FROM CLASSICAL TO POSTMODERN: MADNESS IN INTER-AMERICAN

NARRATIVE

By

Jennifer A Krause

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the

Graduate School of Vanderbilt University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

English

August, 2009

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

Professor Michael Kreyling

Professor William Luis

Professor Earl Fitz

Professor Jason Borge

For my sister, Krystin, you know why

and

For my parents, John and Nancy

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am profoundly grateful to everyone who has helped me with this project, especially the members of my Dissertation Committee. They have provided me with generous feedback and support and allowed me to pursue my interests with a freedom I had not expected and greatly appreciate. I would specifically like to thank my advisor, Michael Kreyling, who agreed to advise me after the dissolution of the Comparative Literature program, even though he had never met me before or read any of my work. Thank you so much for taking that chance.

I could not have finished this without the help of several people, who deserve to be thanked profusely. Many thanks to Krystin, my sounding board, my support, and my portable dictionary; to Mum and Dad, for reading the whole darn thing, even if it did not make any sense; and to Christina, for providing sound advice and having answers to all my questions. And to my hounds, Astro and Rosie, who made me leave the house every day for a nice long walk. Good dogs.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PLACING FOUCAULT'S MADMAN IN THE AGE OF POPULAR CULTURE

Madness and Foucault

The trope of madness and the figure of the madman are conceptions that have for

centuries absorbed, intrigued, repulsed, and perplexed Western culture. Considerations

of madness have sparked countless literary narratives, starting with the madness of

Cervantes' Don Quixote and moving through the ages, past King Lear's Fool,

Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov, Faulkner's Benjy, and García Márquez's José Arcadio

Buendía. This fascination with madness pervades many sectors of society throughout

Western history and across geographical bounds. One of the pivotal studies of the

interaction between insanity and our own Western cultural views and biases is Michel

Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* [*Histoire de la Folie*], first published in 1961. In

Madness and Civilization, Foucault discusses the history of madness from the Middle

Ages through the Enlightenment, a moment when he claims our cultural and clinical

approaches to the madman transformed considerably due to the advent of modern society.

Although other studies also touch on this issue, Foucault's focus on a chronological

account of change within Western civilization's conception of madness and madmen,[1]

and his insistence on the links and enforced gaps between society, mediator, and lunatic

open up his theories and ideas to a wider range of implications. We can take Foucault's

work and use it as a point of departure for a study of 20th century trends in madness,

wherein the trope of madness functions as a part of not only a literary heritage, but also as

a historically, politically, and culturally charged, constantly changing reflection of society.

Using Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* as inspiration, this dissertation will take one of the fundamental structures of his study (the triad of society, mediator, lunatic) and apply it to the unique cultural circumstances in the Americas after the advent of mass culture studies. By doing so we can reach a more nuanced understanding of how society's relationship with the madman has changed. I will argue that we must find a new definition of madness in the postmodern age, a definition that takes into consideration the postmodern obsession with popular culture and the illusions it provides. Based on this definition, we must reconsider how the madman interacts with society – in the postmodern age, it is the madman, and not society, who becomes the source material for the production of mediators. Postmodern depictions of madness thus suggest an evolutionary progression of Foucault's structures, altering the form of the mediator. We need to investigate these changes, especially in an inter-American sense, in order to not only understand the literary implications of the popular culture phenomenon and its interaction with the trope of madness, but also to recognize the wider cultural implications the differing representations of this trope represent. By recognizing how disparate American nations represent madness and how their interactions with popular culture, especially North American popular culture, affect these representations, we can start to question how cultural entities like madness flow across borders and how the 'taint' of mass entertainment reflects back upon itself.

To begin our analysis, then, we must first understand Foucault. Foucault's consideration of madness begins by chronicling how each age dealt with its madmen.

The key to understanding the medieval conception of madness, for Foucault, is

abandonment. Society at large abandons the madman in a very specific way, mirroring

how the leper was once repulsed and forsaken. Foucault tells us, "Leprosy disappeared,

the leper vanished, or almost, from memory; these structures remained… Poor

vagabonds, criminals, and 'deranged minds' would take the part played by the leper, and

we shall see what salvation was expected from this exclusion, for them and for those who

excluded them as well" (Foucault, *Madness* 7). Jumbled in with other undesirables, all

touched with a hint of insanity, the madman was cast out, taking the role left vacant by

another unclean, diseased figure. Structures, as Foucault says, remained, thus ensuring a

specific form of continuity in the relationship between madman and society. Society

needed to repulse these men, to do so was to follow the strictures of the church, yet this

abandonment was more than simple negation – it also allowed for the outcasts' salvation.

For both lunatic and leper, "Abandonment is his salvation; his exclusion offers him

another form of communion" (7). The church became the intermediary between the leper

and civilization, and by association between the madman and civilization, taking control

of how and when these lunatics received their punishment.[2] The exclusion of madmen

(like the leper), not only from society in general, but also from the society found in

religion, served as both a distancing mechanism and a pathway to an inverted salvation:

"a rigorous division which is social exclusion but spiritual reintegration" (7). Madmen

treated in this manner could eventually rejoin their brethren in the next world, but only

through a total break from normalcy in this one.

Foucault, in comparing the leper to the lunatic, challenges us to follow structures

over time while still acknowledging changes in culture and meaning. He explicitly states,

"With an altogether new meaning and in a very different culture, the forms would remain the same" (Foucault, *Madness* 7). Therefore, though cultures may change over time and meaning can differ depending on where and when it takes its shape, certain structures, certain foundations, persist across borders and over centuries. The implications of this are extremely important – by looking at which structures remain constant, or which are at least present within the construction of the madman over time, we can track how, when, and where new conceptions of madness and the treatment of the madman emerge.

As the decades progressed, the connection between the leper and his salvation, between the madman and his redemption, led to a contemplation of movement. Journeys, whether the pilgrimages of wandering bands of outcasts or the voyages made by ships of fools, became synonymous with both the divide between madman and citizen and the connection between the two. As Foucault states, "It is possible that these ships of fools, which haunted the imagination of the entire early Renaissance, were pilgrimage boats, highly symbolic cargoes of madmen in search of their reason" (Foucault, *Madness* 9). The journey, the quest to find one's sanity through holy passage, represented a safeguard, one that both distinguished the madman from and connected the madman to a state of grace.[3] The paradox is thus twofold – the lunatic cannot connect but must connect with society and with the eternal, with his or her castigator and his or her salvation. Foucault thus places this madman, the first we encounter in his history, in a liminal position "on the horizon of medieval concern" (11). At the edge of things, but not beyond them, this madman was imprisoned by "the *threshold* itself," where "his exclusion must enclose him" (11). In this reading of the medieval and early Renaissance treatment of the madman, Foucault underscores one of the most important aspects of his reading of

4

madness and its relationship to society. Not only is the madman surrounded by paradox; he is also trapped in a triptych of positionality. Each era places an obstacle between society at large and the mad, constructing a buffer that both distances the madman from society and tries to, if not cure madness itself, then at least offer the lunatic some form of salvation or immortality. The degrees and manifestations of these intermediary figures change through the ages, but throughout Foucault's text the historian presents this three-fold relationship between society, madness, and liaison.

The question of death (and perhaps salvation) now becomes an important player in Foucault's conception of madness. At the end of the Middle Ages, death did not deal finality, but instead served as a portal, a go-between between society and the mad, between redemption and condemnation. In this age, madness had no cure except death, no redemption except forgiveness by an outside source, a divine intervention apart from the mortal hand of the church. As Foucault tells us, in these forms of insanity, set down so vividly by Shakespeare and Cervantes, "madness […] has no need of a physician, but only of divine mercy" (Foucault, *Madness* 31). There was no real cure: "madness still occupies an extreme place, in that it is beyond appeal" (31). Though a part of man's struggle to survive, an intimate aspect of his existence, madness had no recourse to society, no interaction with a final human redemption. The divine, the forgiveness of God, had to therefore act as the conciliator between society and the mad, but only through the finality of death, not by way of the journey once taken by the ship-bound fool or the abandonment of the leper. And death itself could not restore sanity, anymore than it could restore life – it could only reconnect society with the madman for a time. To prove his point, Foucault cites the tale of Don Quixote, wherein "Don Quixote's insane

life pursues and immortalizes him only by his insanity; madness is still the imperishable life of death" (32). This paradox, the life of death caused by madness, connects the quixotic hidalgo back to the society from which he came. Society remembers him because of his death, wherein he renounces his insanity, but society only acknowledges this remembrance because he was insane in the first place and outside the limits of society. We can use this example to re-evaluate the paradox of the intermediary in Foucault's History. This paradox continues, coupled with the presence of divinity, though the mechanism of redemption – the way by which the madman finds his way back to God – differs greatly. Foucault's structures persevere, the trinity of society, liaison and madman remains, yet the representation of that intermediary and its meaning change over time.

As the Enlightenment approached, however, the mad lost the voice they had gained in the Renaissance and madmen were no longer free of the confines of the world; instead, they became situated wholly on an earthly plain, confined within the madhouse, "no longer a ship but a hospital" (Foucault, *Madness* 35). Madness, here, was tamed by Reason and Truth: "here each form of madness finds its proper place, its distinguishing mark, and its tutelary divinity" (35). As the classical age neared, confinement reared its head as the newfound buffer between society and insanity. A need to categorize and label, to put things in their proper place, led to a revolution in the conceptualization of madness. In her reading of this section of Foucault's work in her article "Madness and Philosophy or Literature's Reason," Shoshana Felman comes to the conclusion: "The entire history of Western culture is revealed to be the story of Reason's progressive conquest and consequent repression of that which it calls madness" (Felman 209). For

Foucault, the need to put things in their place, to distinguish one thing from another, to

listen to Reason, quelled the voice given to madness by the Renaissance. At the

beginning of his second chapter, "The Great Confinement," the author writes, "By a

strange act of force, the classical age was to reduce to silence the madness whose voices

the Renaissance had just liberated, but whose violence it had already tamed" (Foucault,

Madness 38). The urge to repress madness, to confine it out of sight in a tightly

controlled, highly rational space, therefore came not from a need to oppose its violence,

which had already been suppressed, but from the need to oppose, or at least control, the

taint insanity left on those who listened to it, yet who were not consumed by it.

As the Renaissance waned, however, the place of the madman relocated once

again, especially with the house of confinement's influence on how society interacted

with insanity. The focus of the early house of confinement was not directed at how to

cure the madman, but at how to manipulate and influence his or her impact on society.

We can see this very clearly if we look at the first uses of these houses. When speaking

about the Hôpital Général, Foucault notes that it was not a medical institution, but

instead, "a sort of semijudicial structure, an administrative entity which, along with the

already constituted powers, and outside of the courts, decides, judges, and executes"

(Foucault, *Madness* 40). The purpose was not to help the inmates, but to protect the

outside world from experiencing any uncontrolled interactions with the madmen. The

house itself, as intermediary between society and madness, repressed any interaction

relating either to each other, such that the house itself was its own judge and jury, without

the influence of society's norms.[4] Foucault marks the advent of the houses of

confinement as an important and "decisive event" in the history of unreason (64). For the

author these houses represent "the moment when madness was perceived on the social horizon of poverty, of incapacity for work, of inability to integrate with the group; the moment when madness began to rank among the problems of the city" (64). Madness thus graduated from being a spiritual or moral problem – now it reflected social and economic glitches as well. Felman notes this break between the sacred and the madman: "madness is now desacralized, and through its exclusion takes on a political, social and ethical status" (Felman 211). Madmen in this context became true outcasts, not in the sense of the wandering pilgrim or the exiled fool, but as social rejects, as those who could not or who would not fit into an ordered social scheme. Madness, here, graduated from a localized, personal conundrum into a widespread, social epidemic. This socialization of madness will play an important role in how society and the madman interact from this point on.

In this modern world, then, the madman no longer represented something beyond it. Instead, the insane converged into a purely worldly concern. As Foucault writes, "If there is, in classical madness, something which refers elsewhere, and to *other things*, it is no longer because the madman comes from the world of the irrational and bears its stigmata; rather, it is because he crosses the frontiers of the bourgeois order of his own accord, and alienates himself outside the sacred limits of its ethic" (Foucault, *Madness* 58). The madman was no longer a liminal figure, set on the outskirts of civilization, nor was he at the center of the throng, telling truth by way of his unreasonable, unearthly insights. Instead, he was one who actually crossed borders – not the borders between this world and the next or between immortality and death, but between social spheres, beyond the socially acceptable. Here, too, the madman had at least a semblance of choice – he

leaves normality by his own will, alienating himself beyond the sacred, which was now

not divine, but bourgeois. Thus, while a structure remained intact – society, liaison,

madman – the meaning behind these structures changed vastly. At this point the divine

no longer played a role in the condemnation for the madman (or at least not the central

role), nor in the connection between madness and society. Now the intermediary

reflected and maintained the rules mandated by society itself. The avoidance of scandal,

not the urge for salvation or a fear of the ungodly, governed society's interactions with

the mad. Instead of being a part of life, madness was set at a distance, "under the eyes of

a reason that no longer felt any relation to it and that would not compromise itself by too

close a resemblance" (70). Any close proximity to madness could taint even reason

itself, which could no longer even hint at a passing acquaintance with such scandalous,

untoward, irrational world-views.

The mad, too, were perceived through this lens, which changed the way in which

madness itself was both portrayed and repressed. As Foucault tells us, "Confinement

[…] betrays a form of conscience to which the inhuman can suggest only shame. There

are aspects of evil that have such a power of contagion, such a force of scandal that any

publicity multiplies them infinitely. Only oblivion can suppress them" (Foucault,

Madness 67). The imprisonment of the mad was not the abandonment of the lepers,

which eventually led to the redemption of both castigator and condemned. Nor did it

allow the familiarity allotted to the fool who spoke truth, sequestered at the edges of

society, but still a part of community as a whole. Instead, we are now confronted with

confinement that led to nothing, that left evil to wallow in its own horrid nature, without

any interaction with a divine mercy, or any divine presence at all. The house of

confinement, as an intermediary, allowed no direct interaction between madman and society, as before, but also curtailed the symbiosis between the two. In the Age of Reason, the madman lost any form of gain in his relationship with society due to this new avatar of mediation. The madman was now evil, doomed to oblivion, at the whim of his jailors and the society they served. As Foucault states, "by confinement, madness is acknowledged to be *nothing*" (116).

