (Brander 39), and the resultant narrative, as R. S. Baker convincingly demonstrates, is a diagnostically exact repetition of the so-called "prostitute complex" outlined by Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Stekel (112–19). Though there is nothing in this biography that would not fit Stavrogin's actual or potential features, the insistence in Huxley's text on explaining away the whole problem as a fixation leads to a conspicuous reduction.

This simplification is the more obvious because an individual's neurosis cannot explain away the sense of abjection, the permanent narcissistic crisis which, similarly to the world of *Devils*, actually dominates not only Spandrell's character, but the whole of *Point Counter Point.* Abjection, embodied most obviously in the hatred of the (female) body, and forming the basis of all patriarchal cultures (Kristeva, *Powers* 99–100), is Rampion's explanation of Spandrell's sexual experimentation and fundamental charge against him:

> 'And above all [...] it's a vengeance. It's a way of getting one's own back on women [...], it's a way of expressing one's hatred of them and of what they represent, it's a way of expressing one's hatred of oneself.

> The trouble with you, Spandrell, [...] is that you really hate yourself. You hate the very source of your life, its ultimate basis – for there's no denying it, sex *is* fundamental. And you hate it, *hate* it. (122)

Spandrell, when defending his point by claiming that "We feel spontaneously ashamed of the body and its activities. That's a sign of the body's absolute and natural inferiority" (123), actually accepts this explanation. What it does not account for is "the distaste for physical experience which [...] is transformed into an exaggerated revulsion" (Ferns 100) in *Point Counter Point.* Angus Wilson even spoke about Huxley's "pathological wallowing in physical disgust" (qtd. in Atkins 70) embodied in his failure to represent any pleasurable scenes of basic physical activities, notably of having sex and eating. Rampion is allegedly the only character in the novel who is beyond abjection – at the cost of rejecting all spirituality. Allegedly. Just like the tubercular Lawrence, Rampion is also in very poor health – and tellingly becomes "disgusted" with himself when he catches a cold (109). What is more, one of his final arguments against Spandrell's assertion that Beethoven's music is an evidence for the existence of God, "a beatific vision [...], a heaven" (441) is that "It's the art of a man who's lost his body" (440), more exactly has been *castrated* and become an "eunuch" (441). In other words, he rephrases his rejection of spirituality as a fear of castration – ultimately, a fear of becoming one with the maternal body (Эткинд 402), or a fear of having to distrust the Symbolic and to face the epistemological and ontological uncertainties of human existence (Weber 1111–12). While the universality of abjection plays a major role in Huxley's criticism against modern society – and Dostoevsky – it also questions the validity of his explanation through individual neurosis.

The second major difference between Stavrogin's and Spandrell's character lies in the relatively peripherical position of the latter. Stavrogin's unmitigated central position is the consequence of his key role in the plot of *Devils*, but more importantly of the fact that, as Léna Szilárd emphasises, he "focuses the most intimate unconscious desires of his environment" (31). In this sense, *Point Counter Point* does not have a central character at all. Nevertheless, Huxley criticism usually presents three candidates for this position: as Peter Grosvenor points out, the interpretation of the novel depends to a great extent on whether Quarles, Rampion or Spandrell is considered to be its protagonist (1–2). Arguments for and against each proposition abound, including Baker's seemingly very convincing theory that Spandrell is the central character of the novel because he is the epitome of everything that Huxley's satirical attack is directed against: "it is Spandrell who embodies in his own life and in particular in the ending of that life the corruption of 'the whole man' that Huxley saw as endemic in a 'collapsing' society" (121). He adds that Spandrell, "the violent nihilist overshadows both Webley and Illidge, murdering the fascist and

psychologically dominating the communist" (103). In comparison with Stavrogin, however, the downplaying of his character's influence and role is rather obvious. Spandrell is a solitary figure, just like Stavrogin, but there is no one in the novel who would want to break his isolation. No loving women surround him, who would want him to embody their dreams, no disciples, who would look at him as an ideal, and no political anarchists, who would want him to be their charismatic leader. The vectors of emotional relationships are dramatically reversed: it is Spandrell, who needs a "murderee" to be able to fulfil the role of the murderer, and it is only accidental that he chooses the communist as a collaborator and as the victim of another emotional experiment.

The effect of Spandrell's relatively peripheral position is counteracted by the creation of at least three other characters in *Point Counter Point* who share some of his qualities – and Stavrogin's. The first of them is Lucy Tantamount, who is Spandrell's female double. Her appearance, just like Spandrell's, is reminiscent of Stavrogin's – if possible, even more so:

> She was of middle height and slim [...], with short dark hair, oiled to complete blackness and brushed back from her forehead. Naturally pale, she wore no rouge. Only her thin lips were painted and there was a little blue round the eyes. A black dress emphasized the whiteness of her arms and shoulders. [...] Black suited her so well. (49)

To the familiar contrast of blackness (associated with death, because she is a widow) and paleness, the iconic mask-like quality is also added: her face is "a pale mask that had seen everything before" (96). In addition, she is an even greater expert of emotional experimentation than Spandrell. She carries it out on a small scale through comic "deliberate social blunders" (88) and on a large scale by playing a sadistic game with Walter Bidlake, who is deeply in love with her. Their story, unfolding throughout the novel, is the inverse of Harriet and Spandrell's affair. Furthermore, on a metaphorical level, just like Stavrogin, she is a predatory animal: according to Rampion Walter is "Like a rabbit in front of a weasel" when with her, then he produces the classic snake metaphor so often used for describing Stavrogin when he adds that "You might as well like cobras" (139). She is also like a "siren" or "crocodile" in Quarles's eyes (301). Her similarity to Spandrell is emphasised by the fact that their brief affair could not last because they are too much alike, as both of them are "murderers", that is, sadistic victimisers (cf. Baker 109–10) of their lovers:

> 'As a matter of fact you weren't enough of a murderee for my taste.' There was nothing of the victim about Lucy; not much even, [Spandrell] had often reflected, of the ordinary woman. She could pursue her pleasure as a man pursues his [...]. Spandrell didn't like to

> be used and exploited for someone else's entertainment. He wanted to be the user. But with Lucy there was no possibility of slave-holding. 'I'm like you,' he added. 'I need victims'. (158)

The second such character is Philip Quarles. First of all, he seems to realise another set of central metaphors related to Stavrogin and also evoked by Spandrell's "emotional paralysis": that of being a cripple. Philip is not only physically disabled, having a maimed leg, but also emotionally, because his intellectual life stifles his human relationships. Again, Rampion's judgment at the end of the novel, after following Elinor Quarles's vain attempts to force any emotional response from her husband, rather states the obvious: "But the other High-Lifers [intellectuals], the ones who haven't any physical defect – they are not so forgivable. They've maimed themselves deliberately, for fun. It's a pity they don't develop visible hunch-backs or wall-eyes. One would know better who one was dealing with" (413). Philip is the realised metaphor of the disease of "mental consciousness", physical disability – his recognition of himself in Rampion's words is clearly implied by his "affectation of amusement that was meant to cover the embarrassment he felt" (413). Secondly, his character seems to have a special fluidity (Roston 383); it is not fixed, it is always impressed by new experiences – he makes even efforts not to remember his past and not to think of his future. This feature seems to be a positive embracement of the tragic condition that partly leads to Stavrogin's suicide, namely that the inability of Narcissus to find his identity, to become one with his mirror image is the emblematic story of the Western subject and it implies a fluidity of identity inherent in its narrative nature and in the nature of the linguistic sign.

The third such character is Everard Webley, who embodies the role of the charismatic political leader obviously missing from Spandrell's repertoire and dreams – but significant as one of the roles offered to Stavrogin. Firstly, his Nietzschean figure evokes Kirillov, one of Stavrogin's doubles. This reference is somewhat reinforced by the farcical elements of his death, which repeats motifs of Kirillov's forced suicide. Secondly, Stavrogin's role as a leader is embodied in the legend of Ivan Tsarevich, which Pyotr Verkhovensky wants to use to establish his authority. Unmasking the political practice of relying on national myth – and therefore on unconscious forces – to achieve power, Webley activates the legend of Robin Hood in a similar, but somewhat comic manner (344).

The appearance of these characters might be evaluated – to return to Baker's theory – as a result of the fact that Spandrell is the fullest embodiment of the "disease of modern man," which implies that many of the characters in the novels share a certain number of his features. From another perspective, they counteract Spandrell's peripherisation by multiplying his somewhat distorted images and creating a claustrophobic novelistic universe of mirrors facing each other – a universe which is strikingly similar to that of *Devils.*

Thirdly, Huxley demystifies the enigmatic Stavrogin by rewriting him as a garrulous story-teller, which also makes Stavrogin's implicit narcissism an explicit and dominant trait in Spandrell. Stavrogin's enigmatic identity is one of the central problems of *Devils*, primarily because his verbal attempts at self-definition are restricted to his confession, while his dialogues with his disciples all result in his refusal of his earlier narrative identities now embodied in them. The confession itself is far from being a definite text of his identity, firstly because of its mythical, therefore metaphorical and polysemous nature, secondly because of the presence of two contradictory mythic narratives in it: those of the Golden Age and Narcissus. While the epiphanic vision of the Golden Age evokes the solar hero's myth as a possibly authentic narrative and foreshadows the completion of his spiritual quest, the Narcissus myth implies a tragic outcome including futile desires, a problematic entry into the Symbolic and heightened self-reflexion as a prerequisite of subjectivity. Narcissistic as he is, Stavrogin – as Szilárd convincingly demonstrates – still tries to resist the numerous roles that the fundamentally theatrical (and therefore demonic) world of *Devils* prescribes for him. In fact, she interprets Stavrogin's gratuitous acts – including his suicide – as revolts against this theatricality and attempts to assert his own identity (20–5; 34). As opposed to this, Spandrell keeps talking about himself, obviously trying to define himself through his narrative, which, however, is represented as constant affectation. It is Quarles who emphasises his willingness to speak about himself: "the man was prepared to talk about himself without demanding any personalities in return, [...] and was boastful rather than reticent about his weaknesses" (228). The most conspicuous example for such boasting is the above-mentioned "anecdote" of Harriet's moral corruption, which can be read as a theatrical restaging of Stavrogin's confession with the Rampions as audience. In this context Rampion's comment about the "theatricality" of Spandrell's behaviour, which was "as though the man were overacting to convince himself he was there at all" (102), can be interpreted as a comment on Spandrell's attempts to assert his identity through narrating and narcissistic role-playing – on the abject confession of a "hero" without any trace of originality (cf. Girard 1–15; Bernstein 17–22, 105–8; P. Brooks, *Troubling Confessions* 46–60).

Huxley's demystification also seems to become a demythologisation because the story of the "confession" is retold in a light-hearted manner and any parallel with the epiphanic moment of Stavrogin's vision is missing. Spandrell's last scene, however, clearly fulfils this function and Rampion's comments on it reinforce the power of myth as an interpretative context. In fact, Spandrell's "beatific vision" shared with the Rampions – again – can be read as the "second half" of his confession and a modified rewriting of Stavrogin's key text, including the whole confessional situation. This is indicated partly by the central role of a work of art in both visions: while Stavrogin's dream is inspired by

Claude Lorrain's *Acis and Galatea*, Spandrell becomes convinced of God's existence by listening to Beethoven's A minor quartet. The two works of art are interpreted in the novels as references to the same myth: the Golden Age or the vision of paradise. The other important connecting element is the similarity of Tikhon's and Rampion's role in the two scenes. Mark Rampion, though negatively, associates himself with Spandrell's "father confessor" (438) during their invitation to visit Spandrell. This parallel is further emphasised by Rampion's most sudden and incongruous, maybe even ironic turn to the sacred text of the Bible in the argument about Spandrell's vision. When Spandrell (almost) convinces him[9], he replies with a Biblical quote, "Almost thou persuadest me" (442), which is Agrippa's answer to Saint Paul, and ends in the phrase "to be a Christian" (Acts 26.28). Immediately after this comment, he looks at the metamorphosed Spandrell and claims that "He refuses to be human – either a demon or a dead angel. Now he is dead" (442). Rampion's voice, which throughout the novel most obviously opposes and attacks Spandrell's spiritual quest, at this point not only turns to the sacred mythical text so as to be able to verbalise the inexplicable, but also reveals the fundamental mythic paradigm formulating his vision of Spandrell – and the core of his ideology.

One of the major ironies of the novel is that the vision itself is set in the context of Spandrell's most conspicuous narcissistic role-playing: he invites the Rampions not only to listen to Beethoven but to be the audience of his suicide "staged" as political murder (Cushman 13). As if he was a forerunner of psychoanalytic literary criticism á la Peter Brooks, he realises his idea that "it's only in the light of ends that you can judge beginnings and middles" (151) and consciously manipulates his own "death-bed scene" (151) by prefabricating an ending that would place him in the position of the hero/victim and would end his life at the top of his own spiritual ascent. His willingness to stage his own death, the feeling of counterfeit and sham surrounding it deprive it of the sense of martyrdom and potential to authenticate his life narrative as a fulfilled quest[10]. As opposed to Stavrogin, Spandrell not only accepts the rules of a theatrical world but thrives on being theatrical. This feature clearly corresponds to Huxley's emphasis on theatricality in his essay and contributes to the "easy" dismissal of the Dostoevkian ideological stance.

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[9] Characteristically, there is no critical consensus on the reading of this most crucial scene: some readers argue that Spandrell's vision is meant to be taken seriously, or that it can be taken only seriously, whether it was meant to or not, while others contend that it should be read with ironic distance (cf. May 420–21; Bowering, *Aldous Huxley* 227; Bowen, "Allusions" 502–8; Firchow, "Mental Music" 534).

[10] He is not the only "comedian" in the novel: Spandrell's constant acting is also part and parcel of the narcissistic and theatrical world of *Point Counter Point*, so similar to that of *Devils.* As Zack Bowen points out, "The linking of the phoney and the contrived [...] and the undercurrent of stage managing and counterfeit are a secondary leitmotif which accompanies the main theme of God and eternal truth manifested in science, music and the novel" ("Allusions" 500).

While the ambivalence of Spandrell's suicide scene is clearly reminiscent of *Devils*, the postponement of Spandrell's vision until the very end of *Point Counter Point* deprives his figure of most ambiguities and internal tensions characterising Stavrogin, and creates a relatively one-dimensional and more demonic version of his narrative. Stavrogin's vision in *Devils* leads to an attempt to reform his life, which is often interpreted as a realisation of the metaphor of the "cross" inherent in his name and as a metaphorical upward movement, a spiritual ascent culminating in his suicide in the "loft" (Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*)[11]. This somewhat more optimistic reading of his death utilises the ambiguities and polyvalence of his character, and is also clearly reflected in Huxley's formulation of Spandrell's last scene. However, since the moment of his epiphanic vision is postponed until the very end, all the elements in Stavrogin's narrative which are motivated by it, and therefore do not fit into Spandrell's demonic card-game with God, are eliminated from his narrative or incorporated with an inverted cast and motivation. The best example is the political murder, which Stavrogin does everything in his power to prevent, while Spandrell uses it only as an excuse in a desperate attempt to provoke God to reveal Himself. His crime is the functional equivalent of the Matryosha case: Spandrell hopes to experience an epiphany (cf. Frye, *Anatomy* 223) by committing it and therefore to obtain a notion of his authentic self. This "weeding out" of ambiguities from Stavrogin's narrative leads to Spandrell's rather schematic demonism – an easy target for criticism – and is further emphasised by the above-mentioned theatricality of his last scene.

In conclusion, Huxley's reading of *Devils* in his *Point Counter Point* has proved to involve a combination of diametrically opposed factors. On the one hand, it testifies to a very critical approach to Dostoevsky's text, embodied in Spandrell as a character modelled on Stavrogin. Through this rewriting, the whole metaphysical problematic of Dostoevsky's novel seems to be dismissed as a psychopathological phenomenon, an extreme individual case (of gratuitous criminality) and a bad actor's inauthentic farce. On the other hand, the fact itself that Huxley rewrote *Devils* in 1928 in Britain, as in the case of every rewriting, points to the actuality and obsessive power of the intertext. Dostoevsky's novel is a major representative of the artistic tradition that Huxley continues and should be able to overcome in his rewriting. From this perspective, the creation of a "little Stavrogin" – instead of facing the "real one" – seems to be a set of manipulations that "fixes the fight" before the match is actually started: Spandrell embodies a schematic reading that should make it possible to get

[11] This reading is formulated by Szilárd (35–6), but Katalin Kroó arrives at similar conclusions through the analysis of the intertextual and metatextual levels of Stavrogin's dialogues with his disciples (Kpoo 227–61).

easily beyond the predecessor's ideological stance. Huxley's interpretation, however, is subverted in *Point Counter Point* by several factors, which ultimately raises doubts about the major points of his critical reading. Thus the demystification and demythologisation of Stavrogin's story, which is a significant point of Huxley's rejection of spirituality, is subverted in the closing scene both by the power of Beethoven's music (and Spandrell's ability to share the artist's vision) and Rampion's recourse to the authority of the numinous and mythic in interpreting Spandrell – and in formulating his own, equally mythical explanation for the ailments of humanity. From the perspective of the metaphysical guarantees of the individual, by moving Stavrogin's narcissism into the foreground and asserting Spandrell's constant need for an audience, Huxley does not get much further than restating the Dostoevskian claim about the necessity of the other (the Other?) for the subject to come into being. To carry on Huxley's medical metaphor, his reading proves that Dostoevsky's text represents modern man's disease, but only to highlight that the Russian writer is the more subtle diagnostician of the two: Huxley's simplistic psychological dismissal does not make his Laurentian therapy more convincing.

READING *WOLF SOLENT* READING[1]

> "My own life on earth has resembled Solent's in being dominated by Books." (Powys, "Preface" 11)

Reading. Reading cheap stories and pornography. Reading the scandalous history of Dorset. Reading the story of the dead father in the landscape of his homeland. Reading the metaphor of the Name of the Father. Reading – and rewriting – classics of the carnivalesque tradition in European literature. To a great extent, John Cowper Powys's *Wolf Solent* is – just like Dostoevsky's *Devils* – about reading as a way of defining and understanding identity. Its representation plays the most significant role in the novel because it draws attention to a problematic aspect of narration by highlighting "the division in [Wolf Solent's] narrative consciousness" (Nordius 6). Though third-person narration is used in the novel, the story is told exclusively from one point of view, that of the main character and "[o]utside this consciousness '[t]here is no author's voice with knowledge of objective truth. There is no final authority'" (C. A. Coates qtd. in Nordius 46). What the reader receives is the story in Wolf Solent's reading(s) and thus the identity of this first – and ultimate – reader is a major determining factor in producing readings of *Wolf Solent*.

And here a vicious circle is apparently closed: the text is generated by the narrative consciousness, but Wolf Solent's identity is generated by the text itself. So much so, that for example Janina Nordius's interpretation of the novel as the expression of Powys's philosophy of solitude in the making (45) shows it as the "plotting out" of the central metaphor of the "lone wolf" (46) inherent in the main character's name (cf. P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* 10–24). Wolf Solent as a subject seems to be unambiguously definable by one metaphor, by his name – which appears as a clearly readable sign. However, the reader might realise that the word "solent", revealing a fundamental feature of both character and text, can actually be read as a play on words, combining sole/solitary and silent. The ambiguity inherent in his name is only one example of the multitude of carnivalesque ambiguities (cf. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky' Poetics* 126) characteristic of the novel. Through the character of Wolf Solent as the archetypal reader, reading itself is represented in the text as a form of transgression, which, instead of creating coherent and unquestionable ultimate discourses, rather opens up new gaps in the already existing ones by maintaining

[1] First published as "Reading Wolf Solent Reading," *Eger Journal of English Studies* 4 (2004), 45–55. Special thanks for her careful linguistic editing to Karin Macdonald.

a constant dialogue[2] of text and reader. The acceptance of these bitter-sweet qualities of reading with the major ironies making them possible and the solitary celebration of the joys given by the openness of the reading procedure identify it as a "reduced" form of carnivalesque laughter[3] – probably the only form possible in the 20th century.

The function of reading as a central determiner of Wolf Solent's identity is established by its metonymical/metaphorical connection with his metaphor for the core of his consciousness, his 'mythology'. The latter is a concept that conspicuously resists further interpretation in itself, taken out of its context. On the one hand, Wolf "use[s] it entirely in a private sense of his own" (Powys, *Wolf Solent* 19)[4]. On the other hand, it is most often represented in further images which usually undermine each other. In other words, it is a metaphor leading only to other metaphors, for example his 'mythology' as "hushed, expanding leaves", "secret vegetation – the roots of whose being hid themselves beneath the dark waters of his consciousness" (*WS* 20–21). The "roots" evidently lead from the conscious to the unconscious, in Lacanian terms Wolf's 'mythology' covers his 'true' identity, it screens "the adulterated chapter" of his history, which can be read most conspicuously in the transference neurosis, in the compulsively repeated symptoms surrounding the gap in the story (*The Language of the Self* 20–24). Wolf introduces his 'mythology' in the following manner:

> This was a certain trick he had of doing what he called 'sinking into his soul'. This trick had been a furtive custom with him from very early

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[2] I use the word "dialogue" in the Bakhtinian sense here (cf. Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 64–91; Томсон passim). Clive Thomson claims that Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the dialogue is a much debated one and his contemporary interpreters often emphasise such aspects of his ideas which are not sufficiently detailed and elaborated to settle the issue. He himself suggests taking it as a "strategy" of polemics which Bakhtin himself usually applied when he, without any intention to nivellate them, let the ideas of his opponents speak for themselves in his writings. Thomson, relying on Ken Hirschkop's opinion, treats this "strategy" as a "kind of populist deconstruction" (313), which clearly relates Bakhtin's critical wrtings with poststructuralist, rather than structuralist reading strategies. Peter Brooks in his short study, "The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism" also connects Bakhtinian dialogue with Lacanian psychoanalysis and his own psychoanalytic literary criticism, more concretely with textual analysis through the application of the Freudian concept of transference to literary analysis (11).

[3] Cf. Bakhtin's description of the changes of the grotesque, a phenomenon belonging to the core of the carnivalesque. He claims that in the Romantic period the grotesque and thus the carnivalesque became relevant only to the personal sphere of the individual, their universal character gradually diminished and finally disappeared. The original carnivalesque laughter also changed its nature, its regenerative power was brought to the minimum, which resulted in the dominance of its "reduced" forms: humour, irony and sarcasm (*Rabelais and His World* 46–44).

[4] In the rest of the text quotations from *Wolf Solent* will be identified only with the abbreviation *WS* and page numbers in the parenthetical notes.

> days. In his childhood *his mother had often rallied him about it* in her light-hearted way, and had applied to these trances, or these fits of absent-mindedness, an amusing but rather *indecent nursery name*. *His father*, on the other hand, *had encouraged him* in these moods, taking them very gravely, and treating him, when under their spell, as if he were a sort of *infant magician*. (*WS* 19, emphasis added)

The exact circumstances of the generation of Wolf's 'mythology', as it suits any screen memory covering a traumatic experience, remain hidden (cf. Freud, "Screen Memories" passim). However, its relationship with early childhood, the antithetical reaction of the two parents, the "indecency" attached to it by the mother and the imaginary power position implied by the "infant magician" practically cry for a psychoanalytic interpretation. Wolf Solent's 'mythology' is a classic case of infantile regression to wish fulfilment in daydreaming (cf. Freud, "The Creative Writer and Daydreaming" passim); instead of the core of his consciousness it is a symptom, a (false) construction (cf. Wilden 166; Žižek, "The Truth Arises from Misrecognition" passim) with the function of hiding the seemingly forgotten traumatic knot in the unconscious, which must be read and reread to form a more authentic story of Wolf Solent's identity.

For this reason the readable links which connect the "censored chapter" of the unconscious to this ominous gap give extremely useful help for the analyst. If Wolf Solent's 'mythology' is a case of daydreaming, it is directed at the repetition of an idealistic situation in which the wish-fulfilment was granted in his childhood. For Wolf Solent the perfect situation that is to be repeated is sitting at the bow-window of his grandmother's house – a re-enactment of the circumstances of finding the word 'mythology' for his special habit – thus supplying the first useful links to the "public" and "untouched" chapters of his identity:

> It was, however, when staying in his grandmother's house at Weymouth that the word had come to him which he now always used in his own mind to describe these obsessions. It was the word *'mythology'*; and he used it entirely in a private sense of his own. He could remember very well where he first came upon the word. It was in a curious room, called 'the ante-room', which was connected by folding-doors with his grandmother's drawing-room […]. The window of his grandmother's room opened upon the *sea*; and Wolf, *carrying the word 'mythology' into this bow-window*, allowed it to become his own secret name for his own secret habit. (*WS* 19–20, emphasis added)

As it turns out, the central element which dominates the scene is the (bow-)window, an image which returns several times later in the text always

associated with the pleasurable place where Wolf Solent likes or would like to be. At the beginning of the story the thirty-five-year-old Solent is shown travelling home to his birthplace in Dorset after a twenty-five-year absence, sitting at the window of an otherwise empty railway compartment, deeply submerged in "an orgy of concentrated thought" (*WS* 13), in his personal 'mythology' (*WS* 19). He characterises his mental state in the following manner:

> Outward things […] were to him like faintly-limned images in a mirror, the true reality of which lay all the while in his mind […].
>
> What he experienced now was a vague wonder as to whether the events that awaited him – these new scenes – these unknown people – would be able to do what no outward events had done – break up this *mirror of half-reality* and drop great stones of real reality – drop them and lodge them – hard, brutal, material stones – down there among those dark waters and that mental foliage. (*WS* 21, emphasis added)

The overall image of Wolf Solent represented here is fundamentally reminiscent of "The Lady of Shallot". He is locked up in the ivory tower of his own consciousness, intentionally separating and defending himself from outside events, which appear as mere reflections and shadows (cf. Tennyson 51–5). As a result, the last twenty-five years of his life have been monotonous and uneventful; "he has lived peacefully under the despotic affection of his mother, with whom, when he was only a child of ten, he had left Dorsetshire, and along with Dorsetshire, all the agitating memories of his dead father" (*WS* 14). The same surface of consciousness also seems to protect him from himself: since all the events of his 'real' life take place on a mental plane, in his 'mythology', his being locked up in a state of utter passivity in the shell of his consciousness hinders him from any actual action.

However, "the condition of narratability [is] to enter a state of deviance and detour (ambition, quest, the pose of a mask) […] before returning to the quiescence of the nonnarratable" (P. Brooks, *Reading* 108). It is exactly Wolf Solent's 'mythology' that makes it impossible for him to become the hero of his own story and thus to have an identity (P. Brooks, *Reading* 33) of his own. His story – the novel – can only start when he is willy-nilly pushed out of this passivity, and ends with shattering his 'mythology' as a shelter from "reality", but his ultimate desire is to return to the ideal situation of sitting at the window and submerging in his 'mythology'. For example on returning to Dorset his wish to live in one of the little cottages is embodied in his attempt "to fancy what it would be like to sit in the bow-window of any one of these, drinking tea and eating bread-and-honey, while the spring afternoon slowly darkened towards twilight" (*WS* 66–7). When trying to imagine what it will be like to work for Mr Urquhart, he has a "dream of [a] writing-table by a mullioned window 'blushing

with the blood of kings and queens' [which] turns out to be a literal presentiment" (*WS* 61). When he feels that Miss Gault's drawing-room has "the Penn House atmosphere" it means that "there was something about this room which made him recall that old bow-window in Brunswick Terrace, Weymouth, where in his childhood he used to indulge in these queer, secretive pleasures" (*WS* 132). And finally, when Christie moves to Weymouth, he flatters himself with the idea that their relationship will not end and "[sees] himself as an old grey-headed schoolmaster […] walking with Christie on one arm and Olwen […] on the other, past the bow windows of Brunswick Terrace!" (*WS* 619)

The second link to the "adulterated chapter" is supplied by the *metonymical* connection of the grandmother's house, and more specifically the bow-window, which is the location of the only pleasant memories of Wolf Solent's childhood, with *reading*:

> He recalled various agitating and shameful scenes between his high-spirited mother and his drifting, unscrupulous father. He summoned up, as opposed to these, his own *delicious memories* of long, *irresponsible holidays*, lovely uninterrupted weeks of *idleness*, *by the sea at Weymouth, when he read so many thrilling books in the sunlit bow-window* at Brunswick Terrace. (*WS* 37, emphasis added)

Thus reading in the literal sense of the word and "sinking into his soul" become *metonymically* connected by being attached to the same location, the bow-window in the house of Wolf's grandmother in Weymouth. The location itself, as a scene of his infantile daydreaming, becomes subject to many-layered interpretation via its connection with the symptom that covers the traumatic event. In classic Freudian analysis houses are symbolic of the body and rooms are especially associated with women (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 354–5). In Wolf's case the female body represented by the house and its rooms is most probably his mother's, substituted with the slightly veiled corresponding element of the grandmother's figure. Thus Wolf's wish to return to his passive and pleasurable stay in Weymouth, where he was "irresponsible", that is, free from any moral obligations to act, becomes an embodiment of the return to the maternal womb in the symbolic sense as a combination of libido and desire for the ideal conditions before birth in the death-wish (cf. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 46–76). The bow-window as an opening might be symbolic of his ambiguous position: he is inside but would like to enjoy the pleasures of being a spectator, or to use a word with even more obvious sexual connotations, a voyeour (cf. Barthes 17). Conspicuously, the view of the sea from the window implies a very similar imagery to that of the "dark waters of [Wolf's] consciousness", which is more than reminiscent of the imagery of the oceanic feeling (cf. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* 9–21) related to the Freudian

concept of the death wish. This symbolism is deepened by the relationship of the location with Wolf's 'mythology' and reading, which also seem to be *metaphorically* related to each other in their turn by sharing a number of common qualities. They lack any practical value according to the social norms and make Wolf, who indulges in them, an outsider and a transgressor; they yield solitary autoerotic pleasure; and they serve as an escape from the traumatic experience of his parents' stormy marriage, the "shameful scenes" which might correspond to the "page of shame" (Lacan, *The Language* 24) that seems to be forgotten but must return; and finally, they become the sublimation of his frustrated (incestuous) sexual desire (cf. Freud, *Civilization* 35–40). Thereby, Wolf's 'mythology', as it is also implied by the expression "secret vice" that he uses for it, turns out to be a metaphor for the "short circuit" of incest which closes narratives – and reading – prematurely and finally (P. Brooks, *Reading* 109). It is the de(con)struction of this closed narrative – the story of Wolf Solent as a mythic hero in his own imagination – which he experiences as the tragic death of his 'mythology' and the annihilation of his identity. Significantly, the story does not end here.

The third link to the unconscious is a *metaphorical* connection between looking out of the window and reading in the more general sense of the word, established here and developed in the rest of the text. Windows and words, language, seem to function in a very similar way for Wolf Solent, both providing frames that not only limit his vision and thereby slice out a portion of the world that is perceivable, but actually create signs from otherwise meaningless objects by the continuously changing and often surprising perspective they determine. He verbalises this similarity in the following way:

> These glimpses of certain fixed objects, seen daily, yet always differently, through bedroom-windows, scullery-windows, privy windows, had, from his childhood, possessed a curious interest for him. It was as if he got from them a sort of *runic handwriting,* the *'little language'* of Chance itself, commenting upon what was, and is, and is to come. (*WS* 232, emphasis added)

The implication is that windows present writing, a sign that must be read. In this excerpt Wolf Solent associates his vision through the window with textuality in general, and implies that life is practically nothing else but trying to read the cryptogram it presents.

This circle of associations reaches its full scope in a dialogue with Christie when Solent directly connects the image of the window as a frame with reading and daydreaming:

> Philosophy to you, and to me, too, isn't science at all! It's life winnowed and heightened. It's the essence of life caught on the wing. It's life *framed*… framed in room-windows… in carriage-windows… in mirrors… in our 'brown studies', when we look up from absorbing books… in waking dreams… (*WS* 91)

In this excerpt "framing" becomes a metaphor for contextualising or conceptualising and thus interpretation, while the means that make it possible are the "window" or "mirror" of a philosophical text – or literary text, for that matter. This "framed life", the narrative, seems actually to take the place of life itself for Wolf Solent, so much so, that he even "frames" the most elemental phenomena of nature into stories that he knows from the literary tradition. Everything is symbolic for him, for example "a great yellowish fragment of sky" becomes a centaur drinking from the fountain of a willow (*WS* 151). Thus Wolf definitely seems to embody a kind of neurotic reader (cf. Barthes 63). Since the window as a frame in itself is most conspicuously a hole, Wolf Solent becomes a reader of gaps with all the postmodernist/poststructuralist implications of the word concerning the nature of language and of the human unconscious (cf. Lacan, "The Insistence of the Letter" passim)[5]. Looking out of the window – or peeping in through windows, for that matter – becomes a metaphor for reading which highlights its inherently paradoxical nature, since the window, which is both a border and a frame, simultaneously encloses and opens up space.

Thus the identification of Wolf Solent's 'mythology' as a case of infantile regression to daydreaming, of leading to an ultimate closure of the text so characteristic of psychoanalytic literary criticism applied to fictional characters (cf. P. Brooks, *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* 21), actually reveals that *Wolf Solent* can as easily be the subject of a "more formalist" psychoanalytic criticism outlined by Peter Brooks ("The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Criticism" passim). It reads the returns of the text itself, in the given case the instances of reading itself, which turn out to be attempts to reconstruct the "false constructions" of the textual conscious for the fundamental gap in the text, Wolf Solent's identity itself as a narrative consciousness, the supposed "master" of the text (P. Brooks, "The Idea" 11–12). This is the point where the text recoils on itself: Wolf Solent, in his obsessively repeated attempts to read the missing chapter of his own unconscious, actually acts out the archetypal situation of the reader who both tries to master the text by analysing it and becomes mastered by the text as the

[5] On Powys and postmodernist concerns see (Boulter, *Postmodern Powys – New Essays on John Cowper Powys*). Joe Boulter uses "some of the analogies between Powys's themes and techniques and the themes and techniques of postmodernist theorists as the basis for interpretation of some of Powys's novels" to "interpret him in the context of postmodernist theory" and claims that the most important connecting element between postmodernist theorists and Powys is that they "are all, in a loose sense, pluralists" (5).

analysand (P. Brooks, "The Idea" 11–12). These instances reveal reading itself as transgression, a basically carnivalesque element. Just like the screen memory of Wolf's 'mythology', reading is exposed as an autoerotic activity (cf. Barthes 10) in the scenes of acquiring forbidden knowledge by gaining (perverse) sexual pleasure from reading pornography, of substituting the fulfilment of desire with reading and thereby sublimating it, of Wolf's voyeurism, and finally of his narcissistic obsession with his own images in actual and symbolic windows and mirrors. By the end of the novel Wolf Solent's constant readings and rereadings of himself dissolve the closed narrative of his 'mythology': his mythic image as a fighter in a cosmic battle against evil proves to be incompatible with his other parallel readings of his identity, which turn out to be unavoidably carnivalesque. Of course, only the exchange of one "false construction" with another can take place. However, since it consists in continuous reading, which leaves room for ambiguities and can cope with the constantly shifting nature of the signifier with the help of self-ironic laughter, it results in Wolf's symbolic rebirth after the seemingly fatal death of his mythology[6]. Consequently, reading, as it is represented in *Wolf Solent,* reveals itself as "truly" carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian sense of the word.

[6] My reading of *Wolf Solent* thus partly corresponds to the one given by Ian Hughes in his "The Genre of John Cowper Powys's Major Novels". While I agree with him that "Powys finally succeeds admirably in his attempt to dramatise the philosophic education of a central figure" (46) in *Wolf Solent*, and reading the novel as a "philosophic romance" (37) elaborating the "philosophy of sensationalism" (40) does not exclude a carnivalesque reading, I still think that it implies a closure and a finite nature that do not characterise the novel.

CONFESSING DEFIANCE – DEFYING CONFESSION: DOSTOEVSKIAN ALLUSION IN *WOLF SOLENT*[1]

In my study entitled "Dostoevsky in Wessex: John Cowper Powys after Bakhtin and Kristeva", following Professor Charles Lock's groundbreaking studies on Mikhail Dostoevsky and Powys ("Polyphonic Powys" passim), I suggest that a systematic comparative analysis of the two writers' works is more than overdue. Accordingly, I outline there a research plan that is focussed on four points of intersection between the Dostoevsky canon – that is, as formulated by Powys: Dostoevsky's four major novels and *Notes from the Underground*[2] – and Powys's 'Wessex novels': their approach to realism, the carnivalesque and its discourses, the intertextual nature of narrative identity, and the use of the confessional mode (Reichmann 67–8). In the present paper I would like to continue this train of thought with a case study of *The Brothers Karamazov, Devils* and *Wolf Solent.* In my reading, Powys's novel revisits fundamental Dostoevskian dilemmas as far as the issues of narrative identity and the use of the confessional mode are concerned. Powys revises the bleak Dostoevskian vision of narcissistic subjectivity by evoking two intertextually-coded confessional scenes: by using "The Great Inquisitor" as a reference point, and rewriting in an emphatically Rabelaisian manner the vision of the Golden Age associated with "Stavrogin's Confession".

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[1] First published as "Confessing Defiance – Defying Confession: Dostoevskian Allusion in *Wolf Solent/*Confessant de Défi – Défiant la Confession: La Allusion dostoïevskienne dans *Wolf Solent*," *la lettre powysienne* 15 (Autumn 2010), 24–38. Special thanks for the French translation and the careful editing of the English text to Jacqueline and Max Peltier.
I first wrote on *Wolf Solent* and *The Brothers Karamazov* more than ten years ago (cf. "What Made Ivan Karamazov 'Return the Ticket'? – John Cowper Powys's Rabelaisian Reading of *The Brothers Karamazov* in *Wolf Solent,*" *Slavica* XXXII [2003], 261–281) and the present article is the product of much rethinking and thorough reworking of that original text. None of the earlier versions include the parallels with *Devils*, which is a major theme of my doctoral thesis submitted in 2005 and entitled *A szándék allegóriái – Az identitás mítoszai Dosztojevszkij örökében* (*Allegories of Intent – Myths of Identity in the Wake of Dostoevsky*), and my article "Aranykor, karnevál és *megvetés* – Weymouth transzformációi két Powys-regényben," *Aranykor – Árkádia: Jelentés és irodalmi hagyományozódás, Párbeszéd-kötetek 3*, ed. Kroó Katalin and Ferenczi Attila (Budapest, L'Harmattan, 2007), 232–260.

[2] Cf. John Cowper Powys's insistence on reading 'the four novels *as one novel*' and his Dostoevsky canon (*Dostoievsky* 42; 79).

Raising the Dilemma: *The Brothers Karamazov*

Wolf Solent contains two obvious allusions to *The Brothers Karamazov* at crucially important textual junctures which concern the eponymous protagonist's self-definition and are related to confession and forgiving. The first of these is a very Powysian anticlimactic moment: in the chapter "Mr Malakite in Weymouth" Wolf himself openly alludes to Dostoyevsky's novel in his dialogue with Christie Malakite after their failed attempt to make love:

> 'The day I left London, from Waterloo Station, I saw a tramp on the steps there.' […] 'It was a man, […] and the look on his face was terrible in its misery. It must have been a look of that kind on the face of someone – though *his* sufferers were children, weren't they? – that made Ivan Karamazov "return the ticket". But all this time down here – *that* was March the third – ten months of my life, I have remembered that look. It has become to me like a sort of conscience, a sort of test for everything I –' He stopped abruptly; for a spasm of ice-cold integrity in his mind whispered suddenly, 'Don't be dramatic now'. (Powys, *Wolf Solent* 464)[3]

Let me quote the parallel place from *The Brothers Karamazov,* Ivan's words to Alyosha in the chapter tellingly entitled "Rebellion":

> 'And if that is so, if they have no right to forgive him, what becomes of the harmony? […] I don't want harmony. I don't want it; out of the love I bear to mankind. I want to remain with my suffering unavenged. I'd rather remain with my suffering unavenged and my indignation unapeased, *even if I were wrong*. Besides, too high a price has been placed on harmony. We cannot afford to pay so much for admission. And therefore I hasten to return my ticket of admission. And indeed, if I am an honest man, I'm bound to hand it back as soon as possible. This I am doing. It is not God that I do not accept, Alyosha. I merely most respectfully return him the ticket.' (Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* 287)[4]

The second, indirect reference appears much later in the novel, in Wolf's silent musing, which forms a part of the narrative's resolution. Concerning its content, it is evidently a continuation – and solution – of the dilemmas explicated in his

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[3] All the references to *Wolf Solent* will be indicated as *WS* in parenthetical notes in the rest of the paper.

[4] All the references to *The Brothers Karamazov* will be indicated as *BK* in parenthetical notes in the rest of the paper.

dialogue with Christie. Therefore, it is quite fitting that Wolf should echo Ivan Karamazov here again:

> 'But to *forgive for oneself* is one thing,' he thought. 'To forgive for others… for innocents… for animals… is another thing? Barge *is* an innocent; so it may be permitted to *him* to forgive. I am not an innocent. […] I know too much.' (*WS* 617)

For the sake of comparison, let us see Ivan's words, which directly precede the quote above:

> 'I want to forgive. I want to embrace. […] and, finally, I do not want a mother to embrace the torturer who had her child torn to pieces by his dogs! She has no right to forgive him! If she likes, *she can forgive him for herself*, she can forgive the torturer for the immeasurable suffering he has inflicted upon her as a mother; *but she has no right to forgive him for the sufferings of her tortured child*. She has no right to forgive the torturer for that, even if her child were to forgive him! And if that is so, if they have no right to forgive him, what becomes of the harmony?' (*BK* 287, emphasis added)

How do these excerpts relate to narrative identity and the confessional mode? On the one hand, in *The Brothers Karamazov* the crucial claim about "returning the ticket" is uttered in a confessional dialogue, which is centred on the issue of personal integrity, intertwined with the themes of the subject, story-telling and morality. On the other hand – as I will illustrate later – the issues of narrative identity and confession are brought forward in *Wolf Solent* not only by the allusion to Dostoevsky, but also by the context of the reference, which reinforces them. Ivan Karamazov's words are uttered in the second one of the three inseparably intertwined and probably most hotly debated crucial chapters of the whole novel, "The Brothers Get Acquainted", "Rebellion" and "The Grand Inquisitor"[5]. The three chapters include Ivan and Alyosha's confession-like dialogue the day before Ivan actually takes the fatal step that indirectly leads to his breakdown at the end of the novel: leaving "for Chermashnya" he provides an opportunity for his father's murder. It is at this critical moment that he makes an attempt to introduce himself to his unknown young novice of a brother – in other words, to define himself through story-telling, in a dialogue with the other. Ivan's words of defiance actually serve as a preamble for his definition of the self realised in his "poem," "The Grand Inquisitor". The story that he tells, his narrative of self-definition is nothing but the assertion of his integrity through a

[5] For a detailed analysis of these chapters, especially interpretations of "The Grand Inquisitor" see also (Kovács 59–104).

metaphysical rebellion against God and the Christian ethic centred on the concepts of love and forgiving. The reason is a paradox: these notions seem to be incompatible with the amount of human suffering, and the position of the subject turns out to be untenable in the face of such an irreducible opposition – even if it means self-annihilation. Thus, his self-definition is inevitably also a sin, which needs to be confessed to Alyosha in a heartbreaking cry for absolution – in a cry for the very love and forgiving he rejects.

Thus Ivan Karamazov's "returning the ticket" is shorthand not only for defiance – as is obvious in Powys's non-fiction (e. g. *The Meaning of Culture* 16) – but also for the definition of the self through a confessional narrative. And an intertextual one, at that. But also one that leaves the individual in untenable uncertainty despite all its apparent finality. First and foremost, Ivan's story is essentially intertextual, feeding on the text of the Bible (cf. Kroó, *Dosztojevszkij: A Karamazov testvérek* 49–55). If anyone should miss it, Ivan calls Alyosha's silent kiss – a repetition of Jesus' kiss in "The Grand Inquisitor" – a "plagiarism" (*BK* 309), thereby also evoking a form of intertextuality. Secondly, the identity Ivan creates in this narrative fails to supply a solution for his metaphysical uncertainties and clearly foreshadows his ultimate breakdown. Ivan identifies himself with the Grand Inquisitor, which is emphasised by Alyosha's kiss – a perfect reply to the hidden rhetoric of any confession (cf. de Man, *Allegories of Reading* 279–302; P. Brooks, *Troubling Confessions* 48–52): the craving for absolution (and love). This yearning is expressed in both the Grand Inquisitor's and Ivan's words, however much forgiving and compassion are the central concepts of the metaphysical discourse they are just rebelling against. Nevertheless, as Katalin Kroó points out, instead of providing the so-much desired integrity of the self, the character of the Grand Inquisitor and the whole poem as such become the embodiments of the irreducible oppositions inherent in the ambivalent nature of the human condition. Thus Ivan's identification with the Grand Inquisitor – who both identifies himself with Christ, having to speak for him, in the course of their one-sided dialogue, and distances himself from him – becomes nothing else but the affirmation of his own inherent division and dilemmas (*Dosztojevszkij* 49–55). As the Elder Zossima's prophetic words point out at the beginning of the novel:

> 'If you can't answer [this question] in the affirmative, you will never be able to answer it in the negative. You know that peculiarity of your heart yourself – and all its agony is due to that alone. […] God grant that your heart's answer will find you still on earth, and may God bless your path!' (*BK* 78–79)

Accordingly, throughout the novel Ivan keeps oscillating between extremes, hesitating and acting too late, which ultimately wears out his strength and leads

to his breakdown. The untenable nature of his narrative identity – the intertextual story of the Grand Inquisitor who can define himself only through appropriating the story of another, Jesus – brings him on the verge of psychosis, indicated by his vision of his demonic double[6], the devil.

Thus the reference to Ivan Karamazov could be enough to read Wolf Solent's words to Christie in the context of confession and narrative identity; nevertheless, it is worth paying attention to the context of the allusion, which equally justifies this approach. On the one hand, it is in the knowledge of having hurt Christie – having committed a sin – that Wolf pronounces the words quoted above. As is well known, in the course of their intimate love scene Wolf gets so shocked at the idea that by committing adultery he may finally destroy his 'mythology', the secret narrative of his identity, the core of his integrity, that in the last moment he changes his mind and refuses to make love to Christie. He immediately realises that he "ha[s] hurt her feelings […] in the one unpardonable way" (*WS* 461) – has caused her suffering; consciously in the name of the Christian ethic that forbids adultery and causing suffering to his wife, Gerda; unconsciously in a desperate, irrational and rather selfish attempt at defending his personal integrity. Thus he needs to confess, to tell a story partly to gain absolution for his "unpardonable sin", partly to re-establish his deeply shaken integrity of the self. The reference to "returning the ticket" – just like in the Dostoevskian original – is meant to serve as a preamble for a confession, for the revelation of his 'mythology'. That, however, never actually takes place. In the last moment Wolf regains his ironic distance from the situation ('Don't be dramatic now') and consistently with the literal reading of the Dostoevskian text – forgiving is rejected – he refuses to produce a confession, a rhetoric aiming for absolution.

On the other hand, the same discrediting of the oral confession is underscored by Christie's own situation, with an additional shift towards the written confession – a dialogue with the solitary self, whose sole aim is enjoyment, pleasure, maybe Lacanian *jouissance* (cf. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts* 183–5; Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* 68–9). Before and after the unfortunate incident Wolf and Christie talk of the girl's own "confessional" self-definition, her book entitled *Slate*. Characteristically, first she openly discusses with him how she wants it to be "real" and how she was inspired to write it because male writers do not dare "*to enjoy* writing outrageous things", they write about them only "from artistic duty", which is "disgusting" (*WS* 454). It reveals that whereas Wolf considers writing the "Rabelaisian" *History of Dorset* immoral, Christie chooses this perspective because in her opinion that is the only acceptable one for grasping a sense of reality (*WS* 454). In the following chapter, which is emphatically entitled *Slate*, Wolf actually manages to peep into

[6] On clinical cases of autoscopia cf. (Dolar 11).

the book, which Christie decides never to show him after their failed attempt at making love, realising that the man she has considered her soul-mate does not have the faintest idea about who she really is – or if he has, that identity would be unacceptable for him. The single page he can read before the girl discovers him describes a barely veiled incestuous scene between father and daughter – another "unpardonable sin" which is in need of forgiveness (or forgetting). Another scene which is a transgression of the Law of the Father, a pure moment of *jouissance*, to which, paradoxically, only the Father is entitled – therefore a scene of rebellion, which defies language. Or at least, as the case shows, *spoken* language.

Facing the impossibility of Wolf's confession, his formulating a spoken version of his narrative identity, readers must content themselves with bywords for his self-definition – and written texts. Many of which, like the Dostoevskian allusion, are intertextual references evoking other narrative identities. Though Wolf Solent, similarly to Ivan Karamazov, conspicuously identifies himself with split selves, he avoids a final breakdown. This goes hand in hand with the fact that he rather *evokes* than *creates* other narratives and contentedly lets them speak for themselves. It is characteristic of both the "only written text" he produces in the novel, *The History of Dorset,* which is a compilation, and the heavily intertextual text of the whole novel, which is narrated exclusively through his consciousness. The latter abounds in allusions; Wolf keeps thinking in terms of literary texts, as if they were "life *framed*" in windows, mirrors, minds drunk on book-reading (*WS* 91). In the text he generates he regards only the style as his own:

> This style had been his own contribution to the book; and though it had been evoked under external pressure, and in a sense had been a *tour de force*, it was in its essence the expression of Wolf's own soul – the only purely aesthetic expression that Destiny had ever permitted to his deeper nature. (*WS* 330)

Through an intricate mechanism of doubling and identification, this *History,* however, is clearly revealed as the *written confessional narrative* of Wolf's own identity. In the course of the novel Wolf has to realise that on the one hand he and his father could have a more than rightful place in *The History* because of their scandalous and immoral life. On the other hand, while writing the book he has to identify himself to a great extent with Mr Urquhart, his commissioner, for whom *The History* is a thinly veiled apology for his homosexual attraction to his previous secretary. Still, as it turns out from Wolf's words above, he actually comes *to enjoy* writing the book. Consequently, the book becomes Wolf's own story to a certain degree, just as *Slate* is a story of self-definition for Christie. As a result, story-telling in the novel is represented as basically a carnivalesque,

subversive act and a rebellion against accepted norms. It becomes synonymous with confessing sins, characterised by the inherently ambiguous double rhetoric of all confessional writing: it is both the enjoyable exposure of the hidden self (shameful events, unconscious desires, repressed memories, such as incest, homosexuality, adultery and fathering bastards) and a plea for absolution (cf. de Man, *Allegories of Reading* 279–302; P. Brooks *Troubling* 48–52). In that sense, Wolf's words about Ivan Karamazov really serve as a preamble to a confession, aimed at nothing else but gaining forgiveness for the "unpardonable sin" committed against Christie. But this confession is not realised in an intercourse, like in Dostoevsky's confessional dialogues – it remains a written discourse of the solitary self. The reference to the literary figure (Ivan Karamazov) appears *instead of* the revelation of Wolf's "mythology" to another character in Powys's fictional world.