This manifestation of madness as nothing, however, allows us to see how the movement from one historical era to another changes how we look at madness. Part of Foucault's point in writing his History is to showcase the changes that took place in the confinement of the madman during the Age of Reason. He notes, as we have seen, that even the idea of confinement itself places the Enlightenment apart from earlier forms of contact. The house of confinement, as a mediator between madman and society, redefined classifications of madness and perceptions of madness, to the point that the paradoxes inherent in previous incarnations of the term multiplied and turned in on themselves, creating complex relationships between terms, causes, symptoms, and so-called cures. Jeffrey T. Nealon, in his article "Exteriority and Appropriation: Foucault, Derrida, and the Discipline of Literary Criticism," considers the author's insistence on these paradoxes an important part of the work: "For Foucault, it is not a matter of offering a choppy, discontinuist image of history to combat the 'normally accredited' image of calm continuity, but rather a matter of attending to the disruptions themselves" (Nealon 107). Felman, too, asserts that Foucault's history, by dwelling on the un-definable, recasts our notions of definition in the first place. She writes, "the history of madness is the story of the metaphor of history's forgetting of a metaphor" (Felman 225).

Felman claims that within Foucault's text madness can have no true definition, "For in Foucault's conception, the proper meaning of the notion 'madness' is precisely that it has no proper meaning, that it is, and rigorously, 'a false concept," a metaphor indeed" (227). Yet, as she goes on to note, without a proper meaning, madness still remains a central, if ignored or confined, figure: a configuration of language that cannot be said.

It is the image, however, which instigated a change in how the Age of Reason approached madness. By conceiving madness as an aspect of unreason, by perceiving it as both passion and animality, as delusion, and by dealing with it through confinement, the Age of Reason sought to wipe out its inherent evil – to destroy or hide and not to save. This radical change in the way society interacted with madness led to the ultimate liaison, the quintessential mediator between madness and civilization – the asylum and the doctors who ran it. As Foucault points out, the early Enlightenment views of insanity, the dichotomies of unreason and madness and their link with man's evil and the Fall, led to a later public outcry against the taints that had to obviously be inherent in houses that confined such problems. The author writes, "There prevailed, then, a sort of undifferentiated image of 'rottenness' that had to do with the corruption of morals as well as with the decomposition of the flesh, and upon which were based both the repugnance and the pity felt for the confined" (Foucault, *Madness* 203). The houses of confinement were seen to be literally rotten, putrid not only with perceived evil, but also with physical contagions. A public concern for safety thus began the Great Reform, whereby large numbers of do-gooders began to try to reduce contamination within the madhouses.[5] This confrontation with contagion, with the evils of the madhouse, led to the advent of the asylum, a place where madness finally came in contact with medicine. For Foucault,

however, the intervention of these so-called saviors, these rational, compassionate men

and women, had more to do with fighting the *image* of madness, than with curing actual

diseases. He writes, "it was as a result of this reactivation of images, more than by an

improvement of knowledge, that unreason was eventually confronted by medical

thought" (206). Madness instigated images that could no longer be overlooked. These

images, which threatened the city and its inhabitants more than words ever could,

alienated not the madman, but the house in which he was confined.[6] The alienation of

the old middleman led to change, to a new replacement in the long line of intermediaries.

The house, then, as liaison between society and madness, could no longer continue – it

was cast aside for a newer, better approach: a more reasonable approach.

This is not to say, however, that the idea of confinement itself was abolished in

order to reiterate a newer and more humane treatment of lunatics. In a concluding

thought about the influence of politics on the advent of the asylum, Foucault tells us,

> We see how the political critique of confinement functioned in the
> eighteenth century. Not in the direction of a liberation of the mad; nor can
> we say that it permitted a more philanthropic or a greater medical attention
> to the insane. On the contrary, it linked madness more firmly than ever to
> confinement, and this by a double tie: one which made madness the very
> symbol of the confining power and its absurd and obsessive representative
> within the world of confinement; the other which designated madness as
> the object *par excellence* of all the measures of confinement […] by a
> paradoxical circle, madness finally appears as the only reason for a
> confinement whose profound unreason it symbolizes (Foucault, *Madness*
> 227).

Thus, confinement played an important role even in the era of the asylum, where the

liberation of the conception of madness was supposed to have occurred. Because the

core perception of lunacy did not change (these men were still mad, still represented

unreason, and needed to be confined because of their absurd state), confinement, albeit in

a different form, remained the ultimate buffer between society and madness. This confinement, however, recognized differences – it saw the need to treat different forms of madness as individualized problems. This left madness "free for a perception which individualized it, free for the recognition of its unique features and for all the operations that would finally give it its status as an object" (234). Madness, though still confined, was treated in an entirely different manner – as the object of study and castigation, but also of self-realization (at least to an extent). A change in mediator thus allowed for a change in how society perceived and interacted with the madman, and from what distance. The asylum did not simply punish all, regardless of guilt or crime (if madness could be considered a crime as it was within the first houses of confinement). Instead, it organized guilt, placed the madman and the man of reason into set positions within the confines of the asylum, so that these positions could then be translated to the outside world. By becoming an object of observation, by living as an object in relation to others and to himself, the madman could eventually learn, through self-punishment, to become a subject once more.[7]

This reconfiguration into subjectivity, however, came with a price. Foucault reminds us that at this point in the history of madness, the madman still remained outside of society, on the outskirts of both reason and civilization. The author tells us,

> drawn to the surface of himself by a social personality silently imposed by observation, by form and mask, the madman is obliged to objectify himself in the eyes of reason as the perfect stranger, that is, as the man whose strangeness does not reveal itself. The city of reason welcomes him only with this qualification and at the price of this surrender to anonymity (Foucault, *Madness* 249-250).

This new configuration of confinement, which places the madman within the prison of his own castigation, directed by the hand of an outside force that observes in order not to

13

individualize, but to render anonymous, introduced the doctor as a new liaison between society and the madman – though here the doctor was not a representative of pure science, of reason, but instead was a force of personality, a wise man who could divine and direct the right course of treatment, the morally acceptable solution.[8] As Foucault points out, "they did not introduce science, but a personality, whose powers borrowed from science only their disguise, or at most their justification […] The physician could exercise his absolute authority in the world of the asylum only insofar as, from the beginning, he was Father and Judge, Family and Law" (272). Here, the doctor took the place of divine intervention, of the Church and her holy intercession between lunatic and society – and his tools, instead of abandonment or death or the constant journey of self-discovery, which placed the madman as the object of someone's actions, instead forced the madman, as a newly formed subjective force, to act upon himself.[9] Foucault emphasizes that within the asylum, which relegates the madman to perfect stranger, "Madness no longer exists except as *seen*" (250). Observation, the observation by the medical professional, decided the fate of these madmen in accordance with what was seen, not in conjunction with what occurred within the madman's own mind or within the language he used. Yet, these superficial signs were catalysts for treatments, for cures that would eventually place the madman, now himself once again, back into society. A true portal then, the gatekeeper who decides who can enter the outside world and who must remain within the walls, the doctor fulfilled the ongoing structure inherent in Foucault's assessment of madness and civilization.

And like the divine intervention of the Renaissance, the doctor, too, held a kind of eternal and unquestionable power over his patients, who had to submit in order to retain

any relation with society at large. As Foucault tells us,

> As positivism imposes itself upon medicine and psychiatry, this practice
> becomes more and more obscure, the psychiatrist's power more and more
> miraculous, and the doctor-patient couple sinks deeper into a strange
> world. In the patient's eyes, the doctor becomes a thaumaturge; the
> authority he has borrowed from order, morality, and the family now seems
> to derive from himself; it is because he is a doctor that he is believed to
> possess these powers […] it was thought, by the patient first of all, that it
> was in the esotericism of his knowledge, in some almost daemonic secret
> of knowledge, that the doctor had found the power to unravel insanity
> (Foucault, *Madness* 275).

This interaction between patient and doctor, between madman and Father figure, with all

of its connections with magical remedies and the power of complicated, abstruse, and

(perhaps) forbidden knowledge, led us into the age of Freud and the psychoanalysts.

Though Foucault stops his history of madness at the very beginning of the

nineteenth century, he does draw several conclusions about Freud in particular and

psychoanalysis in general. For Foucault, Freud did away with many of the trappings

associated with the asylum, like observation and silence, yet he retained "the structure

that enveloped the medical personage; he amplified its thaumaturgical virtues, preparing

for its omnipotence a quasi-divine status" (277). Here Freud and his brethren are

extensions of the asylum doctor, at least insofar as their position as mediators (and

interpreters) between society and madness.[10]

At this point, terminology becomes extremely important. Thus far we have read

Foucault's History in order to come to terms with the internal structure of madness as a

trope, with the relationships between madman, mediator, and society that continue

throughout the ages, even as the actual components of each term change. Here, however,

we must concentrate on definitions, on what we actually mean when we use terms like

madman or insane. We can no longer use the terms insanity, madness, and unreason

interchangeably. As the men and women of the Enlightenment began to define all things through reason, the unreasonable nature of the mad became a detached entity, still a part of the umbrella term of insanity, yet separate from the more overt physical manifestations of madness itself. Unreason affected the insane, but not all who were unreasonable were insane. Foucault informs us that madness in the classical age "became pure spectacle," while unreason was locked away (Foucault, *Madness* 69). The author writes, "Unreason was hidden in the silence of the houses of confinement, but madness continued to be present on the stage of the world – with more commotion than ever" (69). Here, another paradox emerges. Madness and unreason split in this formulation, with madness inhabiting the public face of the problem, unreason relegated to the inner sanctum of true insanity. Unreason, the wretched cause of madness, deserved the oblivion all evil merits; madness, on the other hand, as symptom, could be shown. Yet, while each of these terms connoted differing things, they were both judged by reason itself, by the calculating logic of the reasonable house of confinement and the language it used. Foucault goes on to recognize this paradox in more concrete terms: "the classical age enveloped madness in a total experience of unreason; it re-absorbed its particular forms, which the Middle Ages and the Renaissance had clearly individualized" (70). Reason split madness into separate compartments, the inner and the outer face, yet also undifferentiated it, so that only reason itself could define how society perceived and conceived insanity.

We need, then, some kind of definition of the term madness, at least in the classical sense. Before we can extrapolate from Foucault's arguments we must first understand his history, and to fully understand Foucault's history, we must understand the complexity of the classical definition. First, we must note the outward divide between madness and

unreason and how these differing conceptions lead to equally differing perceptions. If unreason was the fault that needed to be hidden away and madness was something that needed to be put on display, yet at a distance, then how can these equally illogical problems be understood? Foucault tells us that only through unreason can we comprehend classical madness: "Unreason was [madness'] support; or let us say that unreason defined the locus of madness' possibility. For the classical man, madness was not the natural condition, the human and psychological root of unreason; it was only unreason's empirical form" (Foucault, *Madness* 83). Classical madness was thus a manifestation of unreason, the outward appearance of an inner problem – it was by no means a problem inherent in the human condition, but one that sprung from a source of unreason. Yet, Foucault also notes outside forces that interacted with madness on a superficial level (as opposed to the deeper nature of the relationship between madness and unreason). These new factors situated the madman both closer to and more separate from normal society and the regular, everyday man. The author cites passion and animality as the two opposing forces within insanity, each related to unreason and madness separately. He writes, "the scandal of unreason produced only the contagious example of transgression and immorality; the scandal of madness showed men how close to animality their Fall could bring them" (81). Unreason, as an entity, emerged from human failing, while madness, as such, stemmed from a baser, more instinctual, less human root. The divide within insanity, then, was complicated not only by an internal struggle between madness and unreason, but also by external manifestations of that skirmish. The classical need to classify, to rationalize irrationality, compartmentalized lunacy into these opposing yet intimate founts of insanity.

Foucault's claims, however, extend beyond this simply dichotomy – we cannot

divide insanity into madness and unreason and leave it at that. The two were both

separate faces of the same term and also distinct and varying symptoms of diverse

problems. Passion, for the author, was not just a symptom of unreason; it was also the

foundation for madness: "at this level, passion is no longer simply one of the causes –

however powerful – of madness; rather, it forms the basis for its very possibility"

(Foucault, *Madness* 88). Therefore, without passion, madness could not exist, yet

passion, as a cause, did not define madness, but only presupposed its possibility.

Foucault tries to explain himself further:

> In other words, beginning with passion, madness is still only an intense
> movement in the rational unity of soul and body; this is the level of
> *unreason*; but this intense movement quickly escapes the reason of the
> mechanism and becomes, in its violences, its stupors, its senseless
> propagations, an *irrational* movement; and its is then that, escaping truth
> and its constraints, the Unreal appears (93).

Insanity was thus both a disease with two faces, unreason and madness, and a progression

that built upon itself, growing from unreason into madness. To be true madness and not

simply an unreason that must be kept hidden, insanity had to, through violence and

senseless acts, become irrational as well. Unreason was the root of madness, and

madness was the outward manifestation of unreason, but without irrationality, without an

escape from reason that goes beyond unreason, true madness could not exist. Madness

had to go beyond truth, beyond worldly realms, into the unreal.

Yet, we must not think of imagination, which also goes beyond the real, as a form

of madness. Foucault insists that at this time the two were not the same. He writes,

"Imagination is not madness. Even if in the arbitrariness of hallucination, alienation

finds the first access to its vain liberty, madness begins only beyond this point, when the

mind binds itself to this arbitrariness and becomes a prisoner of this apparent liberty"
(Foucault, *Madness* 93). Madness presented itself when imagination stepped past a
certain boundary, when the freedom found through the alienation of illusion went beyond
a few haphazard imaginings. Madness only took hold once the mind latched onto this
randomness, unable to let such liberty go. Madness was thus a subconscious choice to
remain absolutely without reason or rationality, caught in an arbitrary pattern of
seemingly liberating options that did not, in fact, allow freedom at all. The man who
lived by his imagination was therefore different from the madman in that while both saw
and experienced the same things, only the imaginative man could recognize what he saw
and relate it to reality. The madman could not distinguish the differences in what he saw
and therefore embraced all of it as real.[11]

By focusing on disruptions, as Nealon calls them, Foucault redefines, recalibrates,
not only our approach to history and to madness, but also our relationship with the
language we use to define the terms themselves. In fact, Foucault even states, "*Language
is the first and last structure of madness*" (Foucault, *Madness* 100). Language forms how
we experience madness, gives us the terms to deal with it and to conceive and perceive
it.[12] For Felman, "The aim, the challenge, the ambitious wager of Foucault's endeavor is
thus to say madness itself, to open our ears to 'all those words deprived of language' –
forgotten words on whose omission the Western world is founded" (Felman 212).
Acknowledging madness' need for utterance, especially coming out of the
Enlightenment, Foucault's history is thus a channel through which the unspoken
disruptions of madness can find their way to more sympathetic ears. The confinement of
the seventeenth century (as opposed to the asylum in the eighteenth) recognized the

importance of this language of madness: "on language are based all the cycles in which madness articulates its nature" (Foucault, *Madness* 100). Here, madness cannot define itself except through discourse, one that encompasses "both the silent language by which the mind speaks to itself in the truth proper to it, and the visible articulation in the movements of the body" (100). Madness must have utterance, even if silent, and tries to reveal its words to an unaware audience through physical manifestations of lunacy. Its dialogue is thus between the mind and the mind, by way of the body, itself a mediator, yet it also panders to a viewing public. The language spoken is the language of delirium, separate from yet related to the language Foucault himself seeks to use in order to relate his own history. Yet it is important to note that in this conception madness remains *spoken*, if not completely understood, aligned once again with the foundations of narration and discourse.

Derrida, in one of his critiques of Foucault, entitled "'To do Justice to Freud': The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis," recognizes the importance of language within the History, though at a different point along Foucault's timeline. He looks to the advent of psychoanalysis, at the end of Foucault's work. He points out that at this juncture language returns to a consideration of madness, when the intermediary can once again speak with the patient. He writes,

> Foucault has just described the loss of unreason, the background against which the classical age determined madness. It is the moment when unreason degenerates or disappears into the unreasonable; it is the tendency to pathologize, so to speak, madness. And there, again, it is through a return to unreason, this time without exclusion, that Nietzsche and Freud reopen the dialogue with madness *itself* (Derrida 238-239).

Although Foucault presents Freud and his fellows as extensions of the confining culture in that they are intermediaries who retain god-like power over the madman, they are also

20

in touch with more than just an image of madness, more than just the unreasonable, as opposed to unreason itself. Freud speaks to madness, converses with it, instead of with its pathologies. In "Madness, the Absence of Work" (which in some editions serves as an extra chapter in *Madness and Civilization*), Foucault focuses on this point, stating that after Freud, "Madness, then, ceases to be a linguistic error, a spoken blasphemy, or an intolerable meaning […] Madness appears as an utterance wrapped up in itself, articulating something else beneath what it says, of which it is at the same time the only possible code" (Foucault, *Absence* 295). The dialogue opened up between the doctor and the patient, then, by way of psychoanalysis, is not a straightforward dialectic. Instead, it is another enigma, wherein madness can converse, but cannot be understood except by way of its own definitions. Therefore, "Since Freud, Western madness has become a non-language as it turned into a double language […] that is to say, a matrix of a language that, in a strict sense, does not say anything" (295). Although language now existed and communication was an option, nothing could actually be said. Understanding, by way of the intermediary, was minimal. Therefore, because of its insistence on the doctor/god and its unintelligible conversations, psychoanalysis both perpetuated and negated the negative aspects of the asylum and its 'thaumaturges.'

    This brings us to a very relevant question in our investigation into madness – how can we consider madness in the twentieth century in relationship with Foucault's work and where could psychoanalysis fit into this discussion? Research, of course, has been done on this subject, if not in these exact terms or with these texts in combination. Derrida's answer to some of Foucault's claims points out that the fault in Foucault's arguments lies exactly *in* his lack of discussion concerning Freud and psychoanalysis.

Derrida especially takes umbrage with the way Foucault handles Freud and the

psychoanalytical doctor. He discovers many links between Foucault's doctor and the

Evil Genius: "Fictive omnipotence and a divine, or rather 'quasi-divine,' power, divine

by simulacrum, at once divine and satanic – these are the very traits of an Evil Genius

that are now being attributed to the figure of the doctor. The doctor suddenly deigns to

resemble in a troubling way the figure of unreason that continued to haunt what is called

the classical age" (Derrida 247-248). Here Derrida posits Foucault's psychoanalytical

doctor as a figure of madness itself, as a force opposed to reason, opposed to any sort of

plausible or rational logic. For Derrida, this doctor does not represent the true nature of

psychoanalysis as the intermediary between society and madness. In his eyes, Foucault

has not given these doctors a chance: this History "implacably judges psychoanalysis *in

the past, in the present, and even in the future*. For psychoanalysis is condemned in

advance" (248).[13]

This issue of condemnation, Foucault's pre-judgment of Freud and his compatriots,

at least for Derrida, stems from a confusion of time. Are we to consider the History as an

outgrowth of the era that it studies, or as a part of the era from which it is written? Is it

influenced more by Foucault's own preoccupations with the cultural climate of his own

contemporary period or should it stand as an impartial representation of historical

accuracy? For Derrida, "The book entitled *The History of Madness*, as a history of

madness itself, is and is not the same age as Freudian psychoanalysis. The project of this

book thus does and does not belong to the age of psychoanalysis; it already belongs to it

and already no longer belongs to it" (Derrida 251). Foucault's book retains a problematic

and paradoxical relationship to psychoanalysis, not only concerning the practices and

products of its approach to madness, but also concerning its application in our present (the future of Foucault's History). Yet, although Derrida does not want to situate the History fully within the realm of the psychoanalytic, he does wish to place it within the grasp of twentieth century applications. For Derrida, "it is a question today of the age to which the book itself belongs… it is a question of the age that is describing rather than the age that is *described*" (232). Though Derrida may have meant this remark as a critique of Foucault's aims in writing his History, its words allow us to consider how we can extrapolate new data and theories from Foucault's work. The text means as much and says as much about the world from which it comes as about the world of which it speaks. We can therefore conclude that structures, not content, continue and are key to an understanding of Foucault's text as a History, whether vertical or horizontal.

Foucault's history of madness therefore poses the question of how madness and our own views and representations of madness have changed, not only with the advent of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, but also with the growing knowledge throughout the twentieth century that reason may not dictate how the world works. The chaos of war, the struggle to find subjectivity in a postcolonial society, the seemingly insurmountable skirmishes with materialism, existentialism, and globalization, question not only the Reason of the so called classical age, but also the way in which this age dealt with unreason. As Derrida notes in his critique of Foucault's work, "we must assume that a certain liberation of madness has gotten underway… that the concept of madness as unreason, if it ever had a unity, has been dislocated. And that a project such as Foucault's can find its historical origin and passageway in the opening produced by this dislocation" (Derrida 230). Here Derrida poses an important point – now madness is no

longer associated with unreason, no longer has its roots in a relationship based on reason and rationality. Even the fact that Foucault was able to write his history points to a disruption in the conception of madness. Does this mean, however, that the liberation of madness in today's age leads explicitly to a psychoanalytical approach to a consideration of lunacy? Do we need to focus solely of Freud and Lacan if we are to understand twentieth century madness?

We can perhaps find an answer to this quandary in Foucault's "Madness, the Absence of Work." In it, he writes,

> It is we today who are astonished to see two languages communicate with each other (that of madness and that of literature) whose incompatibility has been established by our history. Since the seventeenth century, madness and mental illness have occupied the same space in the realm of forbidden languages (in general the realm of the insane). Entering another domain of excluded language […] madness dissolves its kinship, ancient or recent according to the chosen scale, to mental illness (Foucault, *Absence* 297).

Here, Foucault insists that madness, with its link to literature, can no longer be considered one and the same as mental illness. This is not to say that one can be faked, while the other is perfectly real – both maintain a reality, though on different planes of existence and via a different vernacular. Earlier in his essay Foucault makes the distinction between mental illness and madness adamantly clear: "Metal illness and madness, merged with and mistaken for each other from the seventeenth century on, are now becoming separated under our very eyes or, rather, in our language" (293). As forbidden languages, madness and mental illness once shared space on the margins of society, both referring to the realm of the insane, interchangeable with many other terms related to the madhouse. But now we must see them, as they come in contact with literature again, as separate from each other – for while mental illness has gained

24

acceptance as a language through the advent of psychoanalysis, the language of madness

still retains its liminal, and therefore subaltern, status. Today madness, as opposed to

mental illness, lives on the outskirts of society, unexplained, beyond the rationalizations

of doctors and psychoanalysts – it actually repeats a structure seen before, at the onset of

the Enlightenment, when madness was associated with the poor. Felman hones in on this

relationship between suppression and madness, linking it with the emotion found in

literature. She insists, "Madness, for Foucault, is nothing but that which the history of

madness has *made possible precisely by suppressing it* […]. Madness, which is *not*

simply mental illness, *not* an object, is nothing other that the excess of its pathos […] it is

precisely this capacity for suffering, for emotion, for *vertige*, for *literary* fascination"

(Felman 224). Madness (*not* mental illness), defined by way of an emotionally charged

interaction with the literary, is neither subject nor object, a force proscribed by its own

tyranny. I would therefore claim, taking Felman's reading into account, that madness,

like the subaltern, like Said's Oriental, confines itself through someone else's language,

trapped by the associations implied by the written word. We can therefore say that today

madness lives within the subaltern, within the resident of the third world, within

immigrants and exiles, within the queer space, within the woman or the homosexual.

Madness is now a disease that affects the new Others, Others who themselves are victims

of connotation.

For Foucault, even in the Preface to his *Madness and Civilization*, mental illness

and madness do not mix. He writes, "In the serene world of mental illness, modern man

no longer communicates with the madman […] the man of madness communicates with

society only by the intermediary of an equally abstract reason which is order, physical

and moral constraint, the anonymous pressure of the group, the requirements of conformity" (Foucault, *Madness x*). For Foucault, mental illness does not speak with society any longer – it is only madness that still maintains a dialogue with the normal world. And within this dialogue Foucault places control, constraint, and conformity as the intermediary between madness and society.

But what about madness in the twentieth century, what about the subaltern man or woman and his or her bouts with a less ordered, less constrained insanity? Can we look at the twentieth century as Foucault insists, with an interrogation that "does not follow reason on its horizontal course," but wishes to view "that constant verticality" that the author finds within European culture (Foucault, *Madness xi*)?[14] I feel that only by following the liminal access points of madness, the subaltern texts and views of the subject, can we understand madness in a twentieth century context. My study will therefore follow Foucault's division between mental illness and madness, excluding a psychoanalytical reading of the texts, so that we can go beyond a consideration of causes and treatments and instead focus on conceptions and perceptions and on the liminal qualities of subaltern texts. Though a psychoanalytical reading of these works is important to understanding and dissecting what, exactly, occurs in the novels themselves, the purpose of this study will be to question the structures found within Foucault's text, as insanity is divided by mental illness and madness.

This does not mean, however, that we will use Foucault as our guideline for every aspect of this study. Instead, we can consider Foucault inspiration, especially in how he presents the relationships between madman, mediator, and society and how he addresses a text both vertically and horizontally. To begin with, this study will focus on specific

pieces of literature, concentrating not on the historical implications of sweeping cultural and social phenomena, but instead looking at how fiction can provide insight into the process by which a culture self-criticizes. In this aspect we will both veer from Foucault's main goals yet also make use of some of the underlying foundations of *Madness and Civilization*. Nealon, in his essay on the debate between Foucault and Derrida, tries to explain the differences between Derrida's emphasis on individual texts and Foucault's emphasis on history and discourse, ultimately concluding that the two do not have to be mutually exclusive. They both try to find the solution to the same puzzle – how can one think differently? How can we view questions in a different way, through different texts, in a different light?

Though many critics emphasize only Foucault's historicism and do not regard him as a critic who dwells on individual texts, we must recognize his use of specific pieces of literature within his History. Felman notices this trend within Foucault. She writes, "It is in fact to *literature* that Foucault turns in his search for the authentic voice of madness – to the *texts* of Sade, Artaud, Nerval or Holderlin […] it seems that literature is there to re-place madness" (Felman 220). For Felman, literature allows Foucault (and his readers) to reposition madness – by looking at individual texts and reading how their authors interacted with madness through their own dabblings with language, we can come to a new understanding of how madness lives and grows within a certain time period, or within a certain society or culture. Felman's study of Foucault, in which she posits his work in relation to both literature, philosophy, and reason, emphasizes the important role of literature as a displacement mechanism: "For Foucault, the fictions of madness undermine, *disorient* thought" (220). Foucault's literatures of madness redefine things,

re-place conceptions and confuse reason itself. The History is therefore a history of literature: "The History of Madness is the story of this surplus, the story of a literary residue" (223). For Felman, at least, Foucault's relationship with literature is complex and understanding it is imperative if we are to grasp his History at all.

Even within the History itself, literature plays a large role, especially in Foucault's discussion of the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance. For Foucault, literature and its relationship to the fool revealed society's regard of the madman as a symbol, at least in the centuries leading up to the classical era, the age of Enlightenment. At the end of the Middle Ages the fool took center stage in popular literature, literally speaking the truth of criticism in the 'follies' of the day, as opposed to the cautionary roles written for him in the tales and satires of an earlier period.[15] Foucault tells us, "the madman […] reminds each man of his truth […] he utters, in his simpleton's language which makes no show of reason, the words of reason that release, in the comic, the comedy" (Foucault, *Madness* 14). By way of his unreason, the madman opened up a passageway between dreary reality and a comic revelation of truth. By noticing the otherwise unreasonable, he created connections that led to reason. The madman, however, still remained aloof from society, apart from it, adjacent but unreachable without an intermediary. He had come to represent too much. At this moment Foucault indicates a disjuncture between the image and the word in relation to folly: "Figure and speech still illustrate the same fable of folly in the same moral world, but already they take two different directions, indicating, in a still barely perceptible scission, what will be the great line of cleavage in the Western experience of madness" (18). Though this study will focus on written, literary madness, it is important to

28

recognize this schism.   Here Foucault notes that just as the image started to loose its

meaning as Gothic symbolism decayed, so too did the madman of the 'follies' lose his

place.[16] Within the realm of the visual arts knowledge is linked to madness in a symbolic

fashion, where madness is both animality, ("the dark rage, the sterile madness that lies in

men's hearts") and its opposite ("madness that fascinates because it is knowledge") (21).