Resolution: The Golden Age Revisited

Powys's concern with narrative identity and the limitations of confessional discourse for establishing personal integrity echo not only *The Brothers Karamazov,* but also *Devils.* Most obviously so because the insecure integrity of both Ivan Karamazov and Stavrogin is highlighted in an intricate confessional scene, and because the motif of the Golden Age, emblematic of Stavrogin's narrative identity "defined" in his confession (cf. Dostoevsky, *Stavrogin's Confession* 64–5[7]; Kroó, "From Plato's Myth of the Golden Age" passim; S. Horváth passim), is a recurrent element in *Wolf Solent.* The collapse of Wolf's "mythology", originally associated with the Golden Age of his childhood days in Weymouth, is just as severe a narcissistic crisis as Ivan Karamazov's and Stavrogin's failure to come to a compromise with the Law of the Father in their confessional dialogues. It is just fitting that the resolution of this crisis should be associated with a solitary vision of the Golden Age – a rewriting of the Dostoevskian theme in the combined context of the Romantic enchantment with

[7] In the present article quotations from Dostoevsky's novel will be based Constance Garnett's translation of *Devils,* first published in 1914 with the better-known, but slightly misleading English title *The Possessed*. This translation is now available as a searchable e-text; therefore, the references to this source as (Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*) will not contain page numbers. This version, however, did not include "Stavrogin's Confession", which was first published in English in 1922 as a separate volume. For this reason quotes from that section will be indicated as (Dostoevsky, *Stavrogin's Confession*), with the relevant page numbers. The reason for using these translations is purely philological: Powys was obviously familiar with these versions of the text, and he also mentions the novel as *The Possessed.* As, among others, Ned Lukacher points out, on the evidence of Powys's repeated allusions to central motifs of the surpressed chapter it is simply impossible that he should have been unacquainted with it (21). I myself will refer to Dostoevsky's novel by the more appropriate title *Devils*, which was used in Katz's 1958 translation (cf. Dostoevsky, *Devils*).

the self and its transcendental insights inspired by nature, and Rabelaisian humanism. The fact that this vision, however, does not become the initiator or subject of a confessional dialogue is in itself a statement on the limitations of such a discourse for defining identity. In other words, Powys tries to re-inscribe nature, as the stabilising third element into the discourse of the narcissistic – and solipsistic – self (cf. Kochhar-Lindgren 2–18) by turning the aesthetics of the sublime and the grotesque (abject [cf. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 2–18; Kiss 19–20]) into a non-exclusive opposition. At the same time this combination implies a negotiation between the Law of the Father (revised as the carnivalesque) and the abject of the maternal body (revised as nature). It is this revised vision of the Dostoevskian Golden Age that enables Wolf Solent to carry on and look at his personal integrity not as a fixed narrative, which can be only shattered in moments of crisis, but as a continuously written – and rewritten – work in progress.

Though the vision of the Golden Age appears at the end of the novel, its motifs are present in the text from the very beginning. They are associated with Weymouth, the idyllic moments of Wolf's early childhood and therefore a sense of personal integrity:

> He summoned up, […] his own delicious memories of long, irresponsible holidays, lovely uninterrupted weeks of *idleness*, *by the sea* at Weymouth, when he read so many thrilling books in the *sunlit* bow-window at Brunswick Terrace. (*WS* 37, emphasis added)

Wolf's memories clearly evoke the idylls of the mythical Golden Age (cf. Hesiod, *Works and Days* 106–68) through the topos of the sunlit seaside and the undisturbed pleasure of his "idleness" – his immersion in the dream-world of reading. The vision of the sunlit sea is later directly associated with the motif of gold, when Wolf, staring "at the great orb of the horizontal sun" recalls "the sight of the dancing ripples of the wide bay turned into liquid gold by the straight sun-path" (*WS* 630) on a spring day in Weymouth – a sight that caused his "extraordinary ecstasy" (*WS* 630). Wolf finds the metaphor of his 'mythology' – the image that defines his 'life-illusion', that is, his consciousness and identity – in the self-same "sunlit bow-window" of his childhood idyll (cf. *WS* 19–20). In short, the mythical motif of the Golden Age of Wolf's childhood in Weymouth becomes the signifier of his personal integrity through its connection with his 'mythology'.

Though Wolf likes to associate this core of his identity with the paternal – Language, the Law of the Symbolic Father – its gradual crumbling is caused by the revelation of its direct relationship with the abject, the grotesque maternal body. This is why Wolf Solent's quest for the Name of the Father turns into a desperate attempt to redefine his relationship with his mother in the knowledge that his separation from the maternal body is a key to his personal integrity. The

two principles are united in the final negotiation of his vision, which still involves a highly sexualised union with *mother* nature, though without the paternal sanction of the grotesque body as abject.

Wolf's 'mythology' is present in his consciousness as a paternal defence against the abject – his own mother, whose grotesque body he must experience as one with his own. This imagery is most obviously represented in the first major conflict of mother and son: on the figurative level it involves the fragmentation of the maternal body, its vision in its animalistic – subhuman – corporeal reality and therefore its rejection; and a reunion with it. In this scene of jealousy, which is full of Oedipal overtones and is provoked by Wolf's marriage, Mrs Solent is first represented as an almighty power figure – the mother who reserves all authority for herself and consequently fails to prepare a place for the Name of the Father (cf. Füzesséry 52):

> She *towered* above him there with that *grand* convulsed face and those *expanded* breasts; while her fine hands, clutching at her belt, seemed to display a wild desire to strip herself naked before him, to overwhelm him with the wrath of her naked maternal body, bare to the outrage of his impiety. (*WS* 302, emphasis added)

The phallic metaphor of the tower, just like the images of her grandiosity and her (Biblical?) "wrath" at his (not less Biblical) "impiety" much rather evoke an omnipotent divine *father* figure, than a female parent. Her representation, which is dominated by Wolf's perspective, nevertheless already makes the impression of the blazoning of bodily parts.

This proves to be a foreshadowing of her consequent total fragmentation in Wolf's eyes, which evokes abjection (of the self):

> Wolf surveyed her form as she lay there, one strong leg exposed as high as the knee, and one disarranged tress of wavy hair hanging across her cheek. And it came over him with a wave of remorseful shame that this formidable being, so *grotesquely reduced*, was the actual human animal out of whose *entrails* he had been dragged into light and air. […] The physical shamelessness, too, of her abandonment shocked something in him, some vein of *fastidious* reverence. […] as he now contemplated those grey hairs, and that exposed knee, he felt a more poignant consciousness of what she was than he had ever felt at the times when he admired her most and loved her most. (*WS* 303, emphasis added).

This "grotesquely reduced" and emphatically corporeal maternal body is both associated with death, with the dangerous intent of swallowing up the (male)

beholder, and with the inevitable remembrance of birth – the production of life from a subhuman ("animal", "entrails") creature – whose sight fills the "fastidious" Wolf with disgust. Mrs Solent turns here into the image of the carnivalesque "pregnant death" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 25), to whom Wolf can react only with abjection. This, in turn, also means the abjection of the self, since he cannot avoid the consciousness of being born ("torn") from the same cadaverous (falling) body (cf. Kristeva, *Powers* 3–4) – being one with it.

Both the horror of this oneness and its incestuous pleasure are emphasised in the closing image of the scene – a picture of reunion evoking the prenatal oneness of mother and son:

> He fell on his knees in front of her and she let her tousled forehead sink down till it rested against his; […]. Wolf was conscious of abandoning himself to a vast undisturbed peace without thought, aim, or desire – a peace that flowed over him from the dim reservoirs of prenatal life, lulling him, touching him, hypnotising him – obliterating everything from his consciousness except a faint delicious feeling that everything *had* been obliterated. […] his mother […] broke the spell […] finally kissing him with a hot, intense, tyrannous kiss. (*WS* 304)

The description of this scene is dominated by the images of the return to the maternal body, accompanied by the euphemistic forms of death – prenatal existence, sleep and unconsciousness. On the level of metaphors, the momentary re-establishment of mother and son's dyadic union means the annihilation of the subject's boundaries resulting from the fulfilment of desire – both as libido and death-wish (cf. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 46–76). These figures of oceanic feeling (cf. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* 9–21) most shockingly correspond to the watery and vegetable imagery of Wolf's 'mythology', thereby undermining its alleged function of defending his integrity from destruction through being "swallowed up" by insatiable maternal desire (cf. Füzesséry 52):

> Outward things [...] were to him like faintly-limned images in a mirror, the true reality of which lay all the while in his mind – in these hushed, expanding leaves – in this secret vegetation – the roots of whose being hid themselves beneath the dark waters of his consciousness. (*WS* 20–21)

No wonder, that Wolf's 'mythology' – allegedly a discourse of paternal Law, in reality a sublimating discourse of the abject working less and less efficiently as the narrative progresses – is both the cause and victim of Solent's narcissistic crisis. Consequently, a major aspect of the resolution of this crisis concerns a re-

channeling and sublimation of his unspeakable desire for the abject, the maternal body: the re-definition of his attitude to nature. The function of nature is re-established, on the one hand, as being a source of transcendental experiences[8], and on the other as the embodiment of the successful negotiation of Wolf's desire for a union with the mother and the paternal prohibition of that fulfillment. The key to this successful compromise is a modified repetition of the tropes of the forbidden union, which, at the same time, is also reminiscent of Wolf's already "dead" 'mythology' as the (paternal) discourse of his personal integrity. It occurs as a fundamental rewriting of the Golden Age associated with the narrative of his identity – and therefore as a powerful echo of "Stavrogin's Confession".

The redefinition of Wolf's attitude to nature offers itself as a solution because it is represented from the very beginning as a highly sexualized sublimation of his desire for the maternal body. In representing nature as a maternal figure and a mediator between different realities Powys obviously relies very heavily on the Romantic tradition (cf. Homans 12–41)[9] (not the least by evoking William Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode" [cf. C. Brooks 124–50]), although he is much more explicit about the sexual nature of this desire for union than the Romantics. Similarly, Wolf Solent himself seems to be highly conscious of it:

> With a desperate straining of all the energy of his spirit, he struggled to merge his identity in the subaqueous landscape. He had, at that moment, a strange feeling, as if he were seeking *to embrace in the very act of love the maternal earth herself!* (*WS* 429, emphasis added)

In general, his walks are characterised by two metaphorical actions: his prodding the earth with his stick and his penchant to leave the straight road and try to find his way by climbing through the gaps of hedges. Both can be interpreted as the

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[8] This experience is the basis for the types of "transcendental solitude" in Janina Nordius's analysis of Powys's fiction (38–43).

[9] In her analysis, Nordius also connects the exploration of the relationship between the I and the Not-I (nature) in Powys's works to the Romantic tradition. For her it is also problematic to decide whether in the moments of transcendental (epiphanic) experiences, which are also instances of the heroes' self-definition, one can speak about a union with nature or the preservation of personal integrity. She finally resolves this dilemma by the differentiation of "self-abandoned" and "self-assertive" transcendental solitude (25–43). Jeremy Robinson also points out that in Powys, similarly to Symbolist poetry, one can speak about the "integration of the I and nature". He analyses the role of nature (landscape) in Powys's Wessex novels, among them in *Wolf Solent,* in this context. He claims that Powys goes beyond the Romantic and Symbolist approaches: he is not concerned with pantheism, a discovery of God in nature, but is characterised by a sensualism which combines elements of the mystical, the elemental, the mythic and the psychological (*Sensualism* 3–5).

figurative fulfilment of the desire verbalised above[10], although – depending on the perspective – the latter can also be read as a representation of the moment of birth, the separation from the maternal body.

Nevertheless, Wolf's attitude to nature is characterised by the same ambivalences as his relationship with his mother. It is particularly obvious in those cases when Wolf, having got already lost among the hedges, strives to find (or force) his way through them (e.g. *WS* 402–3). One of these incidents occurs at the moment when his 'mythology' "dies" and he is horrified at the threat of his merging with the surrounding – abject – material world. He perceives the space around him as a closed, labyrinthine sphere and tries to escape the imprisoning terrain of abjection by finding an opening – a gap:

> There was no 'I am I' to worry about; no Wolf Solent, with a mystical philosophy, to look like a cowardly fool! [...] What was left of consciousness within him flapped like a tired bird against the whole dark rondure of the material universe. If only he could find a crack, a cranny in that thick rotundity. But the thickness was his very self! He was no longer Wolf Solent. He was just earth, water, and little, glittering specks of fire! (*WS* 561)

Wolf's irresistible desire is intermingled with the horror of self-annihilation through union, the fear of mythic – and by committing suicide, drowning himself, far too material – death. This end is made only the more disgusting by the images of fragmentation and dissolution associated with both maternal bodies.

The horror of the union with the maternal body – of both Mrs Solent and mother nature – is written over by the closing image of the novel, the vision of the Golden Age announcing Wolf's spiritual and psychological rebirth. The abject corporeal presence of nature is embodied in Wolf's experience "behind the pigsty" (*WS* 633) – an excremental vision of human nature which induces him to shortlist all his failures and fiascos over the last year, all the events that have rendered his life meaningless, his former concept of himself untenable. Similarly to the scene above, the experience is claustrophobic for him: being imprisoned in an abject natural space as an image for his spiritual and psychological dead-end, he is desperately searching for a way out. But the resolution is totally different here, since Wolf finds a gap, a way out, which results in a transcendental experience that renews his spiritual strength:

[10] Cf. Robinson's opinion, according to whom in Powys's novels "it is not the world, that is permeated by sexuality, but the characters' *relationship* with it" (*Sensualism* 12).

> As his eyes fixed themselves upon the green hedge opposite him, he became aware, through a small children-made gap, of the amazing gold of the meadow beyond. Why, the field was full to the very brim of golden buttercups! It was literally a floating sea of liquid, shining gold! [...] Nothing at that moment short of physical force could have prevented him from climbing through the gap and entering that field. [...] Once in the field, it was just as if he were wading through golden waves. [...] He couldn't resist the distraction of fumbling about at random with his stick among the buttercup-stalks. [...] He began walking to and fro now, with a firmer step, across that field. [...] Buttercup-petals clung to his legs, clung to the sides of his stick; buttercup-dust covered his boots. The plenitude of gold [...] surrounded him... (*WS* 629–30)

The scene serves as a counterpoint to Wolf's excremental, abject vision of nature, humanity, the maternal body and himself. It makes it possible for him to handle the two experiences as non-exclusive oppositions – in fact, as phenomena which depend on each other for their full significance and therefore should be interpreted together. As he has insisted earlier, "Moments as perfect as this *required* death as their inevitable counterpoise" (*WS* 456). This insight brings along with it the promise of a more carnivalesque vision which is able to look at the material aspects of life – even death and dissolution – with playful irony, recognising the sublime and the grotesque as the two sides of the same coin. Since the imagery of the scene is also reminiscent of the tropes dominating both the paternal and the maternal versions of Wolf's narrative identity, it brings them to a hypothetically successful compromise.

And not only that: the novel establishes a dialogue with Dostoevsky's *Devils* at its very commencement by evoking Stavrogin's vision through the sight of the rays of "the horizontal sun pouring through the coloured windows" (*WS* 32) of the Abbey in Ramsgard (cf. Dostoevsky, *Stavrogin's Confession* 65; Lukacher 21). This dialogue, continued through the consistent evocation of the myth of the Golden Age, also culminates in a carnivalesque resolution here. While Stavrogin's narrative, similarly to Ivan's story, is fraught with ambiguities and is therefore (self-)destructive, Powys accepts these ambiguities as an inevitable concomitant of narcissistic, solipsistic subjectivity and tries to make the best of them by returning to the carnivalesque Rabelaisan tradition, on the one hand, and to the Romantic vision of nature, on the other. Part and parcel of this attempt is the turning away from the confessional mode, which is indicated here by the acting out, the "realisation" of the vision structuring Stavrogin's confessional narrative instead of rewriting it as a dialogue.

The intertextual relationship between *The Brothers Karamazov, Devils* and *Wolf Solent* most probably demands further research. In the present article I have tried to discover only one aspect of this relationship: the way both Dostoevsky and Powys disclose the intertextual nature of narrative identity in the context of the confessional mode. One major conclusion is that their reactions to a lack of originality, or a failure of identity, and the sense of belatedness that it implies, seem to be radically different. Whereas, according to Michael André Bernstein, the typical Dostoevskian hero is outraged at his own belatedness, his lack of originality and his inability to break out from the already existing literary scenarios and motifs (17–22), with some necessary simplification one can claim that Powys actually advocates the reading and narrative practices that cause the Dostoevskian hero's often catastrophic predicament. This difference in the two writers' attitudes is clearly palpable, in my opinion, in Wolf Solent's identification with Ivan Karamazov in a crucial moment of self-definition: it is an exemplary case of creating his narrative identity via the appropriation of the story/stories of his fictional doubles. The same phenomenon appears on a larger scale in his writing of *The History of Dorset* – that is, in the formulation of his narrative identity as a compilation or metatext. A further difference between the two authors can be found in the structure of their texts. Among others, both Bernstein (93) and Peter Brooks (*Troubling* 46–60) point out how the (often abject) confession is a dominant element in Dostoevskian writing. In *Wolf Solent*, however, the opposite seems to be true: Powys's representation of the confessional discourse reveals his distrust of oral communication as a means of achieving authentic subjecthood. A prominent example for this distrust – for me – seems to be Wolf Solent's inability to reveal his 'mythology' to Christie Malakite and the concomitant shift of emphasis on the written confessional discourse. Powys's acceptance of solipsistic, narcissistic subjectivity seems to entail this – just like the alternative solution of revisiting the Dostoevskian version of the Golden Age and representing unshared transcendental experience, a solitary vision in and through nature that allows for the coexistence of multiple versions of reality as a key to personal integrity in a (post)modern world.

THE HISTORY OF DORSET: WRITING AS READING IN JOHN COWPER POWYS'S *WOLF SOLENT*[1]

For a reader interested in comparative literary studies John Cowper Powys's *Wolf Solent* seems to be a goldmine: Powys sends his readers rambling in libraries to detect the source of his numerous more or less explicit allusions. However, the anxious reader might realise quite soon that s/he has undertaken a hopeless mission: similarly to the Joycean texts, s/he would have to be well-versed in the whole of the Western European literary tradition – let alone knowing the history of fine arts and Eastern philosophies – only to end up with a pile of controversial, often mutually exclusive references. Instead of contributing to anything even faintly resembling a coherent interpretation, they rather make the reader "lost in the funhouse" of intertextuality, hunting for possibly unnoticed references in a futile and almost paranoid manner. This is what has led me to posing the question in a different manner: instead of finding and interpreting the possibly relevant aspects of the individual intertextual references I would like to examine how they function in the text in general. This issue is closely intertwined with some aspects of narration, such as perspective and tone, and with the "only" written text the main character, Wolf Solent, produces in the novel: his book, *The History of Dorset*. In my opinion, the compilation of this *History*, which represents writing as basically reading and interpretation, mirrors the generation of texts in the narrative consciousness and for this reason sets a possible interpretative framework for the richly intertextual texture of the whole novel. This, in turn, is reminiscent of the metafictional segment and its functioning in Dostoevsky's *Devils* which proposes an alternative, unofficial and in many ways carnivalesque discourse for the writing of history.

Let us see first why narration is problematic in *Wolf Solent*. Though third-person narration is used in the novel, the story is told exclusively from one point of view, that of the main character. Ideally, it should provide a unified perspective, but this is far from the truth. As Janina Nordius points out in her study of Powys's major fiction:

> A general poststructuralist awareness may also be useful in dealing with Powys's portrayal of the divided selves […] in examining the

[1] First published as "*The History of Dorset* – Writing as Reading in John Cowper Powys's *Wolf Solent*," *Romanian Journal of English Studies* 1 (2004), 304–13. Special thanks to Don Wilcox for his careful linguistic editing.

> division in the narrative consciousness itself which is apparent in for instance *Wolf Solent*. (6)[2]

Nordius's insight directs the reader's attention to the main character's identity itself, which, of course, is generated by the text. As Jacques Lacan points out, the subject is constructed by the entry into the Symbolic, that is, in Language:

> What we teach the subject to recognise as his unconscious is his history – that is to say, we help him to perfect the contemporary historisation of the facts which have already determined a certain number of historical "turning points" in his existence. (Lacan, *The Language of the Self* 23)

However, Wolf Solent's silence, his inability to tell "a significant version of his life story" (P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* 54) and thus to establish his identity becomes apparent in the first sections of the novel. The last twenty-five years of his life have been monotonous and uneventful; "he has lived peacefully under the despotic affection of his mother, with whom, when he was only a child of ten, he had left Dorsetshire, and along with Dorsetshire, all the agitating memories of his dead father" (Powys, *Wolf Solent* 14)[3]. He also seems to protect himself from his own hidden self, repressing traumatic experiences below the surface of his consciousness as uninterpreted metaphors. No wonder he has no history of his own to tell; as he himself points out, though he has worked for ten years as a history teacher, he has "never made any historical researches in [his] life. [He's] only compiled wretched summaries from books that every one can get" (*WS* 36).

By the end of the novel, however, he is forced to enter the Symbolic, to put together at least one story of his life: to write a book, *The History of Dorset*, which becomes his own story for several reasons. On the one hand, at the very beginning of the novel a metonymical relationship is established between Dorset and his dead father. Simultaneously with writing the *History*, Wolf, like a detective, tries to find out the hidden and "forgotten" story of his father "through actively repeating and reworking [the] story in and by discourse" (P. Brooks, *Reading* 25). His return to Dorset becomes a journey back in time, a tedious procedure of remembering and rediscovering his own origins. In Lacanian terms,

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[2] Charles Lock compares the narrative method of *Wolf Solent* to the Jamesian point-of-view technique ("*Wolf* Solent: Myth and Narrative" 120). The similarities are quite obvious, but taking into consideration Janina Nordius's suggestion might reveal why Powys's narrative seems to be more ambiguous and intriguing than James's stories narrated through one central vessel of consciousness.

[3] In the rest of the paper references to *Wolf Solent* will be indicated by *WS* and the page numbers in parenthetical notes.

the aim of his return seems to be a quest for the metaphor of the Name of the Father, to serve as the place where he could fly from his mother (cf. Füzesséry 51). As Wolf claims: "He had come to Dorset … he knew it well enough now … to escape from her, to mix with the spirit of his father in his own land" (*WS* 543). However, the quest leads to a paradox. According to Lacan, "It is in the name of the father that we must recognise the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (*The Language* 41). Nevertheless, the story of the father, inseparably intertwined with Wolf's double, Redfern's, once deciphered, turns out to be nothing else but breaking the law: its reading involves adultery, homosexual desires, suicidal urges and via the connection with an important minor character, Mr Malakite, incest – the most fundamental transgression the Name of the Father as law is supposed to protect from, probably the transgression Wolf is actually trying to escape.

On the other hand, partly in the course of working through his father's and double's story by repetition, Wolf is forced to come out of his Lady of Shallot-like ivory tower and act. He becomes Mr Urquhart's secretary and finishes his book, which Redfern, his dead predecessor, failed to do. He tries to take care of his mother, his newly discovered step-sister and the eccentric poet Jason Otter by actively intervening in their lives for the first time. He marries a woman to whom he is primarily attracted sexually, and (almost) commits adultery with a woman who is not exactly feminine but very intellectual. Under the burden of all this pressure he finally contemplates committing suicide. Since Mr Urquhart plans the *History* to be a "Diary of the Dead" (*WS* 62) from a "perspective on human occurrences that the bedposts in brothels must come to possess – and the counters of bar-rooms – and the butlers' pantries in old houses – and the muddy ditches in long-frequented lovers' lanes" (*WS* 45–46), Wolf's comment in the middle of the novel seems to be totally justified: "We might all be in Mr Urquhart's book!" (*WS* 282) Both Wolf and his father would be "eligible" for featuring in *The History of Dorset*, because, as Peter Brooks claims, it is only through their "deviance and transgression" that their stories become "narratable" (*Reading* 86). Thus *The History of Dorset* becomes Wolf's story in more than one sense: it is an image of his father's story – and thus the story of his origin – and his own story, and since he compiles it, it becomes a model for how he generates texts and how he attempts to establish his identity.

The creation of a carnivalesque history within the framework of the novel as a model for the generation of texts born from unavowable desires and formulated as a compilation – obviously also serving as a metafictional exploration of the entire novel's mechanisms – clearly parallels the functioning of Liza's "literary scheme" in Dostoevsky's *Devils*[4]. The literary ambitions Liza

[4] Lock sees a similar connection between *The History of Dorset* and *Wolf Solent* ("*Wolf Solent*" 124).

wants to realise with Shatov's help gain special significance because they actually outline the chronicler's ars poetica: as the consistent use of the genre of the chronicle shows, both Liza and the narrator of *Devils* aim to rewrite the (already discredited?) Grand Narrative of History (Cobley 187–9, 232) through their alternative historiography. The documentary nature of Liza's project is rooted in the proposed technique: her annuals would be compiled from newspaper articles, i.e. they would be written in a manner which, similarly to the incorporation of generically fundamentally different texts in Menippean satire (cf. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 13), which would result in heterogeneous, "polyphonic" texts. The avoidance of any "political tendency" and insistence on complete "impartiality" (Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*)[5] would vouchsafe for the equality of the individual "parts" or voices, though, as Shatov quite rightly points out, selection in itself is almost impossible without the suggestion of some tendency (Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*).

The aim of both Liza's proposed historiography and that of *Devils* is characterisation, the establishment of identity: those of Russia and Stavrogin, which turn out to be the same. All along, the aims of the "literary scheme" are set in the terms characterisation[6]: it would "*reflect* the characteristics of Russian life", narrate "events [...] characteristic of the moral life of the people, of *the personal character* of the Russian people", and it would be "a *presentation* of the spiritual, moral, inner life of Russia for a whole year" (Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*, emphasis added). This picture of Russia is actually embodied in the narrative of *Devils* as the picture of a typical – and therefore nameless – Russian small town, more particularly as Stavrogin's personal portrait. Since the thematic scope of the novel practically corresponds to the one that Liza outlines – it includes "strange incidents, fires, public subscriptions, anything good or bad, every speech or word, perhaps even floodings of the rivers" (Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*) – *Devils* functions like a realisation of her plans.