This conceptualization of madness placed lunacy outside of man, as a force that acted

upon the self or a fact that tempted the mind.

Within the written arts, however, madness was at first linked with illusion, with

man's weaknesses. Foucault tells us, "In a general way, then, madness is not linked to

the world and its subterranean forms, but rather to man, to his weaknesses, dreams, and

illusions" (Foucault, *Madness* 26). Literary madness, at the beginning of the

Renaissance, looked inside human nature for answers, pointing to man's flaws, his own

self-delusions, as the font of lunacy. Moral satire became the norm, once again

distancing the madman from moral redemption. In this way, "Madness is no longer the

familiar foreignness of the world; it is merely a commonplace spectacle for the foreign

spectator" (28). The madman had no connection with society outside of his own

proliferation of difference. The spatial relationship between madman and society was

thus inverted, placing the strange spectacle of the madman above the revelation of his

insanity, at least within the literary realm.

Foucault does not want to dwell on madness as the commonplace spectacle,

however. Instead, he looks to those literary works that at the transition between Medieval

and Renaissance considered madness outside a critical context. As the ages passed from

the Medieval period to the Renaissance, the insane, as fool, gained a recognized voice in

literature, representing the romantic identification of Don Quixote, the vain presumption

of Cyrano de Bergerac's Chateaufort, the just punishment of Lady Macbeth and the

desperate passion of King Lear (Foucault, *Madness* 28-30). These newly found voices

did not change the consistency of madness, how society conceived insanity's threat of

chaos, but instead changed how this threat was perceived, how man interacted with it.

Foucault explains, "What is in question is still the nothingness of existence, but this

nothingness is no longer considered an external, final term, both threat and conclusion; it

is experienced from within as the continuous and constant form of existence" (16). No

longer a finality but an everyday occurrence and constant trial, madness was an

alternative way of life, of living. Living is the key term here, for though still a

representative of nothingness, madness now belonged to the realm of man, to the actions

and reactions that form societal interactions. No longer existing solely outside the

everyday, no longer a liminal state influenced by otherworldly affairs, madness was now

a state of being, connected to earthly passions and goals. The emphasis on existence and

not conclusion alerts us to a different connection between society and madness, one that

both closes the gap between the two and opens it up to a new, paradoxical intermediary.

By recognizing the importance of literature in how we view madness, especially

during the succession of one Age to another, we can set the stage for our own

consideration of literature at the dawning of the postmodern age. We can also turn to

certain passages within Foucault's "Absence" in order to truly emphasize the importance

of the literary. In "Absence" the author states, "once uncovered as a language silenced

by its superposition upon itself, madness neither manifests nor narrates the birth of a

work… it outlines an empty form from where this work comes… the place from where it

never ceases to be absent, where it will never be found because it had never been located

there to begin with" (Foucault, *Absence* 297). Madness is not the muse or impetus for a

text, but the empty structure within which the author creates his work. Madness,

essentially, circumscribes the unspoken space that gives rise to the literary word, though

it has no hand in the creation of words themselves. As Foucault concludes, "in this sense,

the being of literature, as it has been produced from Mallarmé to today, obtains the region

where, since Freud, the experience of madness figures" (297). Our madness, the madness

of the postmodern era, cannot remain separate from literature. To study madness, to

understand it, we must look at how literature depicts its own interpretations, analysis, and

representations of lunacy. We can therefore introduce this study as one that considers

madness in the twentieth century through the analysis of literatures which deal with the

trope specifically, narratives that can serve as representatives for certain cultures and

points of view at a specific moment in time. Only through literature and by way of the

creative literary space can we come to terms with the postmodern madman.

Madness and Postmodernism

But what do we mean by postmodern? Notwithstanding, we shall not try to create

our own definition of postmodernism here. Many have tried to construct definitions in

the past and criteria varies from critic to critic – no two theorists totally agree on how to

come to terms with its manifestations. We will, however, focus on specific symptoms of

the postmodern as defined by several leading theorists on the subject. To begin a

simplified discussion of the postmodern we need to turn to several different theories, as I

have yet to find one that I will whole-heartedly stand behind. Most turn to Fredric

Jameson's study *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* as the main source for an introduction to postmodernist studies. As expressed in the title of the work, his study claims that postmodernism is tied to the cultural trends of what he calls Late Capitalism, where the postmodern can be defined by the consumption of sheer commodification. In this age, especially in the United States, a need for novel goods at a greater rate of turnover has created a new depthlessness in society, which now thrives on a culture of the image or simulacrum. Depth is replaced by surface, the individual by the masses. The postmodern is born out of this seeming vacuum, which is actually created by overabundance. This paradox leads to artists who try to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically. This in turn lends itself to the use of pastiche (*not* parody), where artists create and play upon our nostalgia for a past that never actually existed. Couched in Jameson's terms, then, postmodernism, which in itself is impure and must be forced into narrative form even if not narrative in nature, is a campy, disjointed reaction to the commodification of the present. He even compares his version of the postmodern to Lacan's definition of schizophrenia, the breakdown of the signifying chain. Postmodernism, in this sense, is itself a form of madness, but a madness of surfaces, one that has no origin and no depth.

Linda Hutcheon, however, in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, provides a different reading of the postmodern. Hutcheon puts herself at odds with Jameson, stating, "While *theorists* like Jameson […] see this loss of the modernist unique, individual style as a negative, as an imprisoning of the text in the past through pastiche, it has been seen by postmodern *artists* as a liberating challenge to a definition of subjectivity and creativity that has for too long ignored the role of history in art and

thought" (Hutcheon 11). Here, and throughout her book, Hutcheon separates postmodern

theorists and postmodern artists, claiming that the theorists rely too heavily on defining

postmodernism through negation, through the deterioration of modernism or the

destructive aspects of capitalist (mass) culture. Artists, however, take the same negative

pronouncements and use them as catalysts for imaginative redefinitions of what it means

to be an individual and an artist, *incorporating* history into their works.[17] This makes

postmodernism a creature of parody (*not* pastiche) and leads to Hutcheon's most

important point – the role of paradox and parody in postmodern narrative. Parody is the

key to her poetics of the postmodern: "the paradox of postmodernist parody is that it is

not essentially depthless, trivial kitsch […] but rather that it can and does lead to a vision

of interconnectedness" (24). Through parody and paradox the postmodern rounds up the

chaotic and seemingly depthless aspects of contemporary culture and tries to connect

these pieces. Though these interconnections may not form a whole, they at least reveal

depth through interaction. Hutcheon makes this point clear when she states,

"Postmodernism teaches that all cultural practices have an ideological subtext which

determines the conditions of the very possibility of their production of meaning. And, in

art, it does so by leaving overt the contradictions between its self-reflexivity and its

historical grounding" (xii-xiii). Thus, postmodernist art reveals the common

underpinnings of all cultural constructs, distinctive ideologies that *must* be present in

order for meaning to be produced. Whether these ideologies are factors that relate to

mass or elite culture does not matter, for the meaning behind postmodernism lies in its

contradictions – meaning is thus created through inference and possibility.

By looking at Jameson and Hutcheon side-by-side, we can come to understand in more detail the aspects of postmodernism(s) most important for our own study. First, we must concede the importance of mass culture and capitalism in the postmodern. It is the popular that most directly influences artistic production, whether the artist reflects upon, reacts to, or creates for this mass audience.[18] We shall agree with Hutcheon, however, in how the postmodern reacts to capitalism – through parody and not pastiche. Though surfaces and simulacra play important roles in the postmodern texts we will study, they do not comprise the entirety of postmodernism's repertoire. The postmodern *does* deal with depth, especially in the way it presents the connective tissues created by the linking together of disparate manifestations of contemporary culture – high or low, elite or mass, written, aural, or visual. Yet this depth does not only stem from the connectivity cited by Hutcheon – we can also find depth in Jameson's breakdown of the signifying chain, where connections are lost, set aside, or repressed, leaving gaps that need to be filled yet remain empty. Even though this breakage causes madness, it is through madness that we can find some sort of narration to the contemporary plight of the postmodern man.

And it is not only Jameson who equates madness with the postmodern and its obsession with popular, mass culture. Neil Larsen, in his book *Reading North By South*, also equates postmodern philosophy, including Derrida and Foucault, with irrationality. He writes, "It is not all 'Western' modes of thought and being that must now be discarded but more precisely their Enlightenment or *modern* modalities, *founded* on the concept of *reason*. […] Postmodernism might thus be considered a form – albeit an unconventional one – of *irrationalism*" (Larsen, *North by South* 165). Chris Lehmann, in his tract *Revolt of the Masscult*, links madness with the kind of popular fiction that does not go beyond

simple mass entertainment. He writes, "'Psychosis' may be too dignified a term for the

unimaginative production of so much inert and unchallenging mass entertainment"

(Lehmann 25). Though the tone of his prose may overstate the point, this connection

between madness and junk fiction is an important one to note. Leslie Fiedler, in a

collection of essays entitled *What Was Literature?* equates 'low' literature with a "return

to the condition of pure myth," also a symptom of postmodernism (Fiedler, *Literature*

129). Fiedler then states,

> 'Privileged insanity' would be perhaps the most honest name for what we
> seek in mythic art; a way of suspending rationality, which, though
> presumably framed and limited, involves always the minimal risk of no
> return, a permanent confusion of reality and illusion, as in the famous case
> of Don Quixote. In any case, continual exposure to the pleasures of pop
> trains us to indulge impulses which morality and mental hygiene warn us
> are dangerous (137).

In Fiedler's estimation postmodernism's tolerance and even over-indulgence in what he

calls 'pop' leads to behaviors and thought patterns that step outside normal bounds,

because 'pop' is tangled up in a quest for mythic reality, or mythic history, as opposed to

what has actually occurred or what is actually occurring. Reality and illusion intermingle

because of the interplay between 'high' and 'low' art forms. Yet, the madness inherent in

postmodern works is privileged because we *intend* to erase boundaries. Madness is thus

both a tool with which we can come to reconsider rationality and reality and an end-goal

in itself, a plain of existence that survives *outside*.

Phillip Harper, too, notes the importance of the peripheral nature of the

postmodern and equates it with a damaged or at least fragmented mental state. In his

Framing the Margins: The Social Logic of Postmodern Culture, Harper turns to

postmodern theory for his inspiration. He writes,

To characterize it very roughly, postmodernist theory suggests that our sense of the individual human psyche as an integrated whole is a necessary misconception, and that various technological, economic, and philosophical developments of the late twentieth century demonstrate to us the psyche's fundamentally incoherent and fragmentary, or 'decentered,' nature. This decenteredness is manifested in the cultural realm through a number of signal effects and practices; in particular, characteristic fiction of the postmodern era thematizes psychic decenteredness in both its narrative structures and its depiction of the human subject (Harper 3).

In this much more theoretical approach to the question of madness and the postmodern, Harper presents 'psychic decenteredness' as an important theme in postmodern fiction and traces its importance back to the nature of the late twentieth century psyche, which is now, according to science and philosophy, a fragmentary, chaotic thing that wishes to be whole and centered, even if only in an illusory form. The *illusion* of completeness is necessary, though not actually true. For Harper, as with Fiedler, madness is thus a reality that we must come to terms with, though in Harper's case the acknowledgement of its existence is enough, while Fielder presents it as something worth striving for. Madness, whether Harper's 'decenteredness' or Fiedler's 'privileged insanity,' is present in the postmodern text because we cannot express our experiences of reality without it – whether it is aligned with the fragmentation of the contemporary psyche or with an overindulgence in popular culture.

This brings us to the question, however, of how the postmodern author can relate all of this to an audience. After all, the postmodern *must* have narration, even if disjointed or paradoxical. As Hutcheon explains in her book, "In most of the critical work on postmodernism it is narrative – be it in literature, history, or theory – that has usually been the major focus of attention" (Hutcheon 5). The creation of a storyline is implicit at the very core of the postmodern experience, whether the point is to search out

36

the narrative thread in an otherwise chaotic and non-narrative collection of thoughts or to question the integrity of a narrative or history that appears tampered with or confused. As Jameson notes, within the postmodern everything must take narrative form, even if it is not narrative in nature. This is where the novel and mass culture collide, within the bounds of the narrative quandary. How can we create a narrative, whether personal, national, communal, or otherwise, within a culture of conformity (as evidence by the commodification of the culture industry)? How can we, as citizens of a post- world, relate our experiences to the larger forces and narrations of history (and myth)?