In contrast with official – scientific and objective – historiography the impelling power of story-telling for both Liza and the chronicler seems to be

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[5] Here and in the rest of the paper quotations from Dostoevsky's novel will be based Constance Garnett's translation of *Devils,* first published in 1914 with the better-known, but slightly misleading English title *The Possessed*. This translation is now available as a searchable e-text; therefore, the references to this source as (Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*) will not contain page numbers. This version, however, did not include "Stavrogin's Confession", which was first published in English in 1922 as a separate volume. For this reason quotes from that section will be indicated as (Dostoevsky, *Stavrogin's Confession*), with the relevant page numbers. The reason for using these translations is purely philological: Powys was obviously familiar with these versions of the text, and he also mentions the novel as *The Possessed.* I myself will refer to Dostoevsky's novel by the more appropriate title *Devils*, which was used in Katz's 1958 translation (cf. Dostoevsky, *Devils*).

[6] Constance Garnett's translation is somewhat misleading here: the Russian text is built on the metaphors of portrayal, image-drawing. Cf. (Достоевский, *Бесы* 82).

desire itself. Liza's "literary scheme" may be only an excuse to approach Marya Timofeevna through Shatov. This, in turn, is obviously motivated by her desire to discover Stavrogin's mysterious past, to test the "feasibility" of her own wish-fulfilment fantasies centred on him, and ultimately to put together the image of a coherent identity – both for him and herself. Similar motives might be hidden behind the chronicler's enterprise, who tries to decipher and arrange into a meaningful story the mysterious events of the recent past to "work through" the unspeakable experience of the beloved woman's death – and maybe even more significantly, to come to terms with the figure of his "victorious" rival after a major blow to his narcissism. The narrative of History is rewritten in *Devils* both as a compilation of journalistic pieces composed by a chronicler always lagging behind the events[7], and as a fundamentally narcissistic project, a personal history focused on the "historisation" of the unconscious (Lacan, *The Language* 23) and desire.

As for *The History of Dorset* as a similar model for the generation of texts, there are three important aspects of Wolf's writing procedure that seem to be highly relevant here. First of all, *The History of Dorset* is a compilation. Mr Urquhart describes it in the following way:

> 'Our History will be an entirely new genre, [...] What I want to do is to isolate the particular portion of the earth's surface called "Dorset"; as if it were possible to decipher there a palimpsest of successive strata, one inscribed below another, of human impression'. (*WS* 45)

According to this, on the one hand the text will be put together out of the fragments of already existing texts, layered on each other, like in the case of a palimpsest. Thus it implies first of all the deciphering – the reading and interpreting – of probably blurred and partly damaged inscriptions covering (and thus modifying) each other. The impossibility of a "perfect" and "total" reading is emphasised by the tentative "as if". On the other hand, the phrase "human impression" also implies utter subjectivity – as if it were the human (un)conscious that was to be read. Thus the writing procedure is based on a complicated reading procedure similar to that of psychoanalysis, while its aim is to "isolate" Dorset like a human individual by establishing its identity through its history. *The History of Dorset* has nothing to do with "objective" or scientific truth. It gives necessarily controversial and partial impressions of "the ebb and flow of events" (*WS* 45), which may discredit and undermine each other, and since the deepest stratum is unreachable, it, "like analyses, may in essence be interminable" (P. Brooks, *Reading* 212).

[7] The parallel between the chronicler and a journalist is most convincingly established in (Карякин 243–319).

Secondly, a compilation implies the selection of relevant material – a choice of similar elements from the greater paradigm of events that have taken place in Dorset. Since this selection is based on similarity, it can be associated with the metaphoric pole of language, to use Roman Jakobson's term, and is one of "the aspects [in which] an individual exhibits his personal style" (1114). In the case of *The History of Dorset*, however, it is not Wolf who carries out the task of selection, but Mr Urquhart. On the one hand, he decides on the nature of the material to be included and he defines it in terms of a certain perspective that Wolf identifies as "Rabelaisian" (*WS* 46). It is characterised by a Protean nature, involving carnivalesque laughter, following the logic of inversion and giving a "bottom-view", which is fundamentally opposed to the serious and officially accepted (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 129–30; *Rabelais and His World* 10). It gives an outlet to such desires that must be repressed according to the norms of civilisation. On the other hand, Mr Urquhart actually prepares notes for Wolf about the material that should be included. As a result, Wolf has to acquire a perspective that is not his own, has to deal with metaphors that he has intentionally excluded from his life, just like the Name of the Father, but metaphors, which forcefully return like the repressed. He has to face the inevitable presence of already written texts which are parts of his own text that is just being written, independently from his will or acceptance.

The third important aspect of the writing procedure is closely connected to this method of selection: since "the spiteful commentaries and floating fragments of wicked gossip gathered together by his employer" (*WS* 329) are given in note form, Wolf Solent has to provide the missing links in the text. There is only one concrete example in the novel to show the steps of this transformation. The original notes are the following:

> Cerne Giant – real virginity unknown in Dorset – 'cold maids'; a contradiction – Sir Walter's disgust – His erudition – His platonic tastes – How he was misunderstood by a lewd person – . (*WS* 330)

Wolf's task is to restore the logic and continuity of the text by adding mostly syntactic elements, in Jakobson's terms (1114) to combine the already given elements with the help of supplying the missing metonymical links. His writing procedure seems to demonstrate what Peter Brooks identifies as the main point in any story-telling: he "order[s] the inexplicable and impossible situation as narrative […] by taking the apparently meaningless metaphor […] and unpacking it as metonymy […] so that we accept the necessity of what cannot logically be understood" (*Reading* 10–24). However, Wolf himself realises that he is not totally free in doing so: even these broken fragments imply a certain tone, reveal the basically rhetorical nature of all writing. As he exclaims, "'Good Lord! […] I must be careful what I'm doing just here. The old demon has

changed his tune. This isn't garrulous history. This is *special pleading*" (*WS* 330, emphasis added). And the events that follow seem to justify him: Mr Urquhart feels haunted by Redfern, the previous secretary's ghost and cannot find peace till he unearths and reburies his body to check whether he really lies in his grave. Though Redfern, an extremely handsome man, died of pneumonia, Mr Urquhart has pangs of conscience because of his death: he was homosexually attracted to the young man, who fled his service and house in an apparently suicidal mood shortly before his death. His enigmatic story has to be put together by Wolf Solent, till it finally reveals the rhetorical purpose of the *History*: it is the narcissistic exposure of Mr Urquhart's shame and his pleading for forgiveness (cf. de Man, *Allegories of Reading* 283–5). Thus Wolf Solent becomes both confessor and analyst to Mr Urquhart through writing his story, while he cannot escape the need of identification with the narrative and thus with the analysand at the same time, since he has to enter the story to be able to unify it by creating its style. As he says:

> This style had been his own contribution to the book; and though it had been evoked under external pressure, and in a sense had been a *tour de force*, it was in its essence the expression of Wolf's own soul – the only purely aesthetic expression that Destiny had ever permitted to his deeper nature. (*WS* 330)

Thus *The History of Dorset* as a model for generating the text of the novel, shows the birth of narrative consciousness through writing, which is fundamentally the infinite reading and interpretation of already given texts. In the case of the *History*, the Rabelaisian perspective which Wolf Solent has to adopt and which determines the principle of selection, is not Wolf's own. It is set by a different consciousness and indirectly – as the term implies – by a literary work of art, François Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Thus the writing of the *History* becomes the reading of already existing texts in the interpretive context of a literary text. This fact leads back to the issue of narration, perspective, the narrator as a subject, and their possible relationship with the phenomenon of intertextuality.

What are the implications of such a writing procedure concerning the generation of the text of the whole novel? Wolf Solent "compiles" the story of his life in a very similar manner, by "framing" (*WS* 91) every event in the context of already written texts, reading his own self through already existing stories – the stories of fictional characters and characters in the novel whom he recognises as his own doubles. The interconnection between textuality, frames/mirrors and doubles (the Doppelgänger) has been pointed out and

interpreted by both cultural semiotics and psychoanalysis[8]. Thus it can be claimed that both the intertextual references and Wolf Solent's doubles function as mirror images in the Lacanian concept: he enters Landguage, the Symbolic through identification with them.

However, just like there are many strata in the "palimpsest" from which he compiles *The History of Dorset*, there is a chaotic abundance of fictional characters and doubles he identifies with. The novel is full his misreadings, his "visions and revisions", dramatic reinterpretations of events, characters and his own identity, in the course of which Wolf usually manages to distance himself from them spatially and temporally, which is shown in a shift from pathetic and tragic to ironic. But the interpretative framework is always supplied by intertextuality. Wolf's own "Protean" self undergoes an infinite series of transformations: his explicit metamorphoses include Greek mythological characters, such as Deucalion and Orion, the Biblical figures of both the snake and Christ, a Greek tragic or comic hero in general, Dante descending into Inferno, both the ghost and Hamlet from Shakespeare's play to be followed by a "comic King Lear", let alone Tristam Shandy, Ivan Karamazov, the writer Swift himself – alternatively Gulliver as a Yahoo. Equally important is his implicit evocation of the mythological Narcissus, most conspicuous in the centrality of the mirror and watery reflection among the metaphors of his 'mythology' and in the bleak scene of his suicidal longing to drown himself in Lenty Pond (cf. *WS* 561). He is surrounded by an abundance of ([inter]textual and personal) mirrors in the novel – some of them, like *The History of Dorset*, obviously showing an inverted image –, which create a sense of infinity in space by their mutual reflection. Wolf himself expresses this notion in the following way:

> There is nothing but a mirror opposite a mirror, and a round crystal opposite a round crystal, and a sky in water opposite water in a sky. (*WS* 325)

The endless interplay of reflections – intertexts, images in mirrors and doubles – form in the novel what Nordius calls "a pluralistic 'multiverse,' with as many centres as there are individual consciousnesses, and where each consciousness [...] creates its own particular and individual reality" (31). In this case, however, the individual consciousness which should form the centre of at least its own

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[8] On the one hand, Yury Lotman points out how the text-within-the-text in literature, the mirror in fine arts and architecture and the appearance of doubles in fiction have a very similar function and effect: by adding an inverted perspective and reflection they undermine the distinction between "reality" and "fiction" in an extremely playful manner (Лотман 112–117). On the other hand, Jacque Lacan in his concept of the "mirror stage" ascribes outstanding importance to identification with the image and connects it with entering the Symbolic, that is, Language in the development of the individual (Lacan, „The Mirror Stage" passim; Wilden 167–8; Sarup 62–6).

"reality", seems to be structured like this "pluralistic 'multiverse'", it is divided in itself because it is surrounded by a multitude of mirrors. Wolf Solent's perspective and consciousness could be most easily represented by a cracked mirror moving around and facing several mirrors simultaneously which also reflect each other.

His existence as a subject seems to be constantly endangered, which is reflected by Wolf's classic Gothic fear of losing his identity (cf. Botting 111) and maybe losing his mind – it is not by chance that most of his literary alter egos share the feature of (feigned or real) mental disturbances. An excellent example for the clash of two mutually exclusive experiences and how he "finally" comes to terms with them is given on the very last pages of the novel: going home at sunset, he first sees a field which becomes a "floating sea of liquid, shining gold" (*WS* 629) and then passes "behind the pigsty" (*WS* 633). He would like to believe that the first one, this visionary "epiphanic moment" of "self-abandoned transcendental solitude", to use Nordius's terms (41), is really his "ultimate vision" (*WS* 630), the image that closes the tedious procedure of (mis)reading and rereading with a final word. However, the Rabelaisian inverted perspective provided by the angle of vision from behind the pigsty makes him realise that he has to resign himself to the basically paradoxical nature of his own consciousness and the "multiverse" he lives in. The image of the identity that might be able to cope with this situation is supplied in the text by the metaphor of the river:

> …how different a thing the personality of a river is from the personality of a sea. […] the water of a river is at every succeeding moment a completely different body. […] Wolf tried to visualise the whole course of the Lunt, so as to win for it some sort of coherent personality. By thinking of all its waters together, […] this unity could by achieved; for between the actual water before him now, […] and the water of that tiny streamlet among the mid-Dorset hills from which it sprang, there was no spatial gap. The one flowed continuously into the other. They were as completely united as the head and tail of a snake! (*WS* 109)

Personality and river. One of the possible meanings of Wolf Solent's name actually connects him to this very important image: The Solent, usually referred to as a river, is a channel between the Isle of Wight and the mainland. The metaphor seems to suggest an identity constantly in flight, on the flow, which is made possible by the nature of the linguistic sign itself and of the Symbolic order in which the subject is located (Lacan, "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious" passim). It does not exclude other possible readings of the name "Solent" but rather includes them, suggesting that there might be an infinite

number of metaphors hidden behind it. Applied to the interpretation of the novel it denies the possibility of a definitive closure – however much desirable it seems (cf. Gould 44–5) –, since the river does not actually "end", it simply flows into the sea. This reading of Solent's name points toward a much more playful – and probably ironical – approach to the novel, suggesting not only the acceptance of the infinite play of signifiers as inevitable, but even faintly reminding the reader that it is actually enjoyable. Wolf realises it for the first time while he is writing *The History of Dorset*: 'I must play with it, just as [Mr Urquhart is] playing with it' (*WS* 62).

This outcome reflects an approach to the intertextual nature of narrative identity which is in sharp contrast with that of *Devils* – the text on which Wolf's carnivalesque history is partly modelled. According to Michael André Bernstein, the typical Dostoevskian hero is outraged at his own belatedness, his lack of originality and his inability to break out from the already existing literary scenarios and motifs (17–22). This plight has a major role in Stavrogin's collapse: his whole life, and consequently its narrative(s) turn out to be an infinite sequence of literary allusions, similarly to the compilation implied in Liza's "literary scheme" and its realisation, the text of *Devils.* Therefore, lacking any sense of authenticity, Stavrogin puts a forceful stop to his interminable narrative by committing suicide. With some necessary simplification one can claim that Powys actually advocates the narrative practices which cause the Dostoevskian hero's catastrophic predicament, as is most conspicuous in Wolf Solent's writing of *The History of Dorset* – that is, in the formulation of his narrative identity as an interminable compilation or metatext.

At the beginning of my paper I claimed that the compilation of *The History of Dorset* mirrors the generation of texts in the narrative consciousness and for this reason sets a possible interpretative framework for the richly intertextual texture of the whole novel. If it really does so, it is by representing the writing procedure as basically an infinite succession of misreadings and an inevitably endless attempt of self-assertion in the course of which the already written text functions as a mirror image. But *The History of Dorset* is only one of them – a most conspicuous one, though, and thus an apparently easy target for analysis. The situation becomes much more complicated when the reader has to realise that this is only one of the mirrors in the text, an intricate texture of intertextual references and a number of doubles functioning in a similar way, and their mutual reflections actually make the analyst run almost the same circles. The time structure of the novel is completely cyclical, suggesting a possibility for infinite (compulsive) repetition (cf. P. Brooks, *Reading* 113–42). The last page of the novel – what with elevated epiphanic moments of transcendental visions – leaves Wolf Solent standing at the gate of his house and with a sentence simply implying that the story must go on: "Well, I shall have a cup of tea" (*WS* 634).

‘PURE ROMANCE’: NARCISSUS IN THE TOWN OF MIRRORS[1]

> “I am an incorrigible bookworm with a desperate mania for trying to write the sort of long romances I have always loved so intensely to read.” (Powys, “Preface to the New Edition” xv)

A Glastonbury Romance, John Cowper Powys’s only consistent rewriting of *Devils* (cf. Lock, “Polyphonic Powys” passim) as a major comment on narcissistic subjectivity, quite fittingly starts with the meeting and happy union of Narcissus and his one and only love: himself, his own mirror image (cf. Ovid III 339–508). That is, John Crow, who temporarily appears to be the main character of the novel, is happily reunited with his androgynous cousin, Mary Crow, and they decide to become a couple (cf. Kochhar-Lindgren 2–44; Lacan, “The Mirror Stage” passim; Boothby 21–46)[2]. Their belonging together is expressed by one of the most beautifully drawn scenes of the novel, when they take a boat down the River Wissey[3]. John Crow names this surrogate or oblique

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[1] Special thanks to Professor Charles Lock for his editing the first two sections of this article, which are to be published with the same title, but a slightly different text in the 2012 volume of *The Powys Journal.*

[2] On Powys’s own opinion about the narcissistic nature of all subjectivity see (*Psychonalysis and Morality* 33–4), especially: “The inherent Narcissism of our identity-lust can easily be tested in a thousand interesting and curious ways”.

[3] Cf. the description of the scene:

> The prolonged struggle of these two with the boat and with the water became in a very intimate sense *their marriage day upon earth*. By his salt-tasting sweat and b her wrought-up passion of guiding, these two ‘run-down adventurers’ plighted their troth for the rest of their days. They plighted it in defiance of the whole universe and of whatever was beyond the universe; and they were aware of no idealization of each other. They clung to each other with a grim, vicious, indignant resolve to enjoy a sensuality of oneness; a sensuality of unity snatched out of the drifting flood of space and time. It was not directed to anything beyond itself, this desire of theirs. It was innocent of any idea of offspring. It was an absolute, *fortified and consecrated* by the furious effort they were making, *by the diamond-bright sparkles upon the broken water, by the sullen clicking of the rowlocks.* (Powys, *A Glastonbury Romance* 80–1, emphasis added)

In the rest of my paper I will use only the abbreviation *GR* for *A Glastonbury Romance* in parenthetical references.

homosexual relationship, which is also incestuous[4], a "pure Romance" (*GR* 39)[5]. It is tempting to see this union of the almost same, this short-circuiting of desire that makes narrative *impossible*[6] as *the* romance to which the novel's title alludes. Since this most narcissistic of desires is consummated on the opening pages, the story might as well end here. But it does not: it flows on for over a thousand more pages, and it takes a proper flood to stop it – but not to bring it to an end. The critical question for me is what, once desire has been satisfied, keeps the story going.

It might be useful in this context to recall Powys's own often-quoted words in his preface to the 1955 edition of the *Romance*: the novel's "heroine is the Grail. Its hero is the Life poured into the Grail. Its message is that no one Receptacle of Life and no one Fountain of Life poured into that Receptacle can contain or explain what the world offers us" ("Preface to the New Edition" xiii). The last sentence of this passage, as Charles Lock has aptly pointed out, warns

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[4] The Crows' penchant for incest is later on marked out by the narrator in the particular context of *looking for the same in the different* and stopping time by *keeping things the same* – maybe also with a faint echo of *doubling* as a protection of the ego against death à la Sigmund Freud (*The Uncanny* 233–4):

> There is doubtless in certain old, indurated families a deep ineradicable strain of what might be called centripetal eroticism. A tendency to inbreeding is not always a sign of degeneracy in a race. It is often an instinct of ethos-preservation, suspicious of the menace of mixed bloods. Doubtless something of the inordinate individuality of the Crows was due to a constant inter-marriage between cousins among them, doubling and redoubling the peculiarities of their 'Gens'. (*GR* 671)

As this passage suggests, neither incest, nor homosexuality are prerogatives of John Crow alone: Philip Crow's "only passionate love-affair before he met his cousin again, after a long separation, had been with a boy at school, whose figure, girlish for that of a youth, was almost identical with Percy's" (*GR* 671).

[5] In the description of their first love scene John experiences Mary as a mirror image of himself, including even reversal as a peculiarity of looking-glass reflections:

> *She was feeling exactly as he was feeling – only, as was right and proper, the reverse way*. Oh, what magical expressions for the only things in love that really counted, were those old ballad phrases. Mary was not pretty. She was not beautiful. She had what the old ballads had. Yes, that was the thing. The best love was not lust; nor was it passion. Still less was it any *ideal*. *It was pure Romance! But pure Romance was harsh and grim and stoical and a man must be grim to embrace it. Yes, it went well with cold March wind and cold rain and long chilly grass*. (*GR* 39, emphasis added, except for *ideal*).

Notice the overall echo of the Keatsian "cold pastoral" in the standstill of love-making in nature, perceived through the *mirror* of the literary text implicated by "old ballad phrases".

[6] Cf. „Now that I've found Mary, *let me want nothing else*!" (*GR* 73, emphasis added) On desire as the "engine" of story-telling cf. (P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* 37-61); on incest as a form of "short-circuiting desire" cf. (P. Brooks, *Reading* 103-9).

against what in Bakhtinian terms would be called "monologic" readings of the text ("«'Multiverse'... language which makes language impossible»" 64; cf. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 9–11). Powys insists later in the same preface (though these words are seldom quoted) that the Grail's "essential nature [...] is only the nature of a *symbol*. It refers us to things beyond itself and to *things beyond words*" (xv, emphasis added). Though New Criticism long ago warned us against "intentional fallacy", I think we should take seriously Powys's emphasis on the nature of the major organising element of the text as both *figurative* and *extralinguistic*. This is no less important than the equally authorial claim on the impossibility of forming any absolute vision of a single truth. The authorially-voiced words in the "Preface" seem to be in accordance with the self-reflexive narratorial comments within the novel itself. Thus, at one point readers are informed that "The psychic history of a place like Glastonbury is not an easy thing to write down *in set terms*, for not only does chance play an enormous part in it, but there are many forces at work for which *human language has at present no fit terms*" (*GR* 747, emphasis added). The word *term* in the narrower sense implies the exact language of natural sciences, but in a wider sense it is a synonym for *word* in general. Thus, the last clause puts the whole issue of representation hopelessly beyond the limits of language as such. Or, as Lock argues, it leaves the narrator with the task of doing the impossible, and venturing an imaginative and figurative representation with *whatever terms* are available ("«'Multiverse'»" 69). In other words, *terms* can be made *fit* for representation only if they are taken out of their normal *setting*, if they are *upset* and become, in turn, *unsettling*.

It is in this light that I will try to reinterpret those readings of the *Romance* which assign the role of its motive force to the "Saturnian quest"[7]. Indeed, on the shore – or solid-*looking* island – of the novel's textual stream one can see a revivalist-communist utopia emerging in Glastonbury, and then– after a short flourish – meeting its untimely end by the flood. Since the commune is headed by mystic John Geard as the newly elected mayor of the town, it is easy to read this narrative as the return of Cronos/Gwyn-up-Nudd/King Arthur/Merlin, as a transposition of the Isles of the Blessed into Wessex; in short, as the realised mytheme of the Golden Age. There are plenty of readings of the novel of this kind[8]. What I would like to call attention to is that the rise and fall of the

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[7] For the description of the Golden Age during the reign of Cronos (Saturn) cf. (Hesiod, *Works and Days* 109–20 and 156–68). As is well known, Hesiod identifies the Golden Age both with a distant period in the past and with an eternal present, in which heroes live on the Isles of the Blessed under the rule of Cronos at the edge of the known world. These are also seen as part of the underworld.

[8] In fact, the *Romance* seems to be a case study of the two alternative reading strategies dividing major Powysians. On the one hand, it has been interpreted – approvingly by Morine Krissdottir (*John Cowper Powys the Magical Quest* 80–99*; Descents of Memory* 251–62), with more

commune occurs on the periphery, as if it was not totally but *almost* irrelevant: it is a pluralist utopia which hardly scratches the surface of the characters' self-absorbed subjectivity. It is that subjectivity which nonetheless remains the major concern throughout the novel. The Saturnian *quest* is a narratological necessity, just as the myth of the Golden Age is a *necessary illusion*: the latter is the object-cause of desire which makes narrative possible. The goal of the quest *must remain unreachable*: no story starts with "and they lived happily ever after". In the light of the narcissistic overture of the *Romance* this perpetual deferral and frustration is doubly necessary: once Narcissus enters the scene, passivity, stasis and death also make their appearance. And this means that the narrative has to work out an apparently impossible compromise between *movement* and *stasis* to be able to proceed.

It is this challenge that determines the direction of the flow of desire in *A Glastonbury Romance*: seemingly progressing in a straightforward manner, it actually starts to *wander*, as if on purpose, lest it reach its goal and meet its object, thus ending the story. What happens to the Grail as object-cause of desire when it enters this narcissistic field of power? It has to be *displaced*, since the quest for the Grail turns into Narcissus's desire for the impossible union with his own image in the water (cf. Wilden 166). The main attraction of this image is its totality and perfection: these are qualities that the Grail, as the central symbol of a version of the universal myth of the Golden Age, certainly embodies[9]. Thus it can

scepticism by Carole Coates (90–118) – as a text imbued with mysticism, one of the numerous but none the less suspicious Modernist answers to ontological and metaphysical queries tainted by the occult. In short, both Geard and Sam Dekker have been interpreted as Powys's mouthpieces. In my view, this approach equals classifying the text as an esoteric Modernist version of the Grail myth, which is of moderate interest today. One is tempted to feel that Harold H. Watts's comment on Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* is fully applicable to the novel: "It is not the particular message, not [the] particular gospel in this novel, that would lead many modern readers to be sceptical of its claim on our attention. [...] What is objectionable [...], what precludes full modernity for [the novel], is the fact that confident admonition is indeed offered" (415). The dead-end of the critical approach above is clearly illustrated by Krissdottir's denunciation of Powys as a creator of mazes (*Descents* 17–8, 38–9, 423–7), because he fails to offer unambiguous – shall I say prophetic? – enough solutions to the problems he raises.
On the other hand, Powys's texts engender much more fascinating interpretations once they are brought into dialogue with more current critical discourses. This is most obvious in the other major trend of the *Romance*'s readings, which involves for example Harald Fawkner's phenomenological interpretations and Lock's Bakhtinian reading of the novel ("Polyphonic Powys" passim). Not to mention Ned Lukacher's somewhat accidental deconstruction of the mytheme of the Golden Age in the *Romance* (passim) – and thus of the master trope of Powys criticism ever since the 1964 publication of Wilson Knight's seminal *The Saturnian Quest* (cf. especially 19–21, 38–41). To this only Joe Boulter's highlighting of postmodernist concerns in Powys's writing (passim) needs to be added to convince readers that the *Romance* might have something to say in a post-Derridean world.