I believe that the answers to these questions lie in our relationships with the consumer society that has spawned them, and I agree with Hutcheon that postmodern art is not, simply put, tainted by its interactions with mass culture. As she states, "The increasing uniformization of mass culture is one of the totalizing forces that postmodernism exists to challenge. Challenge, but not deny" (Hutcheon 6). Postmodern narration thus tries to walk the line between the mass produced and the individual encounter, the culture of repetition and assertions of subjectivity.[19] The novel serves as a link between individuality and consumer culture, for it provides authorship even as it panders to the needs of the consummate consumer. As Leslie Fiedler notes, the novel is the only 'high' culture art form that comes close to speaking with a 'low' or mass audience. He writes, "the novel is an art form which tends to make the classic distinction between literacy and illiteracy meaningless – or it at least challenges it in ways disconcerting to traditional humanists" and later adds, "Distribution as well as production has been essential to making the novel the closest thing possible within the limits of literacy to a mass art" (Fiedler, *Literature* 53-54). The novel is therefore the perfect

medium for interaction between 'literate,' individualized confrontations with narrative and 'illiterate,' mass-produced repetitions (like blockbuster films, magazines, soap operas, etc.).[20]

<center>Madness and Popular Culture</center>

But what do we mean by mass-produced? Our definitions of postmodernism all hinge on how we understand what is meant by popular culture and how this phenomenon manifests in the twentieth century. Our madman, as a postmodern construct, does not conform to the rules and boundaries set forth in Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*. He or she is the product of the twentieth century, a child of world wars, broken empires, and technological revolutions. We must therefore analyze our lunatics and the literature from which they spring as amalgams of what makes up our postmodern societies, starting with how and why they relate to mass culture. The influence of Hollywood films, the North American music scene, tabloid magazines, and other semi-artistic paraphernalia aimed at the mass audience, both within the United States and throughout the Americas, cannot be overlooked. The recognition of the popular culture phenomenon and its interaction with more artistic endeavors, like the novel, is not only an important aspect of postmodernism, it is also a trigger for a new way of looking at how the individual conforms to society and how singularity interrelates with the group dynamic.

A critical study of the role of popular culture in the twentieth century, Horkheimer and Adorno's chapter "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, addresses many of the issues that plague the relationship between popular culture and literature today. As Andreas Huyssen notes in his own

<center>38</center>

book, *After the Great Divide*, "any critique of the culture industry theory must be grounded to Adorno's modernist aesthetic" (Huyssen 25). As two of the few and first modernist critics to notice the impact of mass culture on 20th century art, Horkheimer and Adorno stand as guideposts in any contemplation of the subject.[21] Notwithstanding, we must always keep in mind their modernist leanings as we delve into what they have to say.[22] In their study of Enlightenment ideals and ideology at work in the first half of the twentieth century, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno try to come to terms with how so-called reasonable world-views played out over the course of history. Within this consideration of the legacy of Enlightenment thinking, they spend a good portion of their study positioning the culture industry and popular culture.

In the 1947 introduction to *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno call the culture industry "the regression of enlightenment to ideology," wherein enlightenment is broken down to "the calculation of effectiveness and the techniques of production and distribution" (Adorno xvi). This regression of enlightenment, which strips the term of its connotations of the quest for knowledge and the light of truth and instead imbues it with references to blind submission and mass acceptance, points to a destructive and deceptive nature inherent in the culture industry itself, at least in terms of enlightenment. Though the implications the two theorists draw from popular culture take a decidedly ominous turn (especially considering the link they make between the culture industry and the rise of the Nazi regime and totalitarianism in general), the growing importance of studying this corruption of enlightenment cannot be denied. The fact that in 1947 these theorists would look at the culture industry and the influence of popular

culture, (though they state they take the culture industry "more seriously than it would

implicitly require") points to the rising importance of such a consideration (xvi).

The impact of popular culture and the culture industry on society's interactions

with both itself and others, and on critical thinking in general, does not have to be

confined to the 1940s and 1950s, however. Though Horkheimer and Adorno's study was

written in 1947, the influence and importance of popular culture and the culture industry

did not wane as the decades passed. In the Preface to the New Edition of their book,

written in 1969, the pair writes:

> The work was written when the end of the Nazi terror was in sight […]
> And yet – even at that time – our assessment of the transition to the world
> of the administered life was not too simplistic. In a period of political
> division into immense power-blocks, set objectively upon collision, the
> sinister trend continues. The conflicts in the Third World and the renewed
> growth of totalitarianism are just as little mere historical episodes as […]
> was Fascism in its time. Today critical thought […] demands support for
> the residues of freedom, and for tendencies toward true humanism, even if
> these seem powerless in regard to the main course of history (Adorno ix-
> x).

Though their work reacts to the threat inherent in the Nazi regime, its particular

rearrangement and interpretation of Enlightenment ideals and ideology, and its use of the

culture industry, many of the insights the two theorists reveal in their study should still

hold true, simply in a different context. In 1969, they see similar warning signs coming

from the Third World and the totalitarian regimes so prevalent in such places, regimes

that influence the course of history even as they erase an emphasis on the human

condition. Taking this one step further, we can argue that the work done by Horkheimer

and Adorno is as useful today as it was in 1947 and 1969, for we are still haunted by

those oppressive dictatorships and Third World politics and policies. We could even go

so far as to point to the United States as an oppressive regime in the same vein, at least

culturally, citing Hollywood and the North American popular music monopoly as the

catalysts for cultural oppression. Fiedler, in *What Was Literature?*, refers to this as

"creeping Americanization" and goes on that say, "pop culture, which has by now not

merely spread worldwide but has triumphed in every land where it is not forbidden for

political reasons, *is* essentially American" (Fielder, *Literature* 65). The faults (and

occasional triumphs) of the cultural industry can thus fall squarely on the shoulders of the

United States.[23] Though these critics may be taking their theories and paranoia a bit too

far, it is nevertheless important to note that certain fears regarding cultural and artistic

production and oppression go hand in hand with discussions regarding the culture

industry.[24]

    Most critics, especially those who specialize in Latin American or pan-American

studies, agree that the influence of mass culture on high art must be considered as the

twentieth century progresses. This interaction, though not always a product of the North

American culture industry, indicates a sea change in the relationship between nation and

literary output. No longer inciting nationhood, especially in Latin America, literature

now surpasses politics, reflecting postmodern sensibilities caught in pre-modern, barely

modern or, in the case of the United States, stagnantly modern nations.   Nestor García

Canclini, a Latin American scholar, points to the situation he sees within *his* America,

where literary production is influenced by a lack of cultural independence produced by

not quite modern political and economic instability.[25] In his book *Hybrid Cultures*, he

points to the disparity between political and artistic output. He describes Latin America

as a place "where traditions have not yet disappeared and modernity has not completely

arrived" (García Canclini 1). The nations that comprise Latin America are still trying to

construct modern societies, while their art and literature reflect post-modern sensibilities. Latin America is therefore the product of hybrid cultures, where "adopting foreign ideas with an inappropriate meaning is at the basis of the majority of our literature and our art" (49). In this sense, literature is about adaptations and adoptions, translations that do not quite hold with the original. Culture, whether high or low, does not burst forth from some nascent core within a nation, but instead ferments at its borders, where foreign and national, high and low, and mass and elite meet. García Canclini is adamant about this point, writing, "The transnationalization of culture brought about by communications technologies, their reach, and their efficacy are better appreciated as part of the recomposition of urban cultures, along with the migrations and tourism that soften national borders and redefine the concepts of nation, people, and identity" (10). Even if a nation is not fully modern in its government or economy, because of the influence of modern technologies, especially those co-opted by the culture industry, its cultural output will reflect more modern and even post-modern sensibilities. This places an emphasis on a repositioning of the borders between the cultured, the popular, and the masses.[26] Therefore, "The interaction of high culture with popular tastes, with the industrial structure of the production and circulation of almost all symbolic goods, and with business patterns of costs and effectiveness, is rapidly changing the organizing devices of what is now understood as 'high culture' in modernity" (37). Many factors determine how high and low interrelate – the views and beliefs of the masses *and* the indigenous elements of a given nation, the political *and* social outlooks of each government, and the economic viability of any given form of art all contribute to a new outlook on what constitutes high culture.

To understand how we can consider popular culture's prominence in the social and cultural changes that occurred in the latter half of the twentieth century, we must first define what we mean by popular culture and enumerate some of its functions. Adorno and Horkheimer align popular culture with mass culture, wherein millions of consumers (the masses) participate in the consumption of cultural artifacts manufactured in such a way that "identical needs in innumerable places [must] be satisfied with identical goods" (Adorno 121). The masses crave something to envelop, to call their own, which represents them as a society, but also allows them to conform to a specific standard, to belong to a specific group. Popular culture provides objects that link these masses together, in much the same way newspapers function in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* – in his theory, a common written word, which exists at the same moment for everyone, allowed Latin American creoles to form their own national identities. From the beginning of their consideration of popular culture and the culture industry, Horkheimer and Adorno regard the phenomenon as the regulation of certain rules and norms: "Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part" (120). Popular culture, especially in a society aimed at normalizing its citizens, thus serves as both a tool of and the foundation for the conformity of the masses. The theorists equate this conformity with predetermination:

> The principle dictates that [the common man] should be shown all his
> needs as capable of fulfillment, but that those needs should be so
> predetermined that he feels himself to be the eternal consumer, the object
> of the culture industry. Not only does it make him believe that the
> deception it practices is satisfaction, but it goes further and implies that,
> whatever the state of affairs, he must put up with what is offered (142).

The masses, by participating in the popular culture phenomenon, lose their subjectivity by becoming consumers whose appetites never cease, objects of an industry that does not

43

allow the act of consumption to be an action of free will, but rather the automated

reactions of automatons. People become replaceable, since they have no individuality

within the system.[27] They do not act, but are acted upon; they do not create, but instead

passively participate in a mass society dictated by others.

Though much of Horkheimer and Adorno's study deals with mass culture in

extreme circumstances, in relation to Nazi Germany or other totalitarian, propaganda-run

states, many of their statements hold true even in countries where there is no official

totalitarian regime, but where monopoly of one form or another does occur. We can look

at the Americas in such a light, where the shadow of Hollywood and its film stars and

classical narrative techniques monopolize the cultural output of the rest of the hemisphere

– not only does the United States dominate political and economic affairs in the

Americas, but it also dictates cultural products and tastes, at least at the mass level. Jesús

Martín Barbero, in the "Audiovisual Experience and Cultural Disorder" chapter of his

book *Culture, media and society*,[28] recognizes this form of monopoly. He cites popular

culture vehicles like magazines, television, and film, as integral pieces in the formation of

contemporary Latin American national identity. He comments, "The role of the radio in

all of Latin America and of the cinema in countries like Mexico, Argentina or Brazil, was

decisive in the formulation of a *national sentiment*" (Martín Barbero 35, my

translation).[29] For Martín Barbero, this inclusion of technological, global information of

the mass scale is detrimental to a true national unity. He writes,

> Today, on the other hand, these means of communication form the most
> powerful mechanism for the dissolution of a national cultural horizon by
> constituting themselves as mediators for the heterogeneous trauma within
> the imaginary that takes shape between the local and the global.   The
> economic and technological globalization of these means of

communication and electronic networks bring about a multiculturalism
that shatters the traditional referents of identity (36, my translation).[30]

Here, Martín Barbero equates the introduction and proliferation of mass media with the

death of traditional national identities in Latin America. This kind of globalization,

which spreads one specific type of culture straight from the Hollywood propaganda

machines, is truly just another form of cultural imperialism, at least when seen from the

viewpoint of struggling nations still searching for a permanent, independent cultural

identity. The author goes on to state, "Within the transformations of sensibility that

emerge within audiovisual experience, there are a tumult of changes within knowing

itself, the recognition that within these experiences questions occur which wholly span

the disorderliness of the urban life, the injustice between comportment and belief, the

confusion between reality and simulacrum," (43, my translation).[31] The multimedia

experience thus reconfigures not only national identities, but also the act of knowing

itself – it raises questions that strive to answer the enigmas of modern (or post-modern)

urban life. But by doing so, popular culture also erases individuality to an extent that

smothers the personal for the group, the national for the global (or, perhaps, the

indigenous for the imperialistic).

García Canclini also recognizes the conformist qualities of mass culture.[32] Tied

to industrialization and the movement of the populace away from the countryside and

toward the metropolis, which would soon become the megalopolis, mass culture reduces

the individual to just one more unspecified part of a larger whole. He writes, "The

urbanization predominant in contemporary societies is intertwined with serialization and

anonymity in production, with restructurings of immaterial communication […] that

modify the connections between the private and public" (García Canclini 208). The city

is at fault here, providing the backdrop for the nullification of identity. Endless repetition

now infects beliefs, to the point that they no longer retain any meaning. Communication

itself, when focused through the propaganda and media of the masses, is immaterial,

leading to a breakdown between the constitution of the individual and the public at large.

Mass culture interrupts chronology itself, neither gaining momentum from the past nor

living on to influence the future: "The mass popular is that which does not remain and is

not accumulated as experience nor enriched with what is acquired" (188). As a serialized

entity, any one artifact of mass culture affects many for a short time, but its influence as

an individualized portion of culture does not last. Nor do previous fads influence

successive mass culture items. This leads to García Canclini's views on hybridity, that

culture itself, especially in Latin America, is made through combinations and exists as a

new entity, entirely separate from that which came before, yet a by-product of it at the

same time.[33] Mass culture, when seen in this light, erases the individuality not only of

the entity who consumes it, but also of the object that it creates. This distinction, or

perhaps lack of distinction, between consumer and consumed will be very important in

how we view the subaltern reaction to mass culture.

Within the United States itself, moreover, we can see the influence of an

imperialistic conformity – it is not just a scourge that affects Latin America (if we can

even call it a scourge). Fiedler points to the American Dream as a equalizer that,

> imagines a slow, inexorable evolution toward an egalitarian community in
> which everyone, rich and poor (the native tradition can conceive of
> equalizing everything but wealth) will speak the same classless dialect of
> their native tongue, hear the same music, read the same books and
> periodicals, see the same movies and television programs, as well as drive
> the same cars, eat the same food and wear the same clothes (Fiedler,
> *Literature* 66).

Hollywood is not the only culprit in the American loss of subjectivity – even the promise of a better future leads to the homogenization of culture and class, where everyone not only dresses the same, but *wants* to dress the same. This is an important aspect of this kind of cultural hegemony: the *desire* to be like everyone else. As Fielder continues, "Finally, for the first time in history, there will exist a cultural democracy in which no one can be identified and placed – and be therefore condescended to or envied – by how he talks, walks and dresses, or what he consumes to satisfy his hunger, slake his thirst and re-create his spirit" (66). Equalizing the masses negates not only individuality, but also difference, that factor which singles out the elite or the unworthy. Thus, those who truly do stand apart must represent more than simple outward notions of difference. There must be something truly wrong with someone who stands apart from the search for this totalizing American Dream.