[9] On mythic syncretism that handles the Grail myth as a version of the mytheme of the Golden Age in the Romance cf. (Lukacher 18).

easily take the place of Narcissus's own reflection as the desired object which promises the establishment of subjectivity and integrity through union with it.

Looking at the Grail in this light leads to several conclusions. 1) Since the Grail appears as the looking-glass image of Narcissus, there can be as many personal Grails as there are figures of Narcissus gazing into the mirror. All the Grail visions in *A Glastonbury Romance* are distinct. 2) In this context, finding the Grail, achieving union with one's own image is both a moment of self-recognition and a harbinger of death. As such, it is Narcissus's greatest desire, even though its fulfilment would bring about his death. 3) Therefore, a *realised* Golden Age is *always* an unacceptable closure for Narcissus. The more so, because the moment of union reveals the true nature of the sublime myth: it is a cover outlining the borders of the abject, the grotesque bodily flow that defies but also holds together symbolisation (cf. Žižek, "The Truth Arises from Misrecognition" 210–12) and threatens the integrity of the subject. What Narcissus will do is to approach this object/abject of irresistible attraction as closely as possible and then remove or reject it, thereby redrawing the limits of his own subjectivity and the coastlines of the infinite flow of the text. This is, in short, what Julia Kristeva calls abjection, the crisis of narcissistic subjectivity giving birth to the uncontrollable proliferation of texts that is a characteristic of Modernist literature,[10] camouflaged as a quest for the Grail in the *Romance*.

In that sense, *A Glastonbury Romance* is a comment on the paradox inherent in narcissistic subjectivity – the only kind of subjectivity accessible after the end of absolute truths in Western thought (cf. Kochhar-Lindgren 5): it is the very *fact* of the realisation of the Golden Age that makes *any* of its *forms* unacceptable. Powys, with a supremely ironical gesture, turns *his own* favourite Rabelaisian, pluralistic form of the myth into a realised utopia for a while[11]. Thus, the compulsive repetition of the novel's "primal scene" (union in a boat) triggers off infinite doubling in the text, and turns practically all characters into likenesses of John Crow/Narcissus, the hero of a "pure Romance." Their narratives, like his, involve an *apparent* union of the self-same, since a real

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[10] On the dynamics of abjection, the oscillation of attraction and repulsion, and the spatial redefinition of the wandering subject (Where am I? instead of Who am I?) see (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 2–18). For an interpretation of the mytheme of the Golden Age as a totality, a synthesis of otherwise mutually exclusive binary oppositions see (Kroó, "From Plato's Myth of the Golden Age" 355–70). On the interpenetration of the narcissistic model and the mytheme of the Golden Age in the pastoral tradition see (S. Horváth passim).

[11] Cf. "Only those who have caught the secret which Rabelais more than anyone else reveals to us, the secret of the conjunction of the particular and extreme grossness of our excremental functions in connection with our sexual functions are on the right track to encompass this receding horizon where the beyond-thought loses itself in the beyond-words" (Powys, "Preface to the New Edition" xv). Powys's 1948 *Rabelais* is an obvious reference point here. On the earlier development of Powys's Rabelais image cf. (Peltier, "François Rabelais and John Cowper Powys" passim).

union of that sort would make *any* romance impossible. Where else could "pure Romance" take place, but in a *town of mirrors*, and what else could its events be, but *pretences*? Camouflaged *to bridge the gulf* between the subject and the object of its desire, these pretences serve to bring about the anthithesis of their declared end, as they *create gaps* to sustain desire and keep the narrative moving. The most prominent example of this *acting* in bad faith is "The Pageant": functioning as the *mise en abyme* of the novel, it makes a rather Derridean comment on the absence/presence of the transcendental signified (myth as the stabilising force of fluid, narcissistic subjectivity, cf. Kochhar-Lindgren 5) and only stages the impossibility of re(-)presentation. It forms a conspicuous *hole* or *vortex* in the middle of the text, around which the more or less "operatic boats" (Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*) keep drifting, together with such Grail reminiscences as female bodies, golden christening cups, punch bowls, aquariums and chamber pots – like floating signifiers.

All Rowing in the Same Boat

> "Modernist mythopoeia is the recognition that this edifice of the human world is not a building resting on the ground, but *a boat*; and if all men dwell in one it is not necessarily the same one. There is a multiplicity of possible worlds. Furthermore, [...] a boat [...] has the advantage of not being fixed to a single horizon." (Bell 37, emphasis added)

One way to prevent the short-circuiting of desire is to shift the focus of the novel: to ignore characters whose desire has (seemingly) been fulfilled in a "pure Romance" and to turn to others who are still questing. This is one of the clear strategies of the *Romance*: the focus of the narrative shifts from John Crow to Sam Dekker, then to Geard, then to Owen Evans, and so on. It makes readers insecure about who the actual main character is (if there is one at all) in the *Romance*, on the one hand, but it also makes them realise that many of the figures are doubles, on the other. This Doppelgänger-effect would allow for the reading of practically all the major characters as self-absorbed Narcissuses, even if they did not compulsively repeat John Crow's act of union with himself. Indeed, each event of utmost importance repeats the 'primal scene' of the *Romance* by staging some kind of merging or fusion in, or in sight of, a floating boat. People have long-awaited epiphanies and orgasms in drifting boats, only a boat afloat with a woman can serve as a muse and inspire literary creativity, and only joint work in a life-boat can bring about reconciliation between a quarrelling father and son. Geard (like King Arthur) can set off for his last journey only in a boat, and he can die only in the most archetypally narcissistic

way: by drowning himself. Thus fulfilling Narcissus' dream, he reunites with the motherly – creative but chaotic – element of water.

The scene of Geard's death is also an emblem of the other most obvious strategy to avoid one's object of desire in the novel: once closure threatens, characters become desperate to get *out* of the boat they are in. They know well to be cautious: meeting the object of one's desire *does* bring death in the *Romance*. This is why Tom Barter *has to* die in a moment of perfect happiness, and this is why Owen Evans joins the living dead after seeing Tom's crushed brains (cf. *GR* 1054–6) – a segment of the Real, his own abject, that lack of the lack which should have remained *hidden* and *lacking* (cf. Dolar 8). The most emblematic figure of free-floating narcissistic desire is Persephone Spear in the *Romance*: she goes through a sequence of temporarily successful unions and breaks out of them as if she knew that this is the key to sustaining desire, even if it also entails the compulsive repetition of the same quest.

That John Crow is an impossible protagonist is clear in the first chapter of the novel: his desire is narcissistic. His longing for Mary is a desire for the self-same in several ways. He and Mary are almost identical because they are close relatives and they actually resemble each other: Mary is just as unfeminine as John is effeminate. The swapping of traditional gender roles is encoded even in the scene of their union: Mary has to row the boat because the physically weak and probably tubercular John is already exhausted. His desire for Mary is not only an attempt to close the spatial gap between self and other – actually a mirror-image of the self – but also to bridge the temporal gulf between his current and his younger self. His desire is a reminiscence of an earlier scene of fulfilled desire – lovemaking in a boat as a child – whose object, however, must remain uncertain: it is either Mary or Tom Barter. The latter option adds another twist to John's desire for Mary: it mixes it with homosexual attraction as yet another form of desire for the same. John's bisexuality, the "protean fluidity" of his identity (*GR* 102) and the image of his consciousness as a mirror (*GR* 370) also reinforce the image of Narcissus.

Yet, paradoxically, John Crow is also the archetypal desiring machine of the *Romance*, precisely *because of* his narcissism: incapable of union, he sees in each apparent fulfilment the opening up of a new gap. In fact, this is what qualifies objects of desire as eligible: the lack they reveal enables him to keep on oscillating between self and other (self), wanting both – or at least wanting *always the other*. Thus, in the middle of the Wissey idyll John remembers – all of a sudden – that *maybe* it was not Mary, but Tom Barter he wanted to reunite

with[12]. The identity of the original object is left pending for a while: Mary's lack of memory about the scene is suggestive (*GR* 40), but the issue is finally settled only when Tom's memory confirms the matter (*GR* 143). The bisexual nature of John's desire is what always guarantees that something will be missing from any kind of fulfilment; that his romance – pure or otherwise – should never be brought to a close. This lack is encoded in the non-penetrative sex that he and Mary enjoy, and in the pronounced infertility of their relationship (cf. *GR* 80–1 qtd. in fn. 3). What is secured by Tom's death is the annihilation of their ménage à trois and the loss of John's masculine other[13]. When he and Mary are leaving Glastonbury "they [are] carrying [...] with them [...] not only the corpse of Tom Barter but *the corpse of their stillborn never-returning opportunity* of touching the Eternal in the enchanted soil where the Eternal once sank down into time!" (*GR* 1063, emphasis added) The chance is lost, but only because *they never wanted to take it* in the first place.

It is in view of John's narcissism that I would like to suggest a somewhat impertinent reading of his most perplexing vision. It is, first of all, undeserved: if there is one character in the novel who definitely is *not* questing for the Grail it is John Crow. Even more confusing is the fact that this most sceptical of all figures is willing to accept the vision at face value as both supernatural and prophetic: "But that it was a definite and perhaps a dangerous sign from the supernatural and that it was directed towards himself alone, he never had any doubt" (*GR* 361). Since he is "the human norm, the Powys hero" (Knight 36), his vision brings the Grail as close to being an objective reality in the novel's world as it is possible in a polyphonic text of incompatible subjective realities (cf. Lock, "Polyphonic Powys" passim). That John's reading is an absolute necessity is clear: the phallic imagery of *King Arthur's sword* reveals the paternal severing of all dyadic unions, and the separating of untimely narcissistic closures through the introduction of desire and lack *as an aspect of the Grail*. It is so because the image in his vision is actually a combination of two contrasting states: that of the clearly demarcated *phallic cutting edge* and the *whiteness* of an empty surface of indeterminate (deathly and *maternal*) shape:

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[12] Cf. his dialogue with Mary:

> 'I've been wanting all the time to ask you, Mary,' he recommenced, 'whether you remember that day we couldn't get the boat past the dam – the dam between the big river and the little river? You said just now that you'd never been made love to. Why! my dear, I've had a feeling of longing to see you again all my life since that day I hugged you and so on in the bottom of that boat. Do you remember that too, the way the boat leaked, and how fishy it smelt and the way I held you?" The queer thing was that once more, even as he said these words, the image of the boy Tom Barter rose up. (*GR* 36).

[13] Both the basic dilemma and its resolution deserve comparison with the Birkin—Gerald Crich—Ursula relationship in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920).

> John was struck, there, leaning as he was against the sun-warmed parapet, by a sudden rending and blinding shock. […] at this second, in the blaze of Something that afterward seemed to him to resemble what he had heard of the so-called Cosmic Rays, he distinctly saw... literally shearing the sun-lit air with a whiteness like milk, like snow, like birch-bark, like maiden's flesh, like chalk, like paper, like a dead fish's eye, like Italian marble,... an object, *resembling a sword*, falling into the mud of the river! When it struck the mud it disappeared. Nor was there any trace... when John looked later... to show where it had disappeared. (*GR* 361)

The fall of the sword is thus a cut that reintroduces emptiness – a lack – which makes desire and story-telling possible. It is the cut that both generates and confirms desires in John *beyond* the sphere of his union with either Mary, or Tom, for that matter[14]. One of them is the decision to ruin the pageant by making a comedy out of it: "in my Midsummer pageant I will mock the Grail; for Arthur's sword is tin!" (*GR* 372) John then formulates the prophetic wish of apocalyptic destruction, which, as if by (word)magic, will be realised :

> Oh, it would please him, oh, it would satisfy him, if a great wild salt wave coming out of the dark heathen sea, were to sweep over this whole morbid place and wash the earth clean of all these phantasms! [...] 'There must be destruction [...] before any fresh wind from the gods can put new life into a place like this!' (*GR* 371–2)

John's vision is an act of self-defence which protects the Grail and preserves the narrative. While it saves (his) narrative from an untimely end, it also saves the Grail from being pinned down to any image – theatrical or other – as its absolute representation. It is always the lack, the cut that must be sutured up in language – and it is only through the gaps inherent in language that subjectivity, the discourse of desire can emerge. The utopia of living in the presence of the found Grail must come to an end even before it is realised; it is only this lack of realisation that makes possible both the quest and its writing. John's vision reveals this fact as an essential aspect of the Grail itself. In that sense, Powys's comment on myth parallels the theories of Paul Riceour, Eric Gould and others:

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[14] John is actually saved from the physical consequences of the shock with the help of the classic phallic accessory of Powys heroes: his stick. Cf. "He would certainly have fallen on his side if he had not been clutching the root-handle of his hazel-stick, with which, automatically stabbing the surface of the road as he stumbled, he just saved himself" (*GR* 361). It is tempting to see it as a gesture that identifies John with the phallic aspect of the vision. In this reading the scene would mark his entry into the paternal realm of language as opposed to the engulfing maternal flow. His ensuing focus on his "literary" activities, at least, supports this view.

if myth is *par excellence* the interpretative discourse of the subject trying to define its place in the world, if myth is an attempt *to close an ontological gap*, all it can demonstrate at each attempt is *the absolute necessity and impossibility* of that closure (Riceour 5–6; Gould 6–34; cf. Kochhar-Lindgren 10–11).

To further narcissistic oscillation between the same and other, Sam Dekker and Owen Evans, two characters who most obviously are on a Grail quest, are established as John Crow's doubles early on, when the three men sit together on top of Glastonbury Tor:

> Together these three men represented – in Remorse, in Renunciation, in Roguery – everything that separates our race from nature. Their three intelligences floated there, on that hilltop, above their clothed and crouching skeletons, like wild demented birds that had escaped from all normal restraints." (*GR* 259)

In the scene John, Evans and Sam are revealed as three aspects of the same – humanity – which defines itself in opposition to nature (the body). The common denominator of their position is the abject: it is the indefinite limits of the grotesque body and its fluids that lie at the core of abjection and the narcissistic crisis it means. John's "Rougery" entails narcissism: he must carefully rearrange the limits of his self each time he comes too close to a union with himself. There is no sense of crisis here: John's "pure Romance" is the only one that survives the end of the novel, which suggests that narcissistic subjectivity and the abjection it entails may be our ineradicable human condition in the 20th century. Central to that condition is a constant sense of lack.

Sam Dekker's narrative is, though less obviously, maintained by the same tricks as John's. His romance with Nell is consummated at the very beginning of the novel. Yet he is thereafter obsessed with the idea of leaving Nell in order to become "Holy Sam." He thus tests the dominant sublimating discourse of abjection in Western culture, that of Christian asceticism (cf. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 56–112). This leads Sam to a dead end because it allows him to accept and fulfil everyone else's desires, though not his own or Nell's. As long as Nell does not renounce him, he is constantly torn between his woman and his Christ, while only looking for himself. One of the most sophisticated ironies of the text is that it is Crummie Geard who opens his eyes to both what his Grail vision means and what he is actually doing. Yet she is the one and only character who is explicitly associated with "narcissism" in the novel (*GR* 152). Sam's romance with Nell fails because not all acts of egoism can be redeemed. Or because to remain alone with his Grail vision is Sam's only chance *to have it both ways*.

Owen Evans' narrative also moves along similar lines. He is obsessed with his sadistic fantasies: abjection, just like clinical cases of narcissism, often moves in the terrain of perversion (cf. Kristeva, *Powers* 15–6). His desperate

quest for the Grail is to find a power that could liberate him from this almost demonic possession[15]. The crux is that despite this explicit longing, he knows all too well that he does not want to see the Grail (*GR* 151): he insists on holding on to his symptom, as if he feared something worse should he be deprived of it. This worse state he recognises in Mad Bet as *his* double (*GR* 253). His horror is well-founded: when the fantasy as symptom (be it a myth of the Golden Age or the hell of tortured bodies) is traversed, the subject is left alone with the unbearable sight of the Real to save him from madness and to hold together symbolisation (Žižek, "The Truth Arises" 208–12). Accordingly, meeting the object of his desire is fateful for Evans: it is a shock therapy that relieves him of one disease (his vomiting purifies him from his perversion), but ushers in another. Killing his desire, it is also the commencement of his untimely second childhood: he becomes Cordelia's surrogate child and thus realises the impossible dream of Narcissus by escaping back into the dyadic union with the mother; the stage of absolute mirroring.

Having run the full gamut of abjection, it is with Evans that we return to the starting point: the boat, the river and the woman. According to Roland Barthes writing is the one socially acceptable form of autoerotic pleasure and fantasy (cf. 10). Only in writing can fantasy be legitimated as therapeutic. And this is what Evans is left alone with for the rest of his life: his one activity to prove his sanity, or to keep it. His writing process is a repetition of the "primal scene" of the novel, with all its sham fulfilments and deceptive closures. Evans draws inspiration from a picture lacking any artistic qualities: it is an image of a river, a boat and a woman reading, which is "almost sacred" for him because it *evokes* another picture in his parents' house (*GR* 1001). His writing is based on a sham union with his muse – "in a boat" – which in fact only reminds him of a lack: the lack of the original picture, and the loss of his childhood idyll and self. His writing is also a reading, of course: not only because he is looking at a woman reading and is himself reading his own memories, but because *Vita Merlini* is a work based on compilation. Both reading and writing focus on one particular word: Esplumeoir. This is the word for whose real meaning he keeps rereading *Morte d'Artur*, although he knows he *will not* find it there (cf. *GR* 1055–6). Writing (and reading) is the one therapeutic activity for the soul wandering in the terrain of abjection because it opens up untimely closures. Narcissus's 'pure Romance' allows for sublimation only in the infinite flow of the text, in creative writing as an act of survival (cf. Kristeva, *Powers* 15–6; Kochhar-Lindgren 44). But for Powys this mark of presumed originality inevitably equals Narcissus's gazing at himself in the (inter)textual mirror of already written (hi)stories.

[15] As it has been pointed out, Evans is a Stavrogin-figure from Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* (Lukacher 20), so his narrative moves in the intertextual space marked out by the Dostoevskian vision of narcissistic subjectivity – just like all of his doubles'.

Geard's mystical revival seems to move beyond the dead ends outlined above. It relies on a Rabelaisian attitude: an acceptance and rehabilitation of the grotesque body that opens up both the Christian closure of renunciation and the psychological closure of fixation (Remorse). His personal myth pretends to achieve universality both in the microcosm of the novel and in its extratextual space: he wants to establish a new world-religion. And it is a pretence, indeed: his becoming a mayor means that a discourse of plurality and tolerance comes to power, but in a paradoxical way. Because of its pluralistic nature, such a holder of power cannot maintain its sovereign authority. Geard's mystical revival is anyway based on yet another romance, which breaks the laws of nature by reversing time: the Gothic plot of usurpation concerns the perverted desire of the father to live longer than his accorded time and to resist the resignation of his power (cf. Kilgour 18–9). When Geard receives Canon Crow's legacy, he usurps the place of the lawful heirs, all of whom – with the exception of Philip – are young enough to be his own children. He takes the place of the (dead) father between grandfather and grandchildren, restraining the latter from reaching their full potential – just as Uranus did with Cronos and his siblings by keeping them in the womb of the earth (Hesiod, *Theogony* 147–63), and just as Cronos did with his own children, in turn, by simply eating them (Hesiod, *Theogony* 453–92). Metaphorically, Geard becomes the Cronos/Crow father by repeating the legendary family crime[16]. Eating one's offspring is, like incest, another way to short-circuit desire. Not surprisingly, this other Crow family vice also appears with relation to Geard. There is an incestuous aura around his relations with Lady Rachel, while his own daughter, Crummie explicitly talks about her father's sexual approaches (*GR* 979). Geard's quest has been fulfilled, the utopia has been realised – but only at the cost of overturning the laws of nature in ways that entail futility and sterility. To stop time is to reveal and keep Glastonbury as what has always been its reputation: the land of the dead, the Waste Land, the "Terre Gastee of the medieval romances" (*GR* 319). The Golden Age always has to be *somewhere else* – no nation sees its own land as the Isles of the Blessed, because no nation would like to think of his own country as the underworld (Trencsényi-Waldapfel 124–6). When Geard's boat and Powys's novel reach that closure – the one recorded and opened up in T. S. Eliot's poem, which Powys knew by heart – it is really *time to get out*.

Apart from the Crow couple and Geard there is one more person who takes that hint – in fact, who is unable to take any other: Persephone. The woman who has slept with almost every available man (Dave Spear, Philip Crow, Owen Evans, Will Zoyland) and woman (Angela Beere) and looked only for herself all

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[16] Cf. "Some man of old time, amidst 'en, must have done summat turble ... eaten his own offspring like enough, in want of kindlier meat... summat o' that... and ever since such doings they all outlive their sons. 'Tis a kind of Divine Dispensation, I reckon" (*GR* 32). For a reading of the Crow family as descendants of Cronos cf. (Lukacher 19).

the while. She is the first to leave Glastonbury. Persephone clearly senses her life as a chain of endless repetition, the prime mover of which is her desire *to feel desire for the other*[17] – the one thing Narcissus cannot do:

> 'How queer it is, in my life [...] the very same situation keeps repeating itself! Is it possible that Bristol Warf' – she was thinking of her early encounters with Dave – 'and Wookey Hole, and Saint Mary's Ruin,' – she was thinking of one particular meeting with Angela Beere – 'and that room in the hospital' – she was thinking of the last of her morbid visits to Mr. Evans – 'were all rehearsals of this breaking of the ice with Will? When a person's life repeats itself – from that shore of Phil's to this boat of Will's! – there's a doom of some sort in it. [...] So long as you [Will Zoyland] show her where it is – poor Percy's lost treacherous heart – that she can never, never, never find!' (*GR* 853)

Her insatiable search for sexual pleasure is thus her impossible quest for herself. Evoking the primal scene of the novel again, her quest runs from "shore" to "boat". Another one of Powys's androgynes, she is narcissistic desire embodied. Even her name evokes a connection between seduction and autoerotic desire: Persephone, daughter of the harvest-goddess Demeter and thus representative of fertility, was abducted by Hades to remain in the underworld as its queen half the year. Evoking the story of fatal self-love, she was seduced by Hades with the help of a fragile golden flower – *a narcissus* (*Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 405–34). Percy's seduction in the subterranean cave by Philip (*GR* 240) is an obvious allusion and is itself the type from which all subsequent love-makings, including the time when she is in the boat with Will Zoyland (*GR* 852–3), must appear only as repetitions. She leaves Glastonbury – a goddess of fertility cannot be stuck in the land of the dead – maybe to channel her desires into ideological

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[17] The text is very explicit about both her inability to enjoy sexual intercourse and her exquisite pleasure at being desired:

> Artemis-like, she had found that by far the worst part of her affair with Philip – and it had been just the same with Dave – was the fact that she had to undress and be mad love to without the defence of her sweet-smelling Harris-tweed jacket and skirt.[...]
>
> 'Do other women feel what I feel? Is there some deep, secret conspiracy among us to be silent about this loathing of skin to skin, this disgust of the way they are when they have their will of us? Am I betraying some tragic silence that Nature form the beginning has imposed in dark whispers upon her daughters? [...] Is this shrinking, this loathing, something that every girl feels?' (*GR* 314–5)

No less explicitly we are told of her desire to be desired when she is with Will Zoyland: "Her only desire now – and even that was a languid one – was to put off her final yielding to the bearded man *until she had enjoyed to the extreme limit the excited tension of his craving*" (*GR* 852, emphasis added).

streams in communist Russia, but judging by her compulsion to repeat the same quest all over again more probably simply to look for new hunting grounds.

If Powys's narrative is a romance of Narcissus and his doubles and reflections, it is just fitting that it should be set in a town of *glass* – of infinite mirroring. That is what Glastonbury is according to folk etymology, as the narrator shrewdly highlights by listing different names of the place which reflect this supposed meaning in several languages: „Ynys Witrin, Insula Vitrea […] Isle de Viorre, yr Echwyd, Glast, Glastenic, Glastonia, Glaston" (*GR* 573). It is in this manifold refracted light that John Geard's vision of Glastonbury as "his New Jerusalem" deserves rereading. It might be nothing else but the realisation of the trope inherent in the town's name: a trope of infinite, bedazzling, unsettling plurality:

> Castles of crystal, islands of glass, mirrors and mirages of the invisible, hiding-places of Merlin, horns and urns and wells and cauldrons – hilltops of magic – stones – of mystery – all these seemed to Bloody Johnny's brain at that moment no mere fluctuation, undulating mind-pictures, but real things [...]. (*GR* 163)

The sequence suggests that the easily recognisable synonyms of the Grail are nothing else but mirrors, which, in turn, become the watery flow of human consciousness – it is well-known how fascinated Powys was with William James (cf. Peltier, "Two Multiverses, 'One Dizzy Symphonic Polyphony'" 8–9). He obviously applies a very Jamesian imagery here.

It is repetition – whether occasioned by recurrent events or related to doubles – and the watery imagery of the locale that deprive every seeming closure of its status as a "final word". First and foremost, reading is a process that paradoxically proceeds *from the end*: it is the resolution that makes a story meaningful (P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* 10–24; cf. Žižek, "The Truth Arises" passim). But in this case each and every closure is written over by the following one: every new "end" necessitates the reinterpretation of all preceding events, and every apparently fulfilled romance demands a re-reading of the whole of the *Romance*. This infinite mirroring creates an impression similar to the timelessness of repetition as symptom. The "final words" supplied by each closure do not cancel out each other, rather become intermingled and seem to show the different sides of the same malady – and the same remedy. The *Romance*, like the unconscious, knows no past: all the layers of writing and overwriting are present in it simultaneously, like a palimpsest (cf. Lacan, *The Language of the Self* 20–4). What transpires from under it is the predicament of narcissistic subjectivity: for it the Grail must remain what it essentially is – a vessel, a receptacle, a female body, the object-cause of desire. Ultimately, *a lack*.