This erasure of subjectivity, therefore, creates a much more potent configuration of 'us' and 'them,' a normalized society that accepts popular culture and a subaltern contingent that does not or cannot. Society revolves around popular culture, around who conforms and who does not. For Horkheimer and Adorno, the pure fact that the culture industry is an industry, a business that mechanically reproduces stories, films, art, and culture, condemns the individual to non-existence: "Industry robs the individual of his function" (Adorno 124). Constant reproduction does not allow the individual to think. Instead, he or she can only follow the instructions given by the film or the advertisement or the magazine – by the propaganda that reveals parts, but not the whole.[34] Individuals thus become indexed, slotted into the hole that is right for their background. Horkheimer and Adorno write, "The public is catered for with a hierarchical range of mass-produced

products of varying quality, thus advancing the rule of complete quantification.

Everybody must behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance with his previously

determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his

type" (123). Popular culture, in this case, dictates not only how one ought to think, but

also how one ought to relate to others and to oneself. Huyssen points to this aspect of

Horkheimer and Adorno's work as perhaps the most important historically. He writes,

"[Adorno's] analysis of mass culture as a means of social control ripped to shreds that

mystifying veil cast over the culture industry by those who sell it as 'mere entertainment,'

or, even worse, as a genuinely popular culture" (Huyssen 24). By drawing our attention

to the men behind the curtain, the theorists reveal the manipulation inherent in popular

culture, which is based on industry, not on the will of the people. This relates to García

Canclini's insistence on the divide between popular culture and mass culture. In his

work, popular culture relates to the people, to older customs, myths and practices that

stem from the (usually indigenous) population. Mass culture, in this context, is that

which comes down to these populations from the (usually foreign) culture industry.

The outsider, then, the individual who does not conform, becomes mass culture's

villain. For Horkheimer and Adorno, resistance to the sway of popular culture rarely

occurs,[35] but when it does the culture industry immediately sets the rebel apart from

everyone else, an outsider who remains part of the popular whole by being cast as a

deterrent, something to frighten everyone back into line once more. Horkheimer and

Adorno tell us, "Apart from certain capital crimes, the most mortal of sins is to be an

outsider. In films he sometimes, and as an exception, becomes an original, the object of

maliciously indulgent humor; but usually he is the villain" (Adorno 150). Originality is

thus evil, unless this originality allows the culture industry to proscribe boundaries outside which it must not travel. The outsider, too, does not appear to have any power over his own situation: "Not to conform means to be rendered powerless, economically and therefore spiritually, to be 'self-employed.' When the outsider is excluded from the concern, he can only too easily be accused of incompetence" (133). Only those who are weak, who lack both the economic and spiritual capital to gain admittance to mass society, remain outside. Yet, there are aspects of the carnivalesque that complicate Horkheimer and Adorno's conception of mass culture – they recognize that popular culture both rejects and grudgingly accepts certain avant-garde, odd, foolish things. At one point they write, "The culture industry does retain a trace of something better in those features which bring it close to the circus, in the self-justifying and nonsensical skill of riders, acrobats and clowns, " while elsewhere they claim, "The eccentricity of the circus, peepshow, and brothel is as embarrassing to [the culture industry] as that of Schonberg and Karl Kraus" (143; 135-136). Here, nonsense, when coupled with the self-justification of skill and entertainment, is allowed into a popular culture conception of conformity. This same conformity, however, cannot accept the eccentric when it is coupled with voyeuristic qualities inherent in the sideshow, where the common man pays to spy on oddities, to pass judgment on those who do not conform – where nonsense crosses the border into madness. Originality, and even enchantment, become linked to the outsider, the individual, the man mad enough to run against Horkheimer and Adorno's mass deception. Therefore, we can see that traveling beyond the boundaries of mass society implies either villainy, incompetence or, perhaps, madness itself.

We cannot forget, however, the imposition of one culture on another that so concerns Martín Barbero. This destabilization of identity, of knowing itself, inevitably leads to violence, at least within Martín Barbero's conception of popular culture. This violence, projected not at outsiders, but within, at the self, further deforms the question of Latin American identity. The author writes,

> The de-mythification of traditions and customs that, until recently, our societies elaborated as their 'confident contexts,' erodes ethics and erases cultural habitat. Some of our most secret and bitter violences take root there. The people can, with a certain facility, assimilate technological instruments and the images of modernization, but only slowly and painfully can they reconstruct their value systems, ethical norms, and civic virtues (Martín Barbero 33, my translation).[36]

For this theorist, it is not popular culture itself that causes violence or that exerts violence directly on the people by taking away certain liberties through a monopoly of thought, as Adorno and Horkheimer infer through their linking of the culture industry and totalitarianism. Here violence takes its form out of the erosion of morals and values that come from the imposition of one culture on another. People can cope with the media itself, with the technology; they cannot, however, recover so quickly from a monopoly of culture. Violence stems not from the act of imposition, but as a reaction to it. This leads, at least for Martín Barbero, to nowhere, to a place that has no future, nor even a constant present: "the contemporaneousness that media produces remits, on one side, to the *weakening of the past*, to its de-contextualized reencounter, de-historicized, reduced to a citation […] And on the other side, it remits to the absence of a future that, in contrast to the utopias, does not establish a *continuous present*" (40-41, my translation).[37] The violence that occurs within this conception of popular culture and the culture industry is therefore an equal opportunity sort of destruction. It eats away not only at national and

individual identity, but also at time itself, at the continuation of history as we know it, from past to present to future. We cannot even have a connected, integral present; instead, we are faced with "nowhere" (55, my translation).[38] This non-place, outside of any chronology, along with our identities that are subservient to an imperial culture industry, serve as signposts for a new configuration of society itself.

When we look at popular culture from this standpoint, it is not only the outsider who eventually becomes mad; the consummate insider also attracts insanity. Though Adorno only points to the outcast as villain within the standpoint of popular culture, we can look at the underpinnings of his own views, modernism, to point out the reverse shot of such an argument. In Huyssen's commentary on Adorno, he notes that within the theorist's work, "mass culture remains the other of modernism, the specter that haunts it, the threat against which high art has to shore up its terrain" (Huyssen 56). Thus, while the Other is the villain of mass culture, mass culture is the Other of modernism, a villain itself. We can therefore claim that the madman, as the consummate Other, can take on both characteristics, as either a product of or an outcry against popular culture. We must remember García Canclini's insistence that both the consumer and the object of consumption lose their identity within the mass culture machine. The subaltern, he or she who wishes to retain identity, does not have to be an outsider, one who runs against the grain. The subaltern can also manifest as the consumer who tries to become the consumed, who tries to lose his anonymity by becoming the epitome of what he lusts after. This would suggest we must widen the definition of the madman as outsider – we must consider him or her as not only the individual who rejects mass culture, but also the individual who embraces it to an exaggerated extent, his or her profile going beyond the

simple audience member or the magazine reader; instead, we are confronted by the fanatic, the stalker, and the impersonator.

We can therefore think of the madman as one who has gone beyond mass deception, either by conforming to an insane degree or by refusing to conform. He or she is the outsider, the subaltern *and* the devotee, the fan. In this framework, madness takes on a new context – the inclusion of popular culture, as an influential social trend, into mainstream art alters the way in which society views and interacts with the madman. The definition of madness itself morphs into a new form. Now, the madman is not the hysterical woman or the fool or the patient in a sanitarium ward, though all of these aspects still hold important positions in the postmodern canon (if we can even claim one). Postmodern madness is not just an undefined unease with contemporary society or a simple obsession with mass culture products. Instead, it must be defined by how the individual tries to come to terms with either the illusions created by the culture industry or the way in which the culture industry destroys the illusions we once had. As Adorno states, "Art for the masses has destroyed the dream but still conforms to the tenets of that dreaming idealism which critical idealism balked at" (Adorno 125). Art produced by the culture industry reflects a paradoxical conundrum that shatters dreams, yet maintains the structures inherent in dreaming, building its creations within the scaffolding of idealistic illusion. Illusion is the key here, not the substance, or lack thereof, contained within the artwork. Postmodernism picks up on this illusory exoskeleton, making fantasy the centerpiece for much of its own artistic output. As Hutcheon notes, "[Postmodernism] argues that [master narratives] are indeed attractive, perhaps even necessary; but this does not make them any the less illusory" (Hutcheon 6). The postmodern counteracts what

has come before – negative attitudes towards popular culture, modernist insistence on master narratives – by revealing the illusory qualities of such approaches or products. Postmodernism, then, reveals the importance of acknowledging such approaches or products *as* illusion in the creation of new foundational narratives.

Our approach to postmodern madness, then, must take such views into account, recognizing the importance of fantasy and illusion in the creation of anything postmodern. Leslie Fiedler, in a review of Kurt Vonnegut's works, sees postmodernism as a tendency that "rises to the surface whenever an American writer wants to indulge not his own exclusive fantasies of alienation and chosenness, but the dreams he shares with everyone else" (Fiedler, "Divine Stupidity" 7). Fielder's remarks and Vonnegut's own works are reactions to the postmodern world, to a world reeling after the horrors of World War II, the threat of new technologies and new philosophies which defy imagination. We can view postmodern madness in the same light. This version of madness, complicated by the dichotomous instincts to retain individuality while still being a part of a larger whole, begins as the need to be something else, to be more than an Other. Faced with a world that leaves him out, the madman therefore latches onto the fantasies produced by the culture industry instead of turning to the mundane solidity of 'real' life, for while normal society may shun him, the illusions adopted by mass culture will embrace almost anyone. Yet, paradoxically, popular culture also enforces rigorous codes of conduct and the subjugation of individuality. The postmodern madman is therefore haunted by a need to break free from the bonds of such imprisonment. We must define postmodern madness, then, as the confusion created when the euphoria of living in a mass-produced

fantasy world clashes with the need to retain one's own individuality or one's own desires while doing so.

We can thus assimilate all of this information into some kind of thesis: the advent of the pop culture phenomenon allowed the definition and therefore the confinement and treatment of madmen, in the literary sense, to change, evolving into a complicated interaction between society at large, the doctor or confining space, and the madman. Instead of presenting a formal, well-defined model of duties and roles, where the doctor or confining space provides a buffer between society and the madman, dealing with the patient, allowing society to ignore or reject the insane, the new triptych becomes blurred. The spaces between these nodal points overlap and intermingle, allowing the madman to play at being his own doctor, or giving the society itself the stigma of the mad. This suggests that in the latter half of the twentieth century the advent of popular culture, of the recognition of the culture industry as an important cultural phenomenon and the growing importance of the integration of such industrial products into 'higher' art forms, also changes the way in which society reacts to, defines, and deals with madness and the madman. I will argue, then, that the trope of madness and popular culture in the twentieth century are so intertwined that one cannot be considered without the other.

The Inter-American Context

This leaves us with one last consideration – where will we base our study? A study of the workings of madness in the twentieth century, even one limited to individualized readings of specific works that relate to or reflect the madness of the twentieth century, a madness linked now with subaltern cultures and the outsider, is a

monumental task. And not only do we need to know where to center our inquiries, we also need to consider which texts deserve our attention. For this occasion, we will focus our attention of the Americas – including the United States, Brazil and Spanish America. The United States, as the progenitor and exporter of much of what we consider popular culture today, is an obvious choice in a study like this one. Including Latin America, however, is a not so obvious step. Yet, a comparative study of madness, instead of one limited to a single perspective, is appropriate if we consider the fact that we are working with postmodern literature, which reveres multiplicity. We will look to the Americas as the locus of comparison because of the rich history of Inter-American literature, which has flourished in the twentieth century. Though the roots of the interaction between North and South American literature can be traced to the discovery of the New World, it has been within the last few decades that true communication has flourished and since this time-period, with its abundance of influence and reception between languages and countries, coincides with the age of postmodernism, it is an appropriate place to begin.

Of course, we must remember that although the Americas are similar enough to warrant comparison, they are not, by any means, the same. The individual differences of each country, each linguistic group or each cultural entity must be taken into account, in order for us to at least begin to understand postmodern narrative output in the Americas. We cannot assume that the many countries of Latin America and the United States share the same level of technological, economic, or political advancement, whatever we consider these terms to mean. Neil Larsen, in his contemplation of the state of Latin American literature in a comparative context, claims that the literature produced by Latin American nations have so far only assumed a position similar to the position of Latin

America on the global market. He states, "a Latin American literary text requires that society itself speak alongside the text […] in order for its literary value proper to be realized" (Larsen, *Latin America* 146). Larsen argues that for most scholars Latin America is ruled by the laws set down by social sciences, which impose the "colonial/imperialist standard" (146). Latin America therefore sits in an intermediate position, below the United States, but above nations in Africa or Asia who have just gained their independence. The influence Latin American art or literature has over other nations is one that must be intertwined with a social or political context. Larsen writes, "For just as Latin America is not immune to the literary revolutions imported from the imperialist metropolis, so the metropolis is not immune to Latin America's major revolutionary export – the *political* 'avant-garde.' The imperialist center strives to understand the political Latin America, so as to contain and control it" (148). According to this argument, North America has a relationship with Latin American literature because of a need for control and North American critics and scholars read Latin American texts as wholly political in order to contain the revolutionary (political or not) aspects of these works. Larsen does not agree with this view of Latin American texts, but does point out that it remains the most common approach.