"The Pageant" – Myth and Re(-)presentation [18]

This lack at the core of the *Romance* is exactly what becomes conspicuous in "The Pageant". Featuring the staging of a small-town pageant-play in its "central" chapter in a manner that clearly underpins a polyphonic reading, the novel thematises the issue of presence and/or absence, inseparable from that of re(-)presentation. Since "The Pageant" is the *mise en abyme per se* of the entire novel, it posits the whole text as a self-reflexive case-study of the ambiguous functioning of myth in (Late) Modernist writing. Taking into consideration the facts that the *Romance* also shares the political concerns typical for the literature of the 1930s and that its utilisation of the pageant clearly parallels other major Modernists' work at the time, one can only wonder how far claims for Powys's eccentricity, peripheral quality, and inaccessibility for current critical idioms can be maintained.

The chapter entitled "The Pageant" offers itself for a reading as the *mise en abyme* of the entire novel at least for three reasons. First and foremost, the classic device of the text-within-the-text usually underscores the main themes of the text it is embedded in. Secondly, placed approximately in the middle of the text, the chapter forms a kind of structural "centre" – used in need of a better word here, because the application of the term to Powys's diffuse writing is highly problematic. The preparations for the show unite the otherwise loosely attached chapters of the novel's first part, whose plot actually culminates in a characteristically Powysian bathetic (Robinson, "Introduction" v) realisation – or rather non-realisation – of the pageant. Thematically, the originally three-act show with its sections devoted to the Arthurian Legend, the Passion, and the Cymric, heathen Grail, respectively, comprises in a nutshell the mythic concerns of the *Romance.*

A closer look at the genre of the pageant-play in the culture and literature of English Modernism, however, brings into relief the fact that the chapter also serves as a *mise en abyme* in more sophisticated ways. Let me give a quick survey of the relevant features relying on Joshua D. Esty recent study with the challenging title "Amnesia in the Fields: Late Modernism, Late Imperialism and the English Pageant Play"[19]. The first of these is related to the immediate forerunner of the pageant-play in Modernist literature, the modern pageant play as a cultural phenomenon, dating back to 1905. As Esty points out, following that year there was a "pageant boom," during which a pageant town often went

[18] This section of the article was originally presented as "Myth, Mystery and Representation – John Cowper Powys, *A Glastonbury Romance*" at the *Presence and/or Absence* conference, at the Catholic University of Ruzomberok, Slovakia, on the 24th of August, 2011.

[19] The article deals with three major Modernists, T. S. Eliot, E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf, who turn to the pageant-play as a genre in the 1930s. Notably, Woolf applies it in *Between the Acts* as a narrative device and a play-within-the-novel (Esty 246), similarly to Powys.

through “substantial economic revival” owing to the tourist industry related to the shows (273). Involving a large number of local amateurs from all kinds of vocations, the Edwardian pageant-play also shared an impression of “interclass harmony” with its Elizabethan forerunner and created a strong sense of community (246–9). Let me make only passing mention of a curious platitude here: what seems to be the most unrealistic improbability of the *Romance*, the establishment of a new community and an economically successful commune through the realisation of a pageant-play, in this light perfectly fits the utopistic overtones culturally connected to the genre[20]. It also reveals that the pageant-play as a *mise en abyme* repeats the combination of mythic and political concerns the entire novel deals with.

From the perspective of the present reading, the most valuable among Esty's insights concerns the attitude of the modern pageant-play to representation. Originally a mixture of the passion play and the court masque, the Edwardian pageant-play was characterised by a high degree of “local authenticity”. It means that it was usually committed to the presentation of the local history and the legends of the place where it was performed, often involving the actual descendants of the characters represented on stage. That is, it came close to the “literal re-enactment,” the re-presentation of the events instead of their “representation” to “project the absence of historical time” (246–9). According to the impossible aesthetic ideal of the modern pageant, a time of plenty is re-presented and during the performance actors and audience – hardly separable from each other – share the delusion of atemporality: presence seems to be eternalised[21].

[20] Not to mention that this most unrealistic-looking element is part and parcel of the novel's topicality (Rands passim).

[21] Esty's study might also shed new light on the apparent generic contrast between the pageant-play and the romance, allegedly the genre of Powys's Glastonbury text. Esty interprets the curious interest in the pageant-play in the 1930s as a forerunner of the post-war “anthropological turn,” that is, a concern with English culture as an object for anthropological realism. This turn ushered in “neo-realist genres in the wake of modernism,” which, however, were concerned with “generating romances of [...] the countryside, of national character” (246). Apart from the fact that such a contextualisation reclaims Powys from the margins of English Modernism and places him in the eminent company of Eliot, Forster and Woolf, it points to a potentially organic connection between the pageant-play and the romance in Powys's text. Existing analyses of the text as a romance either approach the issue from a phenomenological perspective (cf. Fawkner, “The Manifestation of Affectivity: John Cowper Powys and Pure Romance” passim), explore the relationship of the allegedly non-realistic romance and naturalism (Barrett passim), or place it in the context of the philosophical romance (Hughes passim). I find these approaches dissatisfactory in themselves, first and foremost because Powys obviously plays with overlayering different types of romance: medieval, modern, philosophical, even romance as pulp fiction. To this only the specifically Powysian 'pure Romance' (*GR* 39) needs to be added to imply the full complexity of the issue.

However, Powys's fictional pageant and especially its polyphonic representation problematise exactly the subtle boundaries of representation and re-presentation, putting the pageant itself and ultimately presence under erasure. Geard's revivalist attempts follow exactly the same logic as the genre of the pageant: if the location is authentic (Glastonbury is a the place where Joseph of Arimathea hid the Holy Grail), if the characters are authentic (he himself is in daily communion with Jesus, but by hint also a reincarnation of Merlin) then representation (his deeds and words) can achieve the status of re-presentation (a new Gospel, a New Revelation, a new world religion, logos authentically rooted in presence). If... It is the conditional, the ambiguity in the entire novel that is brought into prominence by the powerful comment on representation inherent in the chapter "The Pageant".

Thus, the fictional pageant as a representation in Powys's novel highlights the problematic of representation as such, first of all because it glaringly illustrates the logic of the supplement (cf. Derrida 141–64). Rooted in a revivalist intent it is supplementary to the Word with its pretensions to substitute it. The pageant is meant to be the first power-demonstration of John Geard's new religion, which is to "bring back an Age of Faith to the Western World" (*GR* 286). By definition, it is germinated in the metaphysics of presence: it is John Geard's brain-child, who conceives of himself as a "new out-spurt […] of the Real Presence" (*GR* 286). By re-enacting the Passion, the pageant is to re-present in sacred ritual the transcendental signified behind the Word on which the whole of Western culture is based, and which, to follow Derrida's axiom, is "a lack at the origin", a presence that is "always already absent" (Spivak xvii). But this representation does not complete, it does not fill in a lack – as far as its aims are concerned, the pageant can be only a substitution: John Geard's "singular Gospel" of a "new Revelation" at Glastonbury (*GR* 1073) by definition cannot be *added* to the Word of the Scriptures and cannot *complete* the discourse Western culture is founded on.

Yet, following the logic of the supplement, it is also an addition as far as Glastonbury is concerned – what is more, an addition to what is not only complete but actually is *in excess*. In Glastonbury, every spot is – often doubly or trebly – linked to myth and the numenous. Why would the town need a representation of the sacred when it is a sacred place and its inhabitants live *in* the sacred? Or, as John Crow mentally puts it, "the land reek[s] with the honey lotus of all the superstitions of the world!" (*GR* 122) and its inhabitants seem to be a special species imbued with mysticism. So much so, that the land itself becomes a thickly overwritten palimpsest of sacred stories: as the list of the names quoted above illustrates, naming the territory borders on the impossible, because it equals listing a host of names replacing each other in an endless metaphorical chain of signifiers. The town is not only Avalon, the "Isle of Apples" of Arthurian romance, or yr Echwyd, the Celtic underworld, but also the

Isle of Glass, as noted above. The scene of the pageant, a text-within-the-text which by definition doubles and mirrors the whole, in this sense is writing added to an already overwritten text, an addition to an already unsettling excess of representation, to the innumerable mirrors of the (looking-)glass town.

While its original function posits the fictional pageant as a supplement, its realisation and representation is a textbook case of what Derrida has termed presence under erasure (cf. 23): never really presented in the text, first running amok and then interrupted, the play is first and foremost a conspicuous *gap* right in the middle of the *Romance*. For a start, there is literally no text-within-the-text, that is, no sections of the libretto are given for the reader – neither is anything audible for the fictional audience. The only ad verbatim quote is not a quote from the play (as a matter of fact, it is not a quote at all in the sense of a conscious repetition): it is the "Eloi, Eloi, Lama, Sabachthani!" of the crucified Christ, to which I would like to return later.

Secondly, very few scenes are actually described; instead, the audience's comments are given – a vertiginous multitude of contradictory perspectives without *any* narratorial or authorial fixed point of reference. One would at least take the words of a narrator who introducing a passion play casually speaks of "the blood of a mad demigod" (*GR* 562) with some reservation on issues of religion and the sacred. This sets the tone for numerous alternative visions of the play: strikers carry banners with the word "Mummery" (*GR* 563), a value judgment opposed by "the waving of Miss Drew's green parasol" and brothel manageress Mother Legge's "Rabelaisian tongue" (*GR* 568). The pageant is "like a magnified Punch-and-Judy show" (*GR* 587) for Will Zoyland, while it is "a ghastly parody upon the death of [...] God" for Sam Dekker, which is able to cast "terrible doubt [on] the ascetic ideal of his whole life" (*GR* 588). Not surprisingly, the play is "a silly, frivolous blasphemy" (*GR* 588) for local priest Mat Dekker. Once another spectator claims that "Tis like Saturday afternoon in private bar and yet 'tis like Good Friday in Church" (*GR* 591) readers are almost convinced that a strong case could be made for the carnivalesque nature of the show. And yet it turns out that of all the viewers, surprisingly, it is the one potential authority on issues of the sacred, the Greek Orthodox priest Father Paleologue, who is absolutely enchanted by the play. He finds a theological justification even for the rudest blunders of the presenters, so much so, that he provokes the following comment from Mary Crow: "Father, I believe you're laughing at us all the time!" (*GR* 600) The priest's exaggerated exculpations ("If I did *that*, dear daughter [...] I'd deserve to be unfrocked. I'd deserve to be cut in pieces like your last abbot" [*GR* 600]) are better suited to inspire doubt in his priesthood than to prove his seriousness.

And indeed, this clearly polyphonic representation – a diametrical opposite of the reassuring, utopistic pastoral idyll associated with the genre of the pageant-play – is combined with a third factor to leave readers in absolute doubt about

what exactly happens on that beautiful pageant day: in contrast to these faint traces of the theatrical events, the real “show” seems to take place off-stage. While the first part of the pageant, based on the Arthurian Cycle, is almost totally ignored by the narrative, a most vivid representation of the Marquis of P’s simultaneous mobbing by the strikers is given. The second part of the play slowly but surely transforms into “reality”: Evans, the “actor” playing Christ, masochistically insists on being really tied to the cross. Thus literally tortured, he has a vision of Christ, presumably bursts a blood vessel, faints, and *then* cries out the above quoted words of the dying Christ unconsciously. The last part of the pageant has to be cancelled because of the ensuing mass hysteria, and the comic scenes of gaining control over the terrified crowd seem to contend for the role of the third part of the drama with the retrospect narrative of Evans’s vision, which actually closes the chapter. A pretentious supplement, the fictional pageant is conspicuous in its absence in the text.

Thus the only effective achievement of this bathetic representation under erasure seems to be that it ultimately blurs the limits between stage and off-stage in the narrative: not only are all the events of any interest taking place off-stage, but the representation of stage characters’ movement to an fro between the world of the stage and “reality” suggests an actual undermining of the difference between representation and re-presentation. A comic version of this blurring is given in the outrageously hilarious scene of quieting the frightened audience. Its comic effect is clearly rooted in playing with the real and stage identity of its central figures: an anachronistic “King Arthur,” who is both a natural leader and an impotent actor in sore need of a prompter, and an unnaturally verbose and self-confident, actually resurrected “Lady of Shalott”.

> Mr. Geard’s daughter looked round. The Middlezoy foreman, still dressed up as King Arthur, was standing nearby, quietly lighting his pipe. She called the man by name and he slouched up to them. “Take this,” said Crummie. “Run over to Pilate’s what-do-you-call-it, will you? Shout out to them that the Mayor bids them good-bye, and tell them to go home quietly, and that Mr Evans has only fainted!”
>
> King Arthur lost no time in obeying to the letter this clear command of the resuscitated Lady of Shalott. [...] Everybody stood still and listened. It was as if the real Rex Arturus himself had suddenly appeared to restore peace upon earth and fulfil his magician’s prophecy.
>
> [...] “The Mayor –“ There was a pause at this point while King Arthur bent his head to catch his prompter’s words. Then raising the megaphone again – “The Mayor give ye all the Blessing of the Living Christ!” The foreman came carefully down the creaking wooden steps with the megaphone under his arm. (*GR* 604–5)

However, the chapter continues with a much more serious subversion: with the retelling of Evans's visionary dialogue on the cross with Christ. Evans is obviously not Christ, but neither is he acting: his *unconscious* repetition of Christ's words has the uncanny effect of representing and re-presenting the Word at the same time, inseparably. Read in Freudian terms, the source of the exclamation is Evans's personal unconscious – it might be a memory from one of the rehearsals. In this case, the Word is repeated as his personal word, devoid of the authenticating presence of God. In Jungian terms, the source of the exclamation might be the collective unconscious (cf. Jung 59–69): it is an objectively existing, impersonal symbol – the Word of authority. If it is so, this authoritative presence is evoked only to record the prime condition of the free play of signifiers: the presence of a transcendental signifier always already absent. The word of authority can present itself only to declare its own absence: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mat 27:46)

Taking all this into consideration, one might be tempted to read the entire novel in the terms of a pageant-play, at least as far as the issue of re(-)presentation is concerned. The predilection of the genre for washing away the boundaries between stage and off-stage, between actors and audience, between representation and re-enactment is not only ritualistic, but also probes into the limits of the power of myth to "give a shape to [...] the immense panorama of futility and anarchy", to quote T. S. Eliot's Modernist axiom (177–8). Geard's attempt at the re-enactment of the Grail myth undergoes the same subversion as the socially, politically and spiritually compromised pageant-play. In the *Romance,* there is an excess of mythological figures Geard can be an avatar of, there is an excess of Grails and Grail visions, an excess of characters doubling each other and having an excess of mythological parallels at the same time, to allow for an unambiguous reading and stop the free play of signifiers. What else would one expect from a novel whose central chapter is – similarly to Forster's *A Passage to India* – a metaphorical *hole*? What else would one expect from a romance in which characters *wander* in the deathly field of power surrounding their abject/object, the Grail, like so many mystified Narcissuses? To survive at all and to keep narrative going, they – just like Powys himself – must *stick* to their desire, stick to their personal Grail as lack, and become, with a slight modification of Kazuo Ishiguro's phrase, the *walking* "artists of a floating world".

IN LOVE WITH THE ABJECT: JOHN COWPER POWYS'S *WEYMOUTH SANDS*[1]

> "the man who hung there, like a cadaver in a straight waistcoat, was analysing Lucinda as if he were embracing a vivisected, half-anaesthetized, snarling panther" (Powys, *Weymouth Sands* 448–9)[2]

Jeremy Robinson remarks that "[o]ne could imagine essays on the Kristevan abject in Powys's use of vivisection in *Weymouth Sands*" ("Introduction" iv). At first sight his comment seems rather provocative and fanciful: vivisection, though a recurrent motif in the novel, is apparently located at its periphery. No wonder that, for example, Janina Nordius pushes aside the whole issue with one passing remark, which relegates it to other images of "universal suffering" (52–3) in John Cowper Powys's works: "But the more specific images of suffering seem to have been replaced by the frequent but fairly general references to vivisection said to go on in the Brush asylum" (132). For others vivisection is even a target for criticism as one of the weaknesses of *Weymouth Sands.* Thus, John A. Brebner claims that it "is never successfully integrated into the novel's total statement" (133), while Carole Coates complains about its "triviality" and "naivety" as "a symbol of evil" (126). In contrast, Jorg Therstappen reads the novel as a text focused on Hell's Museum and the suffering of animals as its "leit-motiv" (21–3). Nevertheless, he remains within the same frame of reference as Brebner and Coates, with the sole difference that he actually accepts vivisection as a working symbol of evil. Inspired by Robinson's suggestion, I would also like to argue that on closer inspection vivisection in *Weymouth Sands* proves to have a central function, but for a different reason. It is a highly significant metaphor for psychoanalysis and, by analogy, science, which underlies Powys's vision of humanity in the novel. This, in turn, reveals a curious – perverted? – fascination with the abject, which might be regarded as

[1] First published as "In Love with the Abject – John Cowper Powys's *Weymouth Sands,*" *Eger Journal of English Studies* 6 (2006), 97–120, then reprinted in a considerably revised form as "In Love with the Abject – John Cowper Powys's *Weymouth Sands,*" *The Powys Journal* XIX (2009), 79–106. Let me express special thanks to late Richard Maxwell for his editorial work, and to Mme Jacqueline Peltier and Professor Charles Lock for their invaluable help in obtaining literature on Powys and for their kindness and encouragement.
Research for the present article was carried out with the assistance of the Eötvös Scholarship supplemented by a grant from the Hungarian Ministry of Education (OM).

[2] From now on all quotes from *Weymouth Sands* will be indicated by *WES* and the page numbers in parenthetical notes.

the dominant shaping factor of Powys's choice of characters, structuring of plot and narrative technique in *Weymouth Sands*.

Vivisection and Psychoanalysis – Images of the Abject

Though it has been pointed out repeatedly that in *Weymouth Sands* vivisection is Powys's central image for the morally unjustifiable approach of modern science to humanity (Brebner 133; Therstappen 23–4), the intermediary step, the metaphorical identification of vivisection with psychoanalysis as a particular branch of science, has not been studied thoroughly. It becomes a firmly established metaphor in the novel only gradually: the originally – questionably – metonymic relationship of the two concepts acquires its metaphorical quality through the repeated comparison of the vivisected animals with the human patients of the Brush Asylum, while the vivisector and the analyst are actually the same person, Dr. Brush. To indicate the proper weight of the implications of this metaphor in terms of the Kristevan abject, first let me contextualise vivisection and psychoanalysis in Powysian art and highlight their relationship with thematic and narrative concerns in his texts.

Vivisection is an obsessively recurring image of "Powys's worst evil – scientific cruelty" (Knight 99–100), against which he launches an obstinate fight and formulates his Rabelaisian philosophy. It features as a more or less emphatic motif in three of his other novels (*Morwyn* – Knight 63; *The Inmates* – Knight 82; *Up and Out* – Knight 108) apart from *Weymouth Sands* as a form of the sadistic and thus the physically repellent in mankind (Knight 21). Notably, vivisection also appears in his book-length essay *Rabelais*, first published in 1948, fourteen years after *Weymouth Sands*: it is in Rabelais' attitude to nature, including the most excremental aspects of human existence, that Powys detects an approach "diametrically opposed to the unphilosophical inhumanity of Vivisection" (42). In Powys's reading of Rabelais this is the basis of "Pantagruelism", the philosophy formulated in the books of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, which he rather likes to read as a new 'Gospel'.

Though Powys's treatment of the French writer, with special reference to such chapters as "Rabelais as a Prophet", must be taken with certain reservations, his understanding of the Renaissance text, though far from being so academic, bears comparison with Mikhail Bakhtin's interpretation. Powys identifies roughly nine major components of Rabelaisian philosophy, namely "the ataraxia of the Stoics", parody, "farcical and sardonic humour", "considerate humanity and pity", "shameless realism and gross bawdiness", a "Christian element", a "magical and *almost occult* hero-worship", "endurance, enjoyment, and unlimited toleration" and "a *metaphysical* element" (*Rabelais* 368–9). It must be noted that Powys and Bakhtin, totally independently from

each other[3], equally emphasise some of the poetic dimensions of Rabelais' works. For example parody appears in both writers' readings (e.g. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 12–15, 21–2; Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 127–8, 141–2, 193–4), but it is also easy to see the parallel between such features as Powys's (grotesque) realism versus Bakhtin's materialism, Powys's sardonic humour and bawdiness versus Bakhtin's emphasis on the comic treatment of the excremental and sexual, or carnivalesque laughter (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 18–24). Tolerance might be just another name for the suspension of official hierarchy Bakhtin highlights (*Rabelais* 7–10, 21–7). The recognition of these features gains special significance in view of the fact that Bakhtin used them as points of reference for his concept of polyphony formulated in his interpretation of Dostoevsky's poetics (Bakhtin, *Problems* 6–7, 127–8, 193–4). In Bakhtinian terms, Powys, expressing a distrust in science typical of mythologically-oriented Modernists[4], poses against the monological "truth" of reason a dialogic or polyphonic vision of his Rabelaisian "Multiverse" (Powys, *Rabelais* 370). On the one hand, Powys's personal Rabelaisian philosophy is formulated in opposition to a crudely scientific approach manifested in such horrors as vivisection; on the other hand, it results in a pluralistic vision of the world (Knight 85; cf. Boulter passim).

Like the image of vivisection in his art, Powys's idea of psychoanalysis is also inseparably intertwined with his notions of ethics and his personal philosophy. *Psychoanalysis and Morality,* a short text first published in 1923, and *Weymouth Sands* can be easily interpreted as two stages in Powys's concept of psychoanalysis – in fact, as two diametrically opposed opinions about it. In the essay Powys hails psychoanalysis (including the theories of Freud, Jung and Adler, 9) as the new science which is to liberate mankind from the burden of having to think of socially stigmatised sexual practices, such as homosexuality and incest, in terms of sin (10–11), or having to reject our inherent narcissism, as a key to individuality (33–4)[5]. There is also a strong metaphysical strain in his

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[3] Jacqueline Peltier in her comprehensive study comparing Powys's different interpretations of Rabelais, also emphasises that Bakhtin's and Powys's works were written approximately at the same time and that Powys would probably have been highly interested in the Russian critic's interpretation, finding a kindred spirit in him. Though she follows the developments of Powys's interpretation only in his non-belletristic works, she also takes it for granted that Rabelais' extremely deep influence on Powys's personal philosophy similarly surfaces in his novels (Peltier, "François Rabelais and John Cowper Powys" passim).

[4] Cf. Morine Krissdottir's claim that "Powys's career was one long battle against the scientific view of life", though she also concedes that "Ironically, Powys was attracted again and again to the camp of the enemy" (*John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest* 23).

[5] Cf. "Powys stresses the extraordinary liberation psychoanalysis is going to bring to man by ridding him of injunctions, hardships and the moral gravity imposed by tradition and religion" (Peltier, "And What about *Psychoanalysis and Morality*?" 35). Peltier also emphasises the transitory nature of this optimistic approach to psychoanalysis and the move away from it in

argument: in a rather Blakean turn he connects “ethical austerity in the matter of sex” with “philosophical austerity in the matter of the cosmic mystery” – that is with a restriction on the freedom of individual thought in the domain of the sacred (23). By opening up the unfathomable depths of the human soul, psychoanalysis seems to be liberating in this respect, as well: it facilitates pluralism, ironic criticism and “humorous indulgence” (23–32). Powys even comes to define art and literature in psychoanalytic terms when he claims that not only the creation of texts and their reception are erotic in nature (31), but also the individual’s attitude to the world (33). In fact, *Psychoanalysis and Morality* suggests that psychoanalysis – and literature, being both its forerunner and the user of its achievements – facilitates an intrusion of the pluralistic (Rabelaisian?) vision of the world into such hostile territories as science, Christian ethics and metaphysics. By the time *Weymouth Sands* was published in 1934, this optimism was obviously gone, as the representation of psychoanalysis *through* the image of vivisection analysed below clearly shows, while the liberating aspects earlier associated with it are gradually transferred to “Rabelaisian” discourses proper.

Far from reading *Weymouth Sands* as a direct realisation of Powys’s theoretical notions, let me use *Rabelais* and *Psychoanalysis and Morality* to throw into relief the subtleties of its metaphorical identification of vivisection and psychoanalysis. The metaphor evolves into a network of motifs which finely interlace the whole texture of the novel, encouraging a reading which strives to go behind or beyond the two essayistic texts partly containing Powys’s own interpretation of his writing practice via his personal philosophy. In *Weymouth Sands* both vivisection and psychoanalysis are instances of the abject, metaphorically linked to most characters in the novel and thus drawing into their field of force almost the entire text. Let me explore this network of images and characters to demonstrate how Powys’s “multiverse” is built on a simultaneous repulsion from and fascination with several aspects of human existence depicted as abject, not by any chance restricted to such particular phenomena as vivisection – or psychoanalysis, for that matter. Powys’s metaphor evokes Julia Kristeva’s (not so rhetorical) question about the analyst: ”Would he then be capable of […] displaying the abject without confusing himself for it? Probably not” (*Powers of Horror* 210). Going beyond the platitude of repeating the Kristevan idea that if not all literature (*Powers* 207) then at least “[g]reat modern literature unfolds over [the] terrain [of the abject]” (*Powers* 18), one can claim that Powys’s position turns out to be a very special one in Modernist literature. His constant fight with “the repellent”, culminating in his Rabelaisian philosophy, means consciously posing the carnivalesque spirit against abjection

Powys’s later philosophy: “But at the time of this essay [*Psychoanalysis and Morality*], there is no question yet of ‘hard crystal’ or core or of the life techniques which would allow us to live as well as possible with our contradictions” (35).