García Canclini, however, insists that the literary and the political horizons in Latin America do not correspond: "While postmodern currents are hegemonic in many countries in art, architecture, and philosophy, in Latin American economics and politics modernizing objectives prevail" (García Canclini 6). We can gather from this statement that reading Latin American literature by way of the modernizing aspects of its political climate does not do such literature justice. We must look at it through the same critical

lens we use on North American literature and could perhaps go so far as to consider both North and South American works as exemplars of national literatures in their own right. Of course, this is not to say that the 'modern' political and social contexts of Latin American states do not impact the content of each work, only that we cannot hold its literature to purely modernist standards. Instead, we must consider both the internal and international influences on literature coming out of the literary South. Larsen, this time espousing his *own* views on Latin America in *Reading North by South*, reinforces such a reading, stating, "Northern readers of Latin American literature, beginning in the mid-1960s, justified their own readerly interest *as part of a larger movement – and narrative – of decolonization*" (Larsen, *North by South* 5). By reading Latin American texts as part of a larger decolonization of the South, North American readers and critics must acknowledge both foreign and internal influences on such works. These texts, grounded in the political and social everydayness of their respective countries of origin (even if only tangentially, as in works by Severo Sarduy or Julio Cortázar) are also influenced, simply by being products of societies recently touched by Northern Imperialism, by Northern aesthetics and values. Whether these values manifest as protests against political oppression or as an homage to Hollywood, the hybrid nature of work coming out of Latin America in this time period give evidence to the importance of reading the literature of the Americas side by side.[39]

A brief literary history of both North and South America is therefore an appropriate way to start our comparison. After the turn of the century, the influences of the avant-garde began to take hold of Latin America, though its manifestations where very different in Spanish American and Brazil. In these works, however, we can find the first stirrings

of an interaction between popular culture and 'high art,' especially literature. Vicky

Unruh, in her book *Latin American Vanguards*, vehemently stresses this point in her

work on Latin American vanguard artists and authors. She states, "The confrontations

between high art and popular or mass culture that emerge in novels by Manuel Puig or

Luis Rafael Sánchez […] are anticipated by Roberto Arlt's novels and plays of the late

1920s and early 1930s and by Oswald de Andrade's 1920s collage narratives" (Unruh

2).[40] For Unruh, the innovations usually laid at the feet of authors writing from the 1950s

onward were actually products of, or at least inspired by, the vanguard writers of an

earlier period. Other critics notice this trend as well. Jason Borge, in his critical

introduction to the book *Advances de Hollywood*, notes,

> For the most radical writers of the vanguard […] an acceptance of the
> popular underpinnings of the cinema (the circus, the serialized novel)
> implies at the same time a certain rejection of artistic cinema […] and
> constitutes, therefore, a valorization of North American cinema, aside
> from the political complications implied in privileging the culture
> stemming from a country that represents […] a geopolitical menace for the
> region (Borge 18, my translation).[41]

The vanguard writers, for the most part, steered away from embracing the cinema coming

out of Europe and all that such artistic, highbrow uses of the new technology implied.

Instead, their fascination with the carnivalesque aspects of mass-produced cinema (those

aspects of cinema that Horkheimer and Adorno cite as embarrassing to the culture

industry at large and which produce subaltern tendencies) led to a wary truce with the

United States, or at least with the Hollywood that produced such films. By noting these

tendencies and the links they create not only between postmodern texts written during the

second half of the century and late modern texts coming out of the first half, but also

between North American cultural output and Latin American avant-garde literature, we

can come to a clearer understanding of the literary scene that produced the texts we will examine in this study.

We can use the case of Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) to illustrate the connections between North America, Latin America, literature and popular culture in the years leading up to the infamous literary Boom. One of the most influential writers that came out of the avant-garde period (though many disagree as to which literary period his work actually belongs), Borges was also one of the first authors to gain a wider audience outside of Latin America. Both a poet and a writer of short fiction, Borges came to exert a great amount of influence over writers, theorists, and academics in both the United States and Europe, though his fame in other continents came well after the publications of his works. It was not until the early 1960s that Borges gained renown, through English translations of his works and several important criticisms of his texts by North American critics. John Updike reviewed Borges, along with John Barth, who cited him as the answer to an exhausted English language literary tradition. According to Martin Stabb, in the book *Borges Revisited*, Updike's article "sees a real possibility that such a writer may have an important effect on our literature" (Stabb 105). Stabb goes on to note that Borges also influenced several of the New Critics and their literary theories and that his fiction even inspired Foucault and *The Order of Things*, in which the writer uses several Borges epigraphs. As Stabb states, "Thus, with the 'phenomenon' of Borges, readers on both sides of the Atlantic were forced to revise what one critic has called 'the conventional image of Spanish America.' In short, after him it was easier to read Latin American literature free of inhibiting stereotypes" (123). Borges, as a Latin American author, wrote texts that were universal, which, though set in Buenos Aires or Paris, could

apply to any locale. In a sense, he opened up Latin American literature to the rest of the world, without the backwater stigmas usually attached to it.[42]

Borges also serves as a link between the modern and the postmodern in the Americas. Though he is widely read as a vanguard author (a Latin American semi-equivalent to English modernisms), many critics place Borges' works, or at least his techniques, squarely in league with the Latin American Boom authors or even postmodernism. According to Umberto Eco, in *On Literature*, Borges' fictions are different from modernism (in the English connotation of the word) because he did not compose his works with the same intentions. Eco writes, "Joyce played with words, Borges with ideas" (Eco 113). This focus on ideas created a different feel to his texts, not only in accordance with syntax, but also with Borges' interactions with his audience. His stories, though perplexing and labyrinthine, were easy to read, if not to follow.

Robert Martin Adams, who does not have the highest regard for Borges, agrees in his book *After Joyce* that Borges' fiction cannot be connected to modernism, though his reasoning differs. Adams states, "Borges, when we look at him closely, is no more a real descendant of Joyce than he is a proper writer of fiction" (Adams 190). In these terms, Borges' use of the short story as his only medium, along with his disconnect with 'proper' literary tradition disavows him from being included in any kind of universal literary canon, at least in terms of modernism. Stabb, on the other hand, notes the importance of Borges to the postmodern. He writes, "Clearly his work does not partake of the pop art aspect or of the kitsch associated with some postmodernist art. […] Yet there are many well-defined features of his writing that appear to be paradigmatic expressions of postmodernism" (Stabb 125). These features include: circularity,

repetition, a bifurcating plot, fragmentation, and the hybridization of genres. Eco goes even further, citing Borges as an author who has already gone beyond what postmodernism aims to be. He tells us, "When it comes to the latest form of contemporary experimentalism, postmodernism, there is much talk of playing with intertextuality. But Borges had gone beyond intertextuality to anticipate the age of hypertextuality, in which one book not only talks of another, but one can penetrate one book from within another" (Eco 115). Raymond L. Williams also agrees with placing Borges as a seminal figure of postmodern literature. In his article "Fuentes the Modern: Fuentes the Postmodern," Williams tells us, "Perhaps the name that North and South share the most with respect to Postmodernism, however, is Borges. The same Borges cited by Barthes, Foucault, Baudrillard and Lyotard also established the foundation for a Latin American Postmodern fiction with his stories of *Ficciones*" (Williams 213). Taking all of these critics into account, we cannot precisely define where Borges fits into the canon or to which age he belongs, yet we *can* cite Borges as an American precursor to the postmodern age, as well as an author who served to unite North and South American literature.

But what does any of this have to do with popular culture? We can, in fact, look at Borges as an example of a vanguard incorporation of mass culture into 'high art.' As García Canclini states, Borges' life and work "demonstrated to the point of exasperation the way mass culture tends to treat high art: by substituting anecdotes for the work, by inducing a delight that consists less in the enjoyment of texts than in the consumption of the public image" (García Canclini 73). Instead of incorporating literature and popular culture together into a seamless whole, Borges' fictions enumerate how mass culture

consumes high art, via 'high' rewritings of 'low' themes, genres, or assumptions. A perfect example of this is "Death and the Compass," which appeared in *Ficciones* in 1944 (though the story was written in 1942). The story is Borges' rewriting of Poe's "The Purloined Letter" and tells the story of an infamous detective who wishes to solve a string of murders that seem to coincide with certain kabalistic clues. This detective, however, unlike Poe's Dupin, is a man of action, a man who does not rely exclusively on his intellect, and as such is prone to acting rashly before he has time to think things through. In the end, this detective is caught in his own trap, for as he solves the clues he comes to realize that he cannot save the last victim – himself. This retelling of Poe's detective tale reveals an enemy, an underhanded murderer and kingpin who represents the epitome of 'low' culture, defeating a sleuth who stands for a classical education and the 'high' culture it represents. Not only this, but the criminal mastermind uses the detective's own education and culture against him by creating an elaborate system of clues, based on the Kabala and a series of brilliant deductions. The defeat of the hero, who has been trapped in his own labyrinth of significance, signifies the death of his form of erudite, holier-than-thou way of thinking. This death privileges, if not the triumph of the masses, then at least the triumph of the cooption of high culture by an avatar of destruction and chaos. Even the genre of the story itself upholds this coup for mass culture. As Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria notes in "Man Without a Life," "One of Borges's most original contributions to modern literature was his ability to encapsulate tragedy in a minor genre like the detective story" (Echevarria 1). By utilizing such a minor genre and combining it with tragedy, Borges places emphasis on the unintelligibility and uselessness of the detective's classical education, even in telling his own story.[43]

This is not to say, of course, that Latin America has a monopoly on incorporating mass culture into her literature. The United States also has a rich history of interaction with the popular, also dating back to her avant-garde past, though most critics would not claim such a coherent link between the two as seen in Latin America. Phillip Nel, in his study on connections between the avant-garde and postmodernism, entitled *The Avant-garde and American Postmodernity*, points to surrealism as the most important evocation of the avant-garde in North America. In this role, surrealism can be considered an art form that both replicates and subverts dominant values and beliefs in American society. Therefore, the importance of surrealism in Pop art and the prevalence of surrealism in the United States as part of popular culture[44] create a link between the avant-garde and postmodernism. In North America the avant-garde lives on *through* this tenuous link between surrealism and mass culture.

For Huyssen, however, it was the avant-garde's utopian goals that paradoxically link it with mass culture and postmodernism. He writes,

> Ironically, technology helped initiate the avantgarde artwork and its radical break with tradition, but then deprived the avantgarde of its necessary living space in everyday life. It was the culture industry, not the avantgarde, which succeeded in transforming everyday life in the 20th century. And yet – the utopian hopes of the historical avantgarde are preserved, even though in distorted form, in this system of secondary exploitation euphemistically called mass culture (Huyssen 15).

Technology, an integral and important part of the postmodern experience, was the North American avant-garde's foundation and its downfall, for it allowed the theoretical, artistic, and critical leaps made by avant-garde artists, but also served to distance them from mass appeal. The goals of the avant-garde, however, apart from their techniques, live on within mass culture, which has filled in the hole the avant-garde could not

saturate. Taking these two critics side-by-side, we can come to the conclusion that, whether by way of certain techniques or through the sharing of certain end-goals, the North American avant-garde influenced postmodernism by impacting the culture industry.

Perhaps the most important historical influence on postmodernism within the United States, however, is the hulking monster of modernism, which touched North American audiences with a heavier hand than it did South American. The presence of modernism, for many critics, gave postmodernism more than just its name; modernism represents a mode of thought that postmodernism tried to counter-act.[45] As Huyssen claims, "Indeed, the birth of the postmodern out of the spirit of an adversary avant-gardism cannot be adequately understood unless modernism's and postmodernism's different relationship to mass culture is grasped" (Huyssen viii). Postmodernism and modernism encounter something completely different when they confront popular culture – although both movements incorporate mass culture into their works, their attitudes towards the popular affect how these incorporations manifest and how they are presented to readers.

Taking all of this into account, we can conclude that a chronological treatment of the postmodern phenomenon will serve as an appropriate guideline for any kind of study of postmodern aesthetics and how such literary realities affect how we view and interact with narrative madness. As we have stated elsewhere, a definition of postmodern madness requires an understanding of the illusions created by the culture industry. It also requires a much broader definition of what it means to be American, in a hemispheric sense. Hutcheon, in her work on postmodernism, notes the importance of reading the

postmodern beyond national borders. She writes, "Although the concept of *modernism* is

largely an Anglo-American one […] this should not limit the poetics of *postmodernism* to

that culture" and includes the 'neo-baroque' of "Spanish culture" in her investigation

(Hutcheon 4). Modernism may be an insular phenomenon, but postmodernism promotes

border-crossings and allows disparate cultural and textual traditions to speak at the same

time about similar circumstances. García Canclini, writing from a different perspective,

believes that postmodernism and Latin America are inseparable. He claims, "The

pluralist perspective, which accepts fragmentation and multiple combinations among

tradition, modernity, and postmodernity, is indispensable for considering the Latin

American conjuncture at the end of the century" (García Canclini 264). Plurality, not

uniformity, is the key reading narrative in the postmodern age. We can come to

understand, then, that when a critic makes a claim that madness is an appropriate

response to contemporary society, as Barbara Lupack does in her book *Insanity as*

Redemption in Contemporary American Fiction, she does so on the basis that "madness is

both a legitimate response and an effective challenge to the superficial sanity of the social

order and the historical process," and is thus synonymous with the postmodern condition

(Lupack 18). The novels analyzed in this dissertation, Carlos Fuentes's *Zona sagrada*

[*Holy Place*], Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*, Manuel Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña*

[*Kiss of the Spider Woman*], Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*, Caio Fernando

Abreu's *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?* [*Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?*], and Bret

Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* are thus novels which, in their own ways, grapple not

only with social constructs, but also with the issues found at specific points in time, with

the histories that lead up to their particular moments.[46]

CHAPTER II

THE FAN AND THE ACTOR AT THE EDGE OF POSTMODERNISM

It is fitting that we turn to marginal works to begin our critical analysis. Marginal not only in the sense that they deal with issues of identity and self-definition from a popular culture standpoint, but because each novel is based on the medium of film and narrated by a less-than-sane protagonist. Each of these novels also stands at the turning point of postmodern fiction. Written in the 1960s, both Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer* and Carlos Fuentes's *Zona sagrada* [*Holy Place*] reflect the inspiration of both modernism and postmodernism and struggle with issues relating to the both the legacy of the 1950s and the promise of the 1960s. These novel's interactions with popular culture, along with their placement along specific historical and temporal timelines and certain experiments in style and content, allow them to stand at the brink of the postmodern aesthetic. By beginning this dissertation with an analysis of these particular narratives, we will be able to see that postmodern madness, even in its earliest forms, distorts the triptych of madman-mediator-society we found in Foucault's history. Here it is the lunatic, and not society at large, that dictates the form and function of the intermediary. In these novels, the madman transforms into his own mediator, the perfect liaison between society and his particular form of madness.