– two notions which are hardly separable, as Kristeva's exposition of Céline's oeuvre also indicates (*Powers* 138–95). How far such a division is practicable remains one of the major dilemmas of *Weymouth Sands.*

To demonstrate how the abject seems to appropriate the whole texture of the novel, let me start with the core of the metaphorical network related to it, that is, with the identification of vivisection and psychoanalysis revealing that both belong to the domain of the Kristevan abject. For the sake of clarity two aspects of these phenomena can be differentiated and treated separately: the representation of the analyst as a vivisector and the analysand as a vivisected animal, with interwoven remarks on the relationship of the two. The related metaphors feature some of the motifs prioritised by Kristeva as appearances of the abject, such as the corpse (*Powers* 3–4), the living dead, the ghost (cf. Cristian passim) and the ambiguous border (*Powers* 4)[6], and lead on to more general issues, such as abjection of the self (*Powers* 5–6), the ambiguous feelings attached to the abject (9–10), the ethics of psychoanalysis, the location of the speaking subject (*Powers* 11–12), the structuring of plot and the specific aspects of narrative consciousness in the novel.

Dr. Brush, the analyst and vivisector, who is repeatedly described as a corpse, who despises himself, his own science and the whole of humanity, who feels unsurpassable pleasure while interminably experimenting with his patients without the faintest hope of cure, readily lends himself to interpretation as the psychoanalyst who – to refer back to Kristeva quoted above – does not simply "confuse himself" with the abject he displays in his patients (*Powers* 210) but in fact *is* abject. The first aspect of this complex phenomenon to be mentioned is that Daniel Brush is apostrophised as a corpse in various ways: he is a "corpse-man", "a cadaver" and he is compared to a hanged man making love to a half-dead panther (*WES* 448–9). Kristeva assigns a definitive role to the corpse (cadaver) as the embodiment of the border (death) against which the subject defines itself and to which all other forms of waste are related:

[6] Charles Lock in "*Weymouth Sands* and the Matter of Representation: Live Dogs, Stuffed Animals and Unsealed Stones" treats the problem of representation in the novel in the context of ambiguous borders/boundaries. In his opinion, Powys undermines the "modern schema of representation" which is "a triumph of humanism" by making basic oppositions, such as those of the human and the inhuman, the animate and the inanimate, the subject and the object, etc., "indistinct" and "interchangeable" (29–31). He connects this with the "framed" nature of the text – with the function of the puppet-show in it, which defines the carnivalesque "model" of *Weymouth Sands* as an "unending sequence of stages, each separated from the others by proscenium arches, these arches being, as it were, reversible" (35). His insights into the interrelationship of ambiguous boundaries, representation (signification), carnival and vivisection could be easily translated into Kristevan terms as a concern with the representation of the abject, i.e. something that defies representation in the Symbolic.

> The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere,* to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, a cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. […] If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. […] the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. (*Powers* 3–4)

Powys assigns to vivisection and the psychologist the role of the very border mentioned here that defines not only the individual human being, but, in the case of *Weymouth Sands*, humanity as such. It gains force partly through the spatial symbolism of the novel, partly through the more than questionable ethical stance embodied by Dr. Brush.

While the location of the institution clearly situates it as a metaphorical border, the characters' emotional reaction to the building, a metonymy for vivisection and psychological treatment, interprets it more specifically as a psychological border – of horror, madness and death – against which the subject defines himself. Since "[w]hat was now the Brush Home was hidden away in so out of the world spot, that very few among what Homer calls 'articulately-speaking men' who lived in Weymouth had ever been near it, though most people had heard of it" (*WES* 109–110), the institution is figuratively placed at the border of the (known) human world – in a horizontal dimension, it is like a terra ingcognita, in a vertical one it is like the underworld. Later the Brush Home is actually compared to Hades (*WES* 518). This is the psychological Hell's Museum (*WES* 86) against which characters in the novel, by rejecting vivisection and madness, can define themselves as live, sane and moral, thereby establishing their own identity and humanity. This is the case with such relatively uncomplicated minor characters as Marret (*WES* 401), Chant (*WES* 111–12) or even the neurotic child Benny Cattistock, who makes his first appearance in the novel with a dog in his arms just rescued from vivisection (*WES* 100). In fact, it is popular wisdom that has given the place the name "Hell's Museum" (*WES* 111–12), which thus expresses the self-definition of the community of the people living in its vicinity through rejecting it and placing it beyond, or rather below the limits of the human world. It is only Dogberry Cattistock, "the man of action" (Knight 46), a representative of a spirit totally alien from Weymouth, who appreciates the scientific practices of Dr. Brush to the extent that he finances his "experimental laboratory". Even he finds vivisection "devilish queer" (WES 437), though, when on his wedding day he ends up watching the doctor the whole day instead of making his appearance at church.

However, in the exemplary cases of Magnus Muir and Sylvanus Cobbold vivisection, though clearly forming a border, also exposes something unbearable *within* the human psyche that actually threatens identity. Magnus Muir's impressions play a definitive role in establishing the function of vivisection as border. Just as he finds it difficult even to look at Daniel Brush "without an obscure horror" (*WES* 102), at the thought that "[t]his man is a vivisector […] a sickening sensation of anger and disgust [takes] possession of him" (*WES* 101). The sight of the very building also provokes "sick aversion and distaste" (*WES* 110) in him. His emphatic bodily reaction is a perfect example of the "loathing" and "repugnance" one feels for the abject (cf. Kristeva, *Powers* 2). His aversion soon takes on the form of the fear of death – he senses "an atmosphere of such horror that he fidgeted in his seat and felt sick in his stomach as if he were going to see an execution" (*WES* 110) – and the fear of losing his sanity. The latter, however, becomes intertwined with his desire for Curly, so that the two affects are intermixed in the same bodily sensation:

> 'How can any one of us have a single moment of happiness […] when there's such a thing as vivisection in the world? And yet would I, to stop it once and for all, and to burn all their operating tables and all their straps and all their instruments, be prepared to sacrifice Curly?'
>
> The coming together of these two electrified nerves in Magnus' nature, his erotic passion and his sickening twinge over vivisection, threw him […] into a series of jumpy contortions. He kept experiencing a twitching in his long legs, and every now and then with a muscular contraction that corresponded to what he visioned was happening under Mr. Murphy's devotion to science he would draw up one of his heels along the floor of the car.
>
> 'I suppose […] the only thing to do is to *assume* that life contains cruelties so unspeakable that if you think about them you go mad! That's what it is! To think about Murphy and Dr. Brush's dogs brings you into the care of Dr. Brush!' (*WES* 306)

It is in combination with sexuality and unavowable pleasure that vivisection – and psychoanalysis – play the threatening role of the abject[7], which is "[o]n the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me" (Kristeva, *Powers* 2).

Sylvanus Cobbold undergoes a much more amplified version of a similar experience during his "analysis" in the asylum. When forcibly hospitalised in the Brush Home for the alleged seduction of young girls – a crude simplification of

[7] Cf. Linda Pashka's rather similar interpretation, according to which Magnus "experiences the sympathetic pain contortions of a torture victim, and these are much like orgasm" (48) here.

his relationship with women probably best explained as a form of "erotic mysticism" (Krissdottir, *John Cowper Powys* 105–7) – he undertakes something like a crusade against vivisection and to stop it he figuratively loses his life and becomes a Christ-like figure. Grotesquely, his reaching out to the Absolute via an embodiment of the feminine is replaced by the perverted eroticism of the analytical situation: the impersonalised, passive personality of the analyst makes the impression of his ideal listener, a woman, on Sylvanus and he is "seized with a mysterious spasm of turbulent erotic emotion" (*WES* 537), which he consciously rejects as perverted. Desire, the need to fill in a lack, whether physical or metaphysical, and rejection are mixed in the characters' attitude to vivisection and psychoanalysis, in their "fascinated start that leads them toward it and separates them from it" (Kristeva, *Powers* 2); it becomes an ambiguous, ever-moving border that forces the subject to keep "straying" (Kristeva, *Powers* 8).

The intrapersonal tensions of such a "straying" subject reach a culmination in Dr. Brush's abjection of the self, generalised as misanthropy in *Weymouth Sands*: fully aware of the fact that his medical practices – both vivisectional and psychoanalytic – are morally unacceptable, he also admits to finding his only pleasure in them, that is, he finds the abject, "the impossible within" (Kristeva, *Powers* 5), as the core of his very integrity. His notion of psychoanalysis – actually a crude version of Freudism – is briefly outlined at the moment of its dramatic change during his "treatment" of Sylvanus Cobbold:

> The grand difference between his old system and his new one lay in the hypotheses they respectively assumed with regard to the *locality* of all those dark, disturbing impulses, manias, shock-bruises, neuroses, complexes that he regarded as both the causes and the symptoms of human derangement. In his old system these volcanic neuroses were resident in an entirely subliminal region, a permanent underworld of the human ego from which they broke forth to cause unhappiness and anguish. This region was out of reach, and possessed locked, adamantine gates, as far as our ordinary processes of mental introspection went. To isolate and analyse these peculiarities as aberrations it was necessary to assume some kind of well-balanced norm, some measure of well-constituted functioning, from which all such "complexes" could be regarded as lapses. (*WES* 513–14)

In this concept of psychoanalysis the analyst identifies with the "norm", the "measure" which "isolates" the abnormal from the normal. The full ironies of this stance can be realised through the representation of the self-same norm-giver as a corpse, quoted above. In the openly sexualised game of analysis with the doctor sitting as if he was wearing a "straight waistcoat" and indulging himself in his perversion of "embracing a vivisected, half-anaesthetized, snarling

panther" (*WES* 448–9), the erotic desire of the analyst is satisfied by an object kept constantly on the verge of life and death and the analyst is totally interchangeable with the analysand, whom he defines as aberrant.

In Dr. Brush's fundamental revision of his earlier scientific theories under the impact of Sylvanus Cobbold's analysis he actually comes to redefine the conscious and the unconscious along a continuum (*WES* 514)[8]. What he does – in fact, still adhering to his role as a "norm-giver" – is a redefinition of the human norm based on the analysis of a "borderline patient", whose speech "constitute[s] propitious ground for a sublimating discourse [in this case rather 'mystic' than 'aesthetic'], since he "make[s] the conscious/unconscious distinction irrelevant" (Kristeva, *Powers* 7). However, the only result is that the vivisection of dogs becomes redundant (he actually gives it up for financial reasons) when he has found a human being to "vivisect" in the person of Sylvanus, the ideal analysand, who seems to be in constant communication with his unconscious:

> Sylvanus had been in Hell's Museum now for over three months and […] turned out to be a well-nigh perfect patient. He became so interested in Dr. Brush's de-personalised personality that he was ready to humour it to the utmost. And since the essence of this man's identity was to eliminate his identity and to become a pure, unblurred mirror in which reality could reflect itself, what Sylvanus constantly aimed at was to furnish the doctor with an increasing series of new layers, new levels, new strata of his precious objective truth. As a result of this, Daniel Brush had never known such persistent, unalloyed mental excitement as he experienced during these autumn months. The more he analysed Sylvanus the more he found to analyse. And what was so extremely satisfactory about it, from Brush's point of view, was that *the question of cure* never emerged at all. The Doctor could in fact drop the "doctor" and give himself up to experiment with Sylvanus as he had never dared to experiment with anyone, no, not even with Mrs. Cobbold! (*WES* 512)

The effect of the doctor's analysis is rather similar to that of vivisection, since under the figurative knife of the doctor's cold-blooded irony Sylvanus stops being human: it "made him howl like a famished wolf" (*WES* 540) and he "gave vent to a cry that seemed hardly human" (*WES* 540). His "analysis" produces similar results as Mrs. Cobbold's, whom, in Dr. Brush's own words, he has "reduce[d] […] to a cold sepulchral pulp" (*WES* 440). The metaphor applied to

[8] Cf. J. S. Rodman's very similar interpretation of this redefinition as a "rejection of Freudian psychology" (33–5).

her emphasises the condition of being in a limbo, stuck between life and death, but belonging more to the latter, like ghosts. The condition of these patients – metaphorically vivisected animals and living dead – is abject in itself because it represents an ambiguous, in-between situation, which "disturbs identity, system, order" and "does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva, *Powers* 4). Their cases imply that if the psychoanalyst represents a border or measure, it is rather in the sense that like death, he "has encroached upon everything" (Kristeva, *Powers* 4) and assimilates his patients – his objects – to himself to make them abject.

If there is one person in the novel who faces vivisection and psychoanalysis as abject, it is Dr. Brush himself:

> 'When I hear my sweet hypocritical colleagues, […] like so many clever politicians, defending experimentation as a humane duty for the curing of disease, I feel that the human race is so contemptible that the sooner some totally different creation takes its place, the better for the universe! Man is a loathsome animal, prodigious in his capacity for a particular kind of disgusting cruelty, covered up with ideal excuses. If I were allowed – as no doubt we *shall* be in half-a-century – to vivisect *men*, I'd gladly let the dogs alone. Comical, comical! It's comical but it's also a little ghastly! I wonder if our sentimental devotees comprehend what we real scientists are like. Mad! That's what we're like. It's a vice. *I know what it is*. And I know what I am. I am a madman with a vice for which I'd vivisect Jesus Christ.' (*WES* 444–5)

It is Dr. Brush's clear-sighted and disillusioned vision of himself that widens the scope of abjection: psychoanalysis becomes generalised as science, and the vivisector-analyst becomes an exemplary representative of the human species which is abject exactly because of its ability to carry out such practices. He also emphasises the ambiguous nature of this practice, since, as an excellent example of the abject, it cunningly covers its inhumanity with the interests of the human kind (cf. Kristeva, *Powers* 4). It questions the Enlightenment vision of the man of Reason, of which late nineteenth-century Positivism, defining the basic approach of even such sciences as psychoanalysis, was a logical continuation. Dr. Brush's vision of psychoanalysis, thriving on the abject, and of mankind, loathsome for sanctioning it, is at the same time apocalyptic: full of pessimism, he predicts the well-deserved and unavoidable end of such a race.

The Promise of a New Discourse: A Glimpse of the Golden Age

Nevertheless, as a counterpoint to the bleak image outlined above, *Weymouth Sands* – similarly to *Wolf Solent* – involves a vision of the Golden Age at a crucial juncture. It is also associated with the resolution of the dilemmas the novel poses, but the Dostoevskian allusion – the reminiscence of Stavrogin's vision in *Devils* (cf. Dostoevsky, *Stavrogin's Confession* 64–5) – seems to be much more prominent in this text. As a further parallel to *Wolf Solent*, it is also the fate of the Powys hero to gain a glimpse the Golden Age here, and formulate a vision which writes over Stavrogin's, and even more particularly his "disciples'" monologic, ideologising readings of the mytheme. In *Weymouth Sands* the motif evolves into a carnivalesque acceptance of growing up, being imperfect, seeing the cosmos as recreated out of the chaos surrounding it with each new day, and being aware that temporary boundaries exist only to be washed away – and redrawn. As the elaboration of the motif and its association with Dr Mabon suggest, the tone of *Weymouth Sands* is defined by the spirit of this vision, which can be read both as the *mise an abyme* and a metatext of the entire novel.

The Weymouth appearing in the Powys hero Magnus Muir's consciousness in the course of his mythic vision, which is fundamentally the elaboration of the eponymous metaphor of the novel into a complex image of the Golden Age, is the model of the whole (fictional) universe. As such, it is a cosmos separated from the chaos of non-being only by fluid boundaries, which is able to contain simultaneously the carnivalesque and grotesque moments of buffoonery and the perfect harmony of Golden Age – or at least its promise. Before a closer analysis of Magnus's vision and the exploration of the central figure of "Weymouth sands", however, it is worth looking at the narrower and wider context of the image. The vision appears in the chapter entitled "Punch and Judy", which creates suspense between the anticlimax of the plot and its resolution in the two final chapters, and makes the impression of a tableau, a standstill. The importance of the scene is highlighted by the fact that in the whole story covering the events of almost a year this chapter features the only sunlit summer day – Magnus's birthday in August (*WES* 467). Consequently, the Weymouth beach appears – for once – as most fitting for the idyllic seaside resort. And the beach is unimaginable without a "Punch-and-Judy performance" (*WES* 4) – the comic show the non-fictional Weymouth is actually famous for[9]. This

[9] The puppet-show, which has been performed for centuries according to by and large the same scenario but with a half-improvised libretto, features Punch as its main character. He first throws his child out of the window, and then beats to death Judy, his understandably upset wife, with his stick. In the rest of the play he goes through a large number of adventures, all of which involve

carnivalesque performance and a sort of mythical perspective, which Magnus calls his own “Homeric religion”[10], determine his emphatically phantasmagoric mental image of the small town: “It seemed an immaterial, an insubstantial thing to him just then, a thing made of the stuff of thought! It was as if in all its long nights and days an impalpable thought-image of it had been wrought, that on such an afternoon as this substituted itself for the solid reality” (*WES* 465). Weymouth appears as a subjective space, in the formation of which the carnivalesque and the Saturnian vision are inseparably intertwined.

Seen in this context, the description of the beach with its sharp focus on the metaphor of “Weymouth sands” is fairly consistent with Magnus’s overall vision: it involves images of the Golden Age and the abject – seen as carnivalesque – simultaneously and depicts them as mutually dependent on each other:

> That difference, for instance, between the *dry* sand and the *wet* sand, which had remained in the memory of Magnus as a condensation of the divergent experiences of his life, heightened the way everything looked from the esplanade till it attained the symbolism of drama. On the dry sand sat, in little groups, the older people, reading, sewing, sleeping, talking to one another, while on the wet sand the children, building their castles and digging their canals were far too absorbed and content to exchange more than spasmodic shouts to one another. The free play of so many radiant bare limbs against the sparkling foreground-water and the bluer water of the distance gave to the whole scene a marvellous heathen glamour, that seemed to take it out of Time altogether, and lift it into some ideal region of everlasting holiday, where the burden of human toil and the weight of human responsibility no more lay heavy upon the heart.
>
> There, above, on the *dry* sand, there were forever limning and dislimning themselves groups and conclaves of a rich, mellow, Rabelaisian mortality, eating, drinking, love-making, philosophizing, full of racy quips, scandalous jibes, and every sort of earthy, care-forgetting ribaldry. But as these mothers and these fathers, these uncles and these aunts from hundreds of Dorset villages [...] formed and reformed their groups of Gargantuan joviality and exchanged remarks upon the world that were “thick and slab” with the rich mischiefs of a thousand years, while, I say, the *dry* sands of Weymouth received the imprint of these mature glosses upon the life that went crying and weeping by, [...] the *wet* sands of Weymouth were imprinted by the

beating up his enemies. In the end he is to be hanged, but he manages to escape even the gallows – what is more, he even kills Satan/Death. Cf. (Mayhew).

[10] Cf. “but I fancy I am the only one who accepts Homer’s philosophy as my own and Homer’s religion as my own” (*WES* 485).

"printless" feet, light, immortal, bare, of what might easily have been the purer spirits of an eternal classical childhood, happy and free, in some divine limbo of unassailable play-time. (*WES* 462–463)

Since the introduction of this passage defines the atmosphere of the scene through ekphrasis – a comparison to Jean-Antoine Watteau's painting entitled *Embarkation for Cythera* – the image evokes both the mytheme of the Golden Age, the Isle of the Blessed, and one of its most famous literary representations involving ekphrasis, Stavrogin's confession (cf. Lukacher 20–21; Hyman 21). While Stavrogin's version proves to be an ultimately failed attempt to redraw the subject's boundaries through myth – the discourse of Law and the transcendental signified (cf. Bell 9–38; Riceour 5–6; Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 7) – Powys seems to apply a fundamentally different strategy here. The cosmos of Weymouth is barely separated by a thin line of sand from the amazing primeval chaos of the sea – which appears in the novel as the archetypal metaphor of the unconscious, the abode of the sea serpent representing chaos (e.g. in the chapter "The Sea Serpent", cf. Eliade 48) and the realm of death. The narrow line of sand – the space of the conscious and of earthly life – is nevertheless an ephemeral and insecure boundary, which has to be fought back from the sea each and every day. The Golden Age of childhood, this mythic, timeless world placed on the border of the universe of signs, which might as well never have existed, is inevitably replaced by adulthood. The latter is, in contrast, pronouncedly carnivalesque, somewhat obscene and grotesque, definitely corporeal and can assert itself with the help of signs. Nonetheless, it is also idyllic in its own way. Similarly to the border between the sand and the sea, the division line between childhood and adulthood also seems to be insecure and permeable. The description of the two kinds of sand can be interpreted both as a contrast of childhood – "the age of innocence" – and a carnevalesque, frolicsome, experienced adulthood in the context of individual development, and as a cosmology, in which the separation of chaos and cosmos is followed first by the mythic Golden Age of humanity, and then by a grotesque, Rabelaisian era. This Weymouth idyll contains both of the latter, but narrative, text and identity can be born only from the carnivalesque vortex – only facing the abject and overcoming the narcissistic crisis of encountering the body and its dissolution can lead to the emergence of the speaking subject. In the world of *Weymouth Sands,* speaking *about* or *from* another position is neither possible nor worthwhile.

This carnivalesque vision slowly but surely appropriates the whole chapter – or rather the entire novel. "Punch and Judy" enumerates almost all the characters of *Weymouth Sands*, whom Magnus Muir interprets as figures in the ongoing *Punch and Judy* performance. In his words, "'There is something […] of Punch in me, in Gaul, in Jerry, in old Poxwell, in the Jobber! Punch must be the eternal

embodiment of what Rabelais calls the 'Honest Cod', the essential masculine element, in every living man'" (*WES* 465). In the same vein, as Linda Pashka also points out, the text of the entire novel can be read as a bitter *Punch and Judy* show (30). One of its first scenes involves the performance of the puppeteers on a cold winter beach, but the analogy does not end here. As if to emphasise the unstable boundaries of "stage" and "reality", Marrett, "the Punch and Judy girl", who is a spectral reminiscence of a puppet herself with her face evoking a "china doll" (*WES* 388) and her body resembling a clothed broomstick, leaves the puppet show and "comes alive". She is in good company in crossing this insecure boundary – Jerry Cobbold, the "world-famous" clown (*WES* 8) also keeps playing a role without a break, even in his private life (cf. *WES* 204). Both the novelistic characters themselves and their personal relationships evoke a carnivalesque turmoil, since they form and re-form emotional ties in the most surprising combinations. This holds true for the Cobbold brothers – otherwise typical carnivalesque parodying doubles (cf. Bakhtin, *Problems* 127) – for Tissty and Tossty Clive, who seem to be interchangeable throughout most of the text; for Jobber Skald, who is simply a twentieth-century reincarnation of Gargantua (*WES* 54); and last but not least, for the abortionist Dr. Girodel, who is an embodiment of Panurge (*WES* 228). In the meantime, these figures gradually seem to become ghosts in the carnivalesque underworld of the novel – whether it means being an inhabitant of the "Homeric" underworld (*WES* 479), featuring as a grotesque "Holy Ghost" (*WES* 333), resembling a living dead recovering from a spiritual breakdown (*WES* 577), or feeling like the "moaning and gibbering" ghost of the *Punch and Judy* show (*WES* 465).

All in all, though the emblematic image of the sunlit sea at dawn or sunset, which – just like in *Wolf Solent* – clearly associates the mytheme of the Golden Age, appears several times in *Weymouth Sands* (pl. *WES* 392, 497), the myth itself is reinterpreted on slightly different terms here. The Golden Age appears as a subversive discourse, which is able to present carnivalesque phenomena outside the concepts of sin and the abject (religious and ethical discourses) or disease (scientific discourse). In other words, it evades the discourse of the Law and the Father, and offers the alternative of a carnivalesque vision instead of the abjection of the self for the subject. It is for this reason that the promise of the Golden Age as an alternative discourse associated with one particular fictional character is written exactly into this vision, as a scene in the "Punch and Judy" chapter.

In the light of Magnus's vision, the promise of a new kind of science – and morality – heralded by the arrival of the new physician, which apparently offers an obvious but rather weak counterpoint to the dominant abject vision, gains much more weight. The tentative indication of a new approach to science and life represented by Dr. Mabon is linked to the Golden Fleece and a retrieval of

the Golden Age of mankind, though apart from Magnus's intuitive attraction to the man there is not much else to support it. After the narrator's introduction, claiming that "this day there did happen to be a sort of oracle delivered, though its utterer […] was a complete stranger to the town" (*WES* 499) it is the Latin tutor who, on their first meeting – and the new doctor's last appearance in the novel – attaches outstanding importance to Dr. Mabon: "I'd like to know this chap's philosophy. He's in advance of all of us. He sees far. He's like the Pilot of the Argo. God! I hope he stays here!" (*WES* 503) The doctor, the writer of a "purely *biological*" (*WES* 504) book on ethics, which he thinks is "barbarous" (*WES* 502), is also a conchologist, who looks "as if he would willingly have exchanged his present incarnation for the life of a Solen [a species of shells]" (*WES* 502). He "seemed to have a special look for everyone, with its own humorous commentary upon the world, but a *different* commentary for each separate person in a group" (*WES* 503). It is his short dialogue with Magnus which gives the promise of a new science beyond psychoanalysis: he explains that having "dropped psychoanalysis" he does "nothing but listen … and … move … perhaps … a few things that have got in the way!" while treating "neurotic cases". The following narratorial comment identifies this particular statement as the "oracle" (*WES* 504–5) mentioned above and thus underpins the exceptional importance of Dr. Mabon's rather general comment. His whole personality and approach poses a sharp contrast to Dr. Brush's: a lover and admirer of nature, he is an advocate of non-intrusion and benevolent, humorous, tolerant passivity. His "dropping" of psychoanalysis together with the representation of its practice in *Weymouth Sands* as vivisection marks Powys's disappointment in his extremely optimistic expectations concerning psychoanalysis. What he presents here seems to be nothing else but the Rabelaisian alternative – in the Powysian sense outlined in his *Rabelais* – to the experimental cruelty and *jouissance* of psychoanalysis as abject.