In order to understand how this transpires in *The Moviegoer* and *Zona sagrada*, we must first gain an understanding of the time in which they were written. Though in the 1940s and 1950s Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy encouraged a more enthusiastic

literary exchange between Latin America and the United States, it was not until after the

Cuban Revolution in 1959 that the United States started to view Latin American literature

as imperative, not only literarily, but politically as well. Before 1959, Alfred A. Knopf

and Nelson Rockefeller promoted the study of languages, cultural conferences and

translations of works. Rockefeller provided financial support to publishers who would

visit Latin America and view its literary scene or to anyone who promoted or printed

Latin American texts in translation, from Spanish America or Brazil.[47] Knopf continued

printing Latin American texts even after the Good Neighbor Policy waned, thus setting

himself up as the most prominent publisher of such texts and a staunch supporter of inter-

American literary influence and reception. Yet, it is the second half of this century that

provides the most important locus of our study, starting with the 1960s. This decade, in

both North and South America, serves as the catalyst for change, not only within literary

conventions, but also within the cross-culturation between nations and national

literatures. The 1960s saw the creation of the Inter-American Foundation for the Arts,

founded in 1962 (and later assimilated into the Center for Inter-American Relations in

1967). This Foundation, lead by Rodman and later David Rockefeller, and whose board

members included Edward Albee, William Styron, Lillian Hellman, Gore Vidal, Alfred

Knopf and other Latin American and North American businessmen, was most notable for

its annual meetings, held in 1962 in the Bahamas, 1963 in Puerto Rico, 1964 in Chichén

Itzá, Mexico and 1967 in Puerto Azul, Venezuela. The Mexican gathering brought

together literary and academic celebrities like William Styron, Knopf, James Laughlin,

Oscar Lewis, Carlos Fuentes, Emir Rodrígues Monegal, José Donoso, Juan Rulfo, José

Luis Cuevas, and Nicanor Parra. Notably, most of the Latin American participants were

supporters of Castro or leaned to the left. At the Venezuelan gathering, Julio Cortázar and Mario Benedetti attended, along with many representatives from important publications from the United States, including *The New Yorker, The Village Voice, The New York Times,* and *The New York Review of Books*. Though these gatherings were important for the promotion of literary relations, as Irene Rostagno writes in her study *Searching for Recognition: The Promotion of Latin American Literature in the United States*, the "working sessions were not in the same league with the socializing" (Rostagno 104). The interactions between North and South American intellectuals was not simply about literature – the specter of politics and political leanings would always haunt any meeting that included Latin Americans who supported Castro and North Americans whose government did not.

Apart from inter-American relations, the 1960s was also an important turning point both in Latin America and the United States. The Cuban Revolution of 1959 jump-started the Latin American literary Boom, which catapulted Latin American literature into new revolutionary directions. The Boom, usually characterized by four or five main authors (Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa and, sometimes, Guillermo Cabrera Infante) marked a turning point not only in Spanish American literary conventions, but also in the reception of Latin American literature abroad. Writers, influenced by vanguard authors such as Borges, Alejo Carpentier, and Juan Rulfo and by the radical new modes of thought espoused by Castro's Cuba (in its first years), began experimenting with timelines, narrative techniques, and other staples of the narrative process. Publishers, both in Europe (Seix Barral in Barcelona) and Latin America (Casa de las Américas in Cuba), began publishing these texts outside national

and linguistic boundaries and these texts where translated almost simultaneously, releasing Latin American narrative to a much wider reading public. These factors opened the door for the first stirrings of postmodernism in the Americas and its particular views of mass culture.

Our first novel, Carlos Fuentes's *Zona sagrada*, is extremely complicated and surreal; its plot is almost impossible to summarize. Published in 1967, the novel recounts the life of Guillermo Nervo, son of the world-famous Mexican film star Claudia Nervo. Guillermo, called Mito throughout the novel, narrates his own version of events to a listener, later revealed to be his former high school lover Giancarlo. His narration is thus very personal, intimate, and confused, though he tries to make it all make sense. Through the chaotic interweaving of episodic snapshots we learn that Mito lived with his father and grandmother until he was old enough to go to school. His mother, however, kidnaps him one day after class, whisking him off to live with her. Mito idolizes his mother, seeing her as both an object of desire and as a hateful dominatrix. Sent away to boarding school in Europe, Mito tries to ignore his obsession with his mother and her celebrity by falling in love with a boy in his class. This fling cannot last, however, and Mito eventually returns to Mexico City and his mother's influence. Now fully in her grasp, Mito tries to get her attention and deal with her apathy by collecting dogs and then killing them, by flirting with her groupies, and by creating his own personal versions of her films, which he can play for himself on his own film projector. Claudia, in her cruelty, flies to Europe to film a movie without Mito and while there begins a tryst with Mito's old lover, Giancarlo. Mito, in response, begins to descend into his own personal hell, a disordered distortion of time and space, bounded by his intimate knowledge of film and

filmmaking. By the end of the narrative, Mito can no longer deal with the reality of his

situation, with the intimate relationship between Claudia and Giancarlo, and so turns

himself into a dog.

Critical reception of this novel has been mixed. Fuentes' fourth novel, *Zona*

sagrada is frequently dismissed by critics – they either consider it a potboiler or spend

little to no time discussing its merits or import in Fuentes' career. When the novel *is*

considered critically, most inquiries tend to center around psychoanalytical, historical, or

mythical readings of the text. Nancy Gray Díaz, in her book *Metamorphosis to Animal*

Form in Modern Latin American Narrative, looks at the text and its surreal ending

through several psychoanalytical frameworks, especially those related to Mito's pseudo-

incestuous relationship with his mother. She also combines this reading with an inquiry

into the mythological structures in the novel, specifically focusing on Mexican and Aztec

goddesses and the role they play in how Mito and Claudia interact on a metaphorical and

spiritual level. Lanin Gyurko, in his article "The Myth of Ulysses in Fuentes' 'Zona

sagrada,'" looks at how Western mythology influences the text, centering his readings on

how Mito's narrative rewrites the story of Ulysses. These critical works, representative

of much of the critical response to the novel, focus most of their attention on explaining

why Mito is mad and how Mito relates to his mother. Even Jorge Luis Galindo, in his

book *El cine mexicano en la novela mexicana reciente* [*Mexican Cinema in Recent*

Mexican Novels], which gives us a cinematic and historical account of the real life

inspiration behind Claudia's character, focuses primarily on Mito's conception of

Claudia. While I do not deny that understanding the relationship between Mito and

Claudia is extremely important if we want to comprehend Mito's madness, I would also

suggest that limiting ourselves to only this aspect of the novel is to misrepresent how the trope of madness works within the narrative. We not only want to know *why* Mito is mad, but *how* his madness manifests and what that could say about postmodern madness on a larger scale.

To begin an inquiry into *Zona sagrada*, then, we need to first take note of its position at the crossroads between the modern and the postmodern. Raymond Williams, in his article "Fuentes the Modern: Fuentes the Postmodern," sees the novel as one in a line of experimental works that reveal Fuentes as a figure who can "bridge the gap in the discussions of Modernist 'versus' Postmodern literature" (Williams 216).[48] For Williams, Fuentes' work is more Modernist than not; because novels such as *Zona Sagrada* and *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* [*The Death of Artemio Cruz*] use an interior-monologue that focuses a specific way of perceiving reality into a structure through which the narrator views the outside world, we must consider them equivalent with *Ulysses* in style, if not in quality.[49] In Williams' essay, however, when he considers Fuentes' more postmodern texts, such as *Terra Nostra* or *Cambio de piel* [*Change of Skin*], he mentions the importance of constant transformation, multiple identities, the domination of the ontological over the epistemological, and the predominance of storytelling over empirical reality. Though he does not find such characteristics in *Zona sagrada* within his essay, I would argue that if we look at how popular culture, especially film, interacts with and subverts modernist leanings within the text, these postmodern tendencies then come to the fore.

Chalene Helmuth, in her book *The Postmodern Fuentes*, actually notes some of these postmodern identifiers, "where the components of personhood are isolated and in

continually shifting patterns, where sexual identity constantly changes and where

projection and metamorphosis occur," yet she, too, ultimately dubs the text modernist,

because "these permutations of the notion of the self still remain within a mythic,

cinematographic, and psychological framework, which offers a rational explanation for

such transformation" (Helmuth 37). While I do think that both critics are right, to a

degree, in saying that the novel has Modernist qualities that may outweigh its postmodern

nature, I think that they have overlooked several significant aspects of the novel, most

importantly its interaction with popular culture. I am not saying that *Zona sagrada* is a

purely postmodern text, but I do think that by approaching it from a postmodern

perspective we can gain insight into how the novel presents the trope of madness and

how this particular madman interacts with society at large. And in order to fully

comprehend both madness and the novel itself we need to look closely at how popular

film and the star culture it creates interacts with the text. Though cinema may provide a

framework for madness in this text, I do not believe that such a framework is inherently

rational.[50]

Of course, rationality does have some sort of role in Fuentes' novel. The book is

divided into three sections, called One, Two, and Three, and each section is then divided

even more – One having only one section entitled "Happily Ever After," Two divided

into seventeen episodes, and Three containing only two divisions, "Suertes de naipe"

["Card Tricks"] and "Zona sagrada" ["Holy Place"]. The first section presents the time

and place of the narrative, when and where Mito regurgitates the events of his life to his

audience. In this section, Mito sits on the beach in Positano, watching the world pass by

around him – young men play soccer; a woman rides a horse down the beach. As he sits,

he begins to equate his surroundings with the story of Odysseus and engages his former lover, whose name we do not yet know, in conversation. The two argue about which version of the Odyssey they are living – will Odysseus return home to find a faithful wife and son or will he be lured by the sirens, never returning home? The question cannot be answered, however, for other matters interrupt the conversation and the novel moves on to the second section.

The second section recreates the other stories Mito narrates to his lover/audience. This section takes up most of the novel and consists of Mito's memories of his relationship with his mother and his first encounters with his lover, whose name, we learn, is Giancarlo. It also includes several dream sequences, where Mito cannot or does not understand the difference between his own fantasies and his reality. The structure of Mito's stories comes to us in fits and starts, episodes overlapping and settings, timelines, and characters changing abruptly. While the book follows no true chronology, we do learn that Mito started life with his father, but was kidnapped by his mother and sent off to boarding school in Italy. There he met Giancarlo and had an affair. Some time later he returned to Mexico City to live near his mother, in an apartment he fills with everything he thinks his mother will loathe – baroque furniture and décor, classical music, editing room cuttings of her films, and lots and lots of stray dogs. In Mexico City Mito lives on the edge of his mother's world and wishes to be a hero in her life, not just an extra. He becomes more and more agitated when he learns his mother will soon leave to film a movie in Europe. With Claudia gone, Mito has no reason to live and comforts himself by watching versions of her films that he has cut himself. Mito claims his story should end here.

The third section reveals what happens after the 'end' of the narrative, after Mito's mother has flown off to Europe. This section follows the final fates of each of the main characters. In it, we learn that Mito actually follows his mother to Italy, on the suspicion that she is having an affair with his former lover, Giancarlo. The paragraphs relating to his visit to Europe are vague – we do not know how much is fantasy and how much reality – but in the end we do know that Mito sees a wild orgy on the film set and witnesses Giancarlo and his mother copulate. This makes Mito frantic and his narration takes an abrupt pause – and next we learn that he has spent tine in an asylum. When he leaves the asylum he reunites with Giancarlo, who takes care of him and who will eventually bring him to the beach at Positano. The final chapter of the book is therefore not addressed to Giancarlo, but to a general reader. It tells of Mito's final transformation – upon returning to Mexico he goes to his mother's house, dresses up in her clothes and, when they do not fit, thinks himself transformed into a dog. He then ends the novel as a dog, locked in his old apartment, visited by the fate he used to reserve for his own dogs.

A consideration of the origins of Mito's madness is therefore paramount, though I do not believe that a specifically psychoanalytic approach is called for in this context. Critics usually assume that Mito's condition is caused by an Oedipus complex; Helmuth equates the distorted sections of the text with Oedipus and notes, "the irregularities of Mito's characterization […] can be attributed to the context of mythical archetypes and a severe Oedipal fixation" (Helmuth 33). While I do not wish to contest this, for I do believe that if we where to perform a psychoanalytical reading of the text to look at Mito's mental illness, we would find not only an Oedipal desire, but could even look at the novel via a discussion of Lacan's object *a* and Freud's four stages of development.

The purpose of this study, however, is not to limit our reading to mental illnesses. We are here to look at how and why his madness manifests the way it does and how that madness interacts with society at large. To begin with, then, we must look at where his madness begins and how it shapes itself over time.

Our first interactions with Mito as a child begin in the second episode of section Two, entitled "Los robachicos" ["The Kidnappers"], though later on in the novel, in the seventh episode of section Two, "Formica Sanguinae" we get an even earlier version of young Mito. Through these glimpses into his childhood we can come to some sort of conclusion about Mito's formative years. At first Mito lived with his grandmother and father, without any contact with his mother. His guardians never mention Claudia in front of the boy, or at least try not to, for he does overhear conversations. Even Mito's exposure to her celebrity is kept to a minimum. We can see how she affected the adolescent Mito if we look at his memories of her movie posters and his father's conversations. Mito tells us,

> ¿Y los carteles? Y las fotografías en los rotograbados […]. Y los noticieros. No, nunca las películas. No sabía ni me explicaban. Pero en un rincón de la alacena han anidado las arañas. […] Y ser fiel a todo lo que los demás no pueden compartir conmigo: esta ausencia del tacto cuando acerco los pajarillos lisos, metidos dentro de un sombrero de mi padre, a la oscura relojería de las viudas negras impalpables, de ese rincón (Fuentes, *Zs* 51-52).

> [And the posters? And the photographs in the magazines […]. And the newsreels. No, never the movies. I didn't know nor did they explain. But in a corner of the closet the spiders have nested. […] And to be faithful to all that others cannot share with me: this absence of touch when I bring the smooth little birds, in my father's hat, to the impalpable black widows' dark watchmaker shop, in that corner (Fuentes, *HP* 44).]

Mito knows his mother is famous and has seen some of her celebrity via still photographs and a taste