The Lure of the Abject – the Speaking Subject, Characters and Plot

If going beyond psychoanalysis as vivisection is represented directly in *Weymouth Sands* only as a passing glimpse of a Rabelaisian Golden Age, indirectly it permeates practically all the levels of the text, though inseparably tied to the abject. The tracking down of another facet of the original metaphor, the image of the ghost for the analysand reappearing throughout the text of the novel in a more generalised sense reveals that the fascination with the abject in the whole of *Weymouth Sands* is far from being restricted to Dr. Brush. In fact, abjection is the position from which the speaking subject seems to enunciate being – the only proper location worth writing about at all. The novel is teeming with abject characters and scenes – psychic health seems to be the exception that

proves the rule. Their treatment, however, is dominated by light-hearted indulgence and non-critical tolerance on the narrator's part, resulting in a polyphonic multiverse of several colliding perspectives filtered through the narrative voice with equal power and "truth-value". Last but not least, Powys's fascination with the abject, this "'something' that I do not recognize as a thing", but which is "not nothing, either" (Kristeva, *Powers* 2) might shed light on the fundamentally bathetic nature of the plot of *Weymouth Sands*, the conspicuously empty centre of the novel.

The metaphor of the ghost for the analysand mentioned above is merged in the text of the novel with the leitmotif of the "Homeric dead" applied to all the inhabitants of Weymouth – in fact, to the whole of mankind. While the patients of the Brush Home are, as mentioned above, associated with the vivisected dogs from the very beginning, the metaphorical parallel for the condition of the suffering animals, neither dead nor living, is that of the ghost. Ghosts, as an extension of the notion of the corpse, are by definition abject. The patients of the asylum, the "brain-tortured unresting ghosts who could neither realise their dolorous identities nor forget them" (*WES* 518) become more specifically associated with the inhabitants of the Homeric underworld when they are compared to Sylvanus Cobbold: "And like Teiresias in Hades it seemed to be the destiny of Sylvanus to find rational articulation, if nothing else, for the blind gibberings of these poor ghosts" (*WES* 518). The context implies a connection of the unconscious, language and identity exemplified by the image of the Homeric dead, which, though the idea allegedly comes from Magnus Muir, is elaborated on by Sylvanus Cobbold[11]:

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[11] It is at this point that the acknowledged autobiographical nature of these two characters (*WES* "Note by Author") becomes rather obvious. Powys himself was fascinated with the motif of the descent to the underworld represented in "Book XI" of *The Odyssey*. His conclusions about the "pessimistic" Homeric attitude to death, which is "a pitiful half-life", are strikingly similar to the more mystically elaborated notions of Sylvanus Cobbold:

> Some would say, 'Why should we try to realise and to appropriate to our imaginations this Homeric view, if it be so dark and tragic?' Because it is not the tragedy of the general human fate that debases our spirit and lowers the temper of our lives; it is the burden of our private griefs, our private wrongs, and the weight of ills 'that flesh is heir to'. […]
>
> Granting that the Homeric view of the fate of the dead is the darkest […] it remains that it saves a man from that irrational fear of vengeance of the Creator, which, while it has kept few cruel ones from their cruelty, has driven insane so many sensitive and gentle natures.
>
> And what most of us suffer from is our absorption in our own cares and worries and afflictions, not any indignant spiritual protest against the general fate of the human race. (*The Pleasures of Literature* 73–4)

‘That tragic half-life of the dead in Homer, that I heard Mr. Muir talk about once at High House, lies behind everything. […] If you […] take that half-life as if it were the bottom of the sea you give the sweet light of the sun its true meaning. Unhappiness comes from not realising that life is two-sided. The other side of life is always death. The dead in Homer are tragic and pitiful, but they are not *nothing*. Their muted half-life is like the watery light at the bottom of the sea. […] That Homeric death-life is tragically sad, but it has a beauty like the dying away of music when instead of becoming *nothing* music carries us in its ebb-flow down to this sea-bottom of the world – […] – where it’s all echo and reflection, where it’s all memory and mirrors of memory and brooding upon what is and is not.” (*WES* 258–9)

At this point the image of vivisection becomes related to the metaphysical dimensions of the novel: life and identity are defined and only definable against death, against nothing, while the Homeric dead become the image of the human condition of being in a limbo. It is not by chance that, as a “result of his metaphysical struggles” (*WES* 408), Sylvanus's face becomes comparable to that of the Homeric dead, “who, while they can remember and forget, are completely deprived of all the creative energy of the power of thought”. The rational language of science – the approach of the analyst comparable only to vivisection – is helpless in the face of the “ocean of human experience” (*WES* 514). Since the ocean, another leitmotif of the novel (Robinson, *Sensualism* 28), is also a metaphor for the psyche, Sylvanus’s mystical preaching can also be read as his definition of being – based on the constant awareness of nothing, of a lack, of death *within*.

Thus, on the one hand, the metaphor of the ghost for the analysand is a perfect embodiment of the abject, since “all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded” (Kristeva, *Powers* 5). On the other hand, it is also an attempt to resolve the irresolvable dichotomy of life and death, being and nothing, and as such, it is positively opposed to the solution offered by psychoanalysis and science – the image of the vivisected animal. It is not Dr. Brush who can facilitate his patients’ (re)entrance into the Symbolic and self-definition but Sylvanus Cobbold, their “Teiresias”, “the ghost of the blind Theban prophet […] whose reason is still unshaken” (Homer). Sylvanus is different from the other patients, “the other ghosts [who] flit about aimlessly” (Homer), “the sad troops of the enfeebled Dead, who were sub-conscious, sub-sensitive, sub-normal, sub-substantial” (*WES* 479), exactly because of his ability to verbalise much deeper layers of his psyche and thereby to establish an identity of his own. In *Weymouth Sands* the hyper-consciousness of Sylvanus Cobbold – the “’mystical’ sublimating discourse” of the “borderline subject” (Kristeva, *Powers* 7) – embodies the most extreme potentials of the

ghostly/ghastly human condition, a self-analysis and self-definition opposed to psychoanalysis represented as vivisection while carrying on the implications of the same metaphor.

While the motif of vivisection, as outlined above, leads to a fundamentally misanthropic approach to mankind seen as abject, *Weymouth Sands* actually abounds in "ghosts" and in "improper/unclean" characters (Kristeva, *Powers* 2) who transgress officially accepted social norms usually because of their more or less serious psychic disturbances and/or unusual sexual inclinations and who are treated neutrally, in a lightsome manner or even with fascination. Let me give only a few examples in a rather sketchy manner – relevant features are so abundant in *Weymouth Sands* that to do otherwise would amount to retelling the whole novel.

Adam Skald is obsessed with killing Dog Cattistock, which he also sees as the only way to keep his personal integrity, as the core of his identity (*WES* 360–61). This is exactly why his newly found love, Perdita, leaves him – she finds him abject. By the end of the novel the forsaken man is so devastated, both spiritually and bodily, that he becomes physically repulsive, looking as if "he had already joined the ranks of those Homeric […] of the enfeebled Dead" (*WES* 479). When the lovers are reunited at the end of the novel, after Perdita's long absence, presumable mental breakdown and physical illness – her own special descent to hell –, both of them are described as "skeletons", his face is "positively ghastly in its disfigurement" and hers is "the face of the dead come to life" (*WES* 577).

Magnus Muir is haunted by the ghost of his dead father to such an extent that he sometimes ceases to have a separate identity of his own. During the lifetime of the elder Muir it was Magnus's "fear of his father […] that made his love-affairs come to nothing" (*WES* 19). *Weymouth Sands* is partly about the forty-five-year-old tutor's attempt to wrestle himself free from this fear five years after his father's death. The interiorised prohibition on bonding with women reappears in a slightly veiled form as his fear that his marriage with Curly will force him to leave the security of the maternal lap/womb associated with Miss Le Fleau's house [its atmosphere dominated by the elder Muir's furniture (*WES* 95)] and push him into the horrors of a life described in terms of a (vivisectional) industrial torture-chamber:

> He felt it now as a menacing engine-house that he was entering – a place full of cogs and pistons and wheels and screws and prodding spikes – and full of people with bleeding limbs. A vague horror, like that of extreme physical pain, oppressed him. He felt as if all the hidden places where sensitive life was tortured had opened their back-doors to him, and the moans from within were groping at his vitals. (*WES* 95)

Curly, standing for sexual relationship and the feminine, becomes the luring but also horrifying object of his desire. This contradiction surfaces in Magnus's inability to consummate his desire and counteract Curly's manoeuvres to postpone their wedding, and is sublimated in his positioning Curly against vivisection, as the sacrifice he could – or should? – make in the name of humanity to stop this unbearable cruelty (cf. the quote from *WES* 306 above). Ironically, this is what literally happens at the end of the novel: the expenses of Curly's leaving for Italy with Dog Cattistock make the miser stop financing Dr. Brush's laboratory and thereby bring vivisection to its end. Magnus goes on heartbroken, but not without a sense of relief. His narrative lends itself to interpretation most easily as a story of the feminine and sexuality treated as abject under the influence of the Law of the Father (cf. Kristeva, *Powers* 2). His sacred horror of the feminine, based on the incest taboo, the prohibition on the maternal (cf. Kristeva, *Powers* 71) might shed light on the conspicuous absence of mothers from the novel: *Weymouth Sands* is teeming with orphans (both infants and adults), childless mother-aged women and careless, malfunctioning mothers. Powys's rejection of Christian morality is almost literally translated here into fictional terms, since his view of the punishing God with His ban on sexuality – "to each superego its abject" (Kristeva, *Powers* 2) – predestines the feminine as abject[12]. It also explains to a certain extent why he finds the Christian notion of sin totally unsatisfactory in coping with the abject (Kristeva, *Powers* 90–112) and tries to come up with alternative solutions represented as the philosophies of the individual characters in the novel.

Most of the other characters can be also termed abject for one reason or another. Thus, Dog Cattistock is a miser to a pathological extent, which makes him unable to bond with women (*WES* 446–8). Captain Poxwell and his daughter Lucinda play out a scenario of incest which drives the father practically mad (*WES* 302) and leaves the daughter not much saner, either. James Loder puts his physical pain on show most perversely and tortures his children with his

[12] This aspect of *Weymouth Sands* – though without the application of Kristevan terminology – is clearly elaborated in Pashka's analysis. She reads *Weymouth Sands* as a *Punch and Judy* show (30), which she interprets, in turn, "as fantasy, as a world in which Judy represents *the* attractive*/repulsive object of desire*" (34, emphasis added). She goes on to explore elements of the *Punch and Judy* show in the novel, including symbolic objects, characters and their relationships. She comes to the conclusion that the "Powysian attraction/repulsion pattern is common to not only Powys but also his several extensions – the Powys heroes, his Punch men. John Crow, Adrian Sorio, Wolf Solent and Magnus Muir all carry sticks, as Punch does […]. All use their sticks as phallic talismen, warding off or attacking desirable but evil and threatening female figures" (38). In other words, she sees "misogyny" in the core of the comic play and "at the heart of *Weymouth Sands*" (32). Her reading seems to support the relevance of my interpretation for two reasons: firstly, her insistence on the simultaneous attraction and repulsion inspired by female characters in Powys heroes points to a parallel with Kristeva's description of the abject. Secondly, by basing her analysis on the *Punch and Judy* show, she also implies a curious relationship of the carnivalesque and the feminine/abject in Powys's art.

illness (*WES* 297). Rodney Loder consciously wishes his father's death and is afraid of going mad like his uncle (178). Daniel Brush is probably a latent homosexual (*WES* 537) and definitely an overt misanthrope. Larry Zed is a charming fugitive from the Brush Home and not without a good cause. The sisters Tissty and Tossty have a most curious Lesbian and incestuous relationship with each other (*WES* 472). Peg Frampton has nymphomaniac inclinations (*WES* 476). The only proper mother in the novel, Ellen Gadget, is reputed to live in an incestuous relationship with her husband, who is also her half-brother (*WES* 249). Last but not least, almost every old family in Weymouth has had some member who was, is, or could have been a patient in the Brush Home (*WES* 487), among them the Loders (*WES* 178) and the Cobbolds (*WES* 270).

The most conspicuous examples of abjection are the brothers Jerry and Sylvanus Cobbold. "The world-famous clown" (*WES* 8) of a thousand masks and the "born prophet" (*WES* 6) function as a pair of – sometimes interchangeable – carnivalesque doubles whose identity is defined along the lines of forming two seemingly diametrically opposed versions of coping with the abject. What they share, though, is their obsession with the excremental aspects of life and a more or less morbid femininity – the abject.

In Jerry's case this fascination is overtly connected to a Rabelaisian – carnivalesque? – attitude that is much more complicated than "subsuming Rabelais' sex/excrement reverence" (Robinson, *Sensualism* 18):

> Jerry had indeed something in him that went beyond Rabelaisianism, in that he not only could get an ecstasy of curious satisfaction from the most drab, ordinary, homely, realistic aspects of what might be called the excremental under-tides of existence but he could slough off his loathing for humanity in this contemplation and grow gay, child-like, guileless. (*WES* 217)

His wife, Lucinda is one of Dr. Brush's out-patients, the "vivisected, half-anaesthetized, snarling panther" (*WES* 449), who has driven her father mad by making up a story – of course, with Powys one can never tell how fictitious – of their child born of incest. Jerry's lover, Tossty, is fatally attracted to her own sister, the beautiful Tissty. The narrator's comments place these relationships far beyond the limits of "normality": "normal sex-appeals had not the least effect upon [Jerry]. What had drawn him to Lucinda […] was a queer pathological attraction; and the same was true […] of his interest in Tossty" (*WES* 218). At the end of the novel he establishes an adulterous – and in a sense incestuous – relationship with his sister-in-law. The tainted nature of this love is already predicted half-way through the plot, much before Hortensia Lily is actually jilted on her wedding-day by Cattistock, when Jerry imagines that he would respond to

her love for him only if "Cattistock ill-used her" and "if she were outraged and *abject*" (*WES* 219, emphasis added).

Sylvanus Cobbold's fascination with excrement is part of his ritualistic, mystical adoration of every aspect of nature, and is probably best exemplified by his kissing the prongs of a fork freshly taken from a dung heap (*WES* 529). Though women are mysteriously attracted by his preaching, and he even shares his house (and bed) with two of them in the course of the novel, he does not have a sexual relationship with them. His "friends" (*WES* 489) are queer figures themselves: social outcasts (Gipsy May and Marret, the Punch-and-Judy girl), neurotics (Peg Frampton, and the hysterical Gipsy, who symbolically castrates Sylvanus [*WES* 412, 416–7] by cutting off his moustaches in his sleep out of jealousy) or somehow even not totally human (Marret is like a puppet, a long broomstick in black with the head of a china doll). But while Jerry's loathing is directed against others – he is a misanthrope – Sylvanus feels "spasmodic body-shame" (*WES* 385) he is repelled only by his own body and sees himself as abject.

Their abjection results in two different "sublimating discourses". Though Nordius claims that "[Jerry Cobbold's] misanthropy is not there to shield some precious thought-world; it is only cynical and full of contempt, devoid, it seems, of any redeeming features" (124), in the novel his abjection is sublimated in his clowning, his "artistic discourse" (Kristeva, *Powers* 7) that is not bound by the limits of the stage:

> […] Jerry's loathing for humanity was even deeper than that of Mr. Witchit […] and the only pleasure he got from his fellows was a monstrous Rabelaisian gusto for their grossest animalities, excesses, lapses, shames! These things it was, the beast-necessity in human life, that he exploited in the humours of his stage-fooling; and because he loathed his fellow-men he was able to throw into his treatment of their slavery to material filth an irresistible hilarity as well as a convincing realism, a combination that always enchanted the crowd. (*WES* 218)

His "acting *sans cesse*" (*WES* 204), also continued in the conspicuously theatrical environment of his private life (*WES* 41), even seems to serve "humanitarian" purposes for example in Perdita's eyes, who "saw the man as a sort of fragile Atlas, perpetually holding up the weight of other people's destinies and aiming above all, as he did with Lucinda, at keeping people from going mad, by an everlasting process of distraction!" (*WES* 218)

In contrast, Sylvanus Cobbold's "mystical sublimating discourse" (Kristeva, *Powers* 7) is embodied in his rather vague philosophy of the Absolute. His efforts to come up with an acceptable version of the unbearable contradictions of the human condition demonstrate how death, cruelty and the repellent are just different facets of the abject against which the individual tries to enunciate his

identity in Powys's art: "his mind gave up the struggle to reconcile his Absolute with the cruelty of things, for this began to seem beyond his power; and in place he wrestled with the Spirit in a frantic effort to make it include the Gross, the Repulsive, the Disgusting" (*WES* 384–5). His personal philosophy results in such grotesque phenomena, as his calling himself "Caput-anus" in his dialogues with the Absolute, while he carefully avoids any references to himself as "I" (*WES* 385). His idealisation of femininity – the sublimation of the abject he cannot handle – brings his relationships with both Gipsy May and Marret to a crisis since he manages to ignore their personal feelings totally. As opposed to the professional jester, it is, however, Sylvanus who can produce "a fit of Gargantuan laughter" when facing such an ironic twist of fate as Cattistock's risking his life to rescue a probably empty cask in a storm at sea and thus to become the local hero instead of Adam Skald (*WES* 285–6). At the end of the novel both Rabelaisianism without indulgence and the vision of a carnivalesque Absolute without a proper incorporation of femininity – sexuality – fail to prove satisfactory alternatives: Jerry's scheming is unmasked in the face of "authentic passion" (*WES* 570) and Sylvanus, locked up permanently in Hell's Museum, is brought to such a breakdown by Dr. Brush's cold-blooded irony and his final loss of Marret that his Absolute has to struggle back to life in a phoenix-like manner (*WES* 542).

Even such a sketchy overview of the novel's cast seems to justify A. N. Wilson's ironic summary of the case of *Weymouth Sands*: the novel "had to be retitled *Jobber Skald* since the mayor and the good people of Weymouth threatened legal action at [Powys's] depiction of the genteel seaside town as seething with evil, populated by brothel-keepers, vivisectionists and lunatics" (3). The new title is especially misleading because it veils a central feature of the novel: if *Weymouth Sands* has a main character at all, it is definitely not the Jobber – however "impressive" he is (Knight 43) – but Weymouth itself, with all its symbolic dimensions[13]. Though the novel has, by necessity, more or less elaborated and complex characters, the major ones – Magnus Muir, the Jobber, Dog Cattistock, Perdita Wane, Jerry and Sylvanus Cobbold, Richard Gaul, Rodney Loder, Daniel Brush etc. – are so numerous, that it is hardly possible to identify one main plot with a restricted number of major characters. What *Weymouth Sands* provides instead, is a collection of "imaginary portraits" (Brebner 136) – of personal philosophies and visions of the world, as if to demonstrate Powys's utterly subjectivist[14] standpoint that "the thing that

[13] The case of the two "versions", of course, includes much more than a simple "retitling" (cf. Moran passim). As far as the centrality of the setting in *Weymouth Sands* is concerned, it seems to be a common assumption in Powys criticism (cf. Moran 23–24; Rodman 40; Brebner 124; Coates 120; Krissdottir, *John Cowper Powys* 108).

[14] On subjectivist pluralism in Powys's Porius cf. (Boulter 8–9).

conceives life and absorbs life, is nothing less than the mind itself; the mind and the imagination!" (*Psychoanalysis* 28)

Though there is an omniscient third person narrator in the novel, his all-knowing reveals itself rather in an ability to enter all the characters' consciousness – and letting their different perspectives collide. It becomes most obvious in such instances when the same event is interpreted from two different characters' viewpoint, but always without the intrusion of the narrator's "final" judgment. For example in the above-mentioned case of Sylvanus Cobbold's kissing the fork out of a dung heap, the narrator's comments, dominated by Sylvanus' perspective and permeated by his ritualistic and pathetic nature-worship, are suddenly interrupted by the rather disillusioning remark that "it would have fatally lent itself to Perdita's impression of him, as one who, even when alone, was forever acting and showing off. Perdita's view of his character, and indeed the Jobber's view, too, would have been accentuated had they witnessed the sequel" (*WES* 529). The more complex characters are introduced through each other's perspectives, which often contrast with each other – most notably in Sylvanus's case, but even the "villain" of the novel, Dog Cattistock is totally humanised through Magnus Muir's vision of him and through a glimpse into his self-reflections on his disastrous wedding day. The result is a typical Powysian "multiverse" of different consciousnesses, which are in dialogic[15] relationship with each other – a "dehierarchised" (Boulter 13), polyphonic, amoral multiverse, in which the repellent, the abject is shown through an indulgent, humorous narrative voice, as if Dr. Mabon was listening with his own "humorous commentary upon the world" (*WES* 503) while his patients reveal themselves as abject.

In comparison with this multiverse of subjective visions the relative insignificance of the plot is probably indicated by its bathetic nature, so characteristic of Powys (Robinson, "Introduction" v). The focus on characters and symbolic locations is well-reflected in the chapter titles: out of the fifteen all but one are nominal, containing mostly either simply a character's name (5) or a place-name (4), as if nothing actually *happened* in the novel. The plot lines seem

[15] In Joe Boulter's analysis of pluralism in *Porius*, whose many aspects and conclusions are also highly relevant in terms of *Weymouth Sands* (cf. the collision of different perspectives [32–3], the representation of different consciousnesses on equal footing as "many world versions" existing independently from each other [e.g. 28–30]), his philosophical conception of pluralism adopted from postmodernist theory for the purposes of analysis (7) actually excludes the notion of any dialogue (25–30). Probably for this reason he does not incorporate in his studies the Bakhtinian approach, though he makes a reference to his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* by applying the term "'double-voiced' style" to Powys's text (34) without any sense of running into a self-contradiction. He also discards "carnival" as a relevant term in his frame of reference relying on Juliet Mitchell – but not on Bakhtin – who associates it with simple inversion instead of dehierarchisation (13–14). My reading, moving in the frame of reference of Bakhtinian poetics rather than postmodernist on philosophy, obviously diverges from Boulter's at this point.

to converge in Dog Cattistock and Mrs. Lily's wedding day, the day when the Jobber intends to kill Cattistock. The description of the wedding, however, is replaced on the one hand by the stories of Sylvanus and Marret's breaking up and of the man's symbolic castration, on the other hand by the meeting of the old gossips of Weymouth, who try to puzzle together the story of Hortensia Lily's jilting – an event none of them witnessed. It is only casually related that the Jobber could not carry out his murderous intentions because Cattistock, to run away from his bride in time, left his house at daybreak and the Jobber was simply too late – ironically, jilting Hortensia Lily maybe saved Cattistock's life. The day, which Cattistock has spent watching vivisection instead of consummating his desire for Captain Poxwell's younger daughter, culminates in the horribly shaken father's "abject confession"[16] of (fictitious?) incest with his other daughter and Lizzy Chant's passing out allegedly at the sight of the late Mrs Cattistock's ghost.

The two chapters covering the day of the cancelled wedding thus actually abound in moments of castration in the epistemological sense of the word (Weber 1111–12): moments, when not exactly *nothing* happens, but something which fundamentally undermines the subject's position by questioning the possibility of believing his eyes and revealing the gap between the signifier and the signified, thereby shaking forever his trust in signification. Sylvanus Cobbold experiences his symbolic castration as a moment of utter shame, after which he needs to redefine his identity (*WES* 418–9). Captain Poxwell's madness is the result of his inability to decide whether his daughter really had a child fathered by him – a story that is tentatively represented through Lucinda's consciousness as a malicious attack against her father's masculinity (*WES* 144–5): castration. The Jobber's inability to carry out the intended murder, talk of which has already come to be the narrative of his identity, results in his rapid physical and spiritual disintegration and calls for a fundamental redefinition of his identity which only becomes possible after his reunion with Perdita. And last but not least, the experience of the uncanny, exemplified by the appearance of Mrs. Cattistock's ghost, is actually built on the moment of castration (Weber 1111–14).

The anticlimactic structure of the plot opens up the epistemological and ontological uncertainties behind a Powysian multiverse abounding in ironic twists of fate. It is also inseparable from the problematic nature of the speaking subject clearly represented in *Weymouth Sands* as enunciating being from the ambiguous position of abjection. If the dynamics of plot are really structured by desire (cf. P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* 37–61), a plot structured around the ambiguous affects surrounding the abject – a simultaneous fascination and

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[16] I have borrowed the expression form Peter Brooks, who uses it to describe Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov's "whole mode […] of both calculated and uncontrollable self-abasement" (*Troubling Confessions* 73).

repulsion – in fact, can hardly be anything else but bathetic: repeating the constant "placing and displacing [of] abjection" by laughter it does not really proceed, but rather "strays" (Kristeva, *Powers* 8) in permanent fear of and constantly desiring the end of the journey, the abject[17].

In conclusion, in *Weymouth Sands* the fascination with the abject has proved to be a dominant shaping factor of the novel's extremely rich and complicated system of metaphors, its characters and themes, and its plot. It is not only Dr. Brush "embracing a vivisected, half-anaesthetized, snarling panther" (*WES* 448–9) who seems to be "in love with the abject", but the whole text that revolves around formulating sublimating discourses of the abject – the "artistic" sublimating discourse realised in the narrative of *Weymouth Sands* probably being the most successful one of them. Rabelaisianism and carnivalesque laughter – with or without the optimism both Bakhtin and Powys attach to them in their non-belletristic works – are unalienable elements in either the philosophical solutions or the narratological approach to the problem. Consequently, its representation in *Weymouth Sands* rather highlights the complexities of the issue instead of producing simplifying solutions. Janina Nordius points out the "divided response" to *Weymouth Sands* in this respect: "While some critics are anxious to state that they find this a predominantly 'happy' book [among them Wilson Knight (47)], others, on the contrary, find it permeated with a sense of loss and failure" (105). Its ambiguities, however, can be easily linked with the fascination with the abject dominating the themes of the novel and Powys's bias towards a Rabelaisian, carnivalesque approach to literature – and life.

[17] Lock expresses a similar opinion when he claims that *Weymouth Sands* is a "shaggy dog story" because Powys represents "desire [as] independent of duration", as a "perpetual condition" which is denied fulfilment exactly to externalise the termination of the text (consummation of desire, death) from the text itself ("*Weymouth Sands*" 26–27).

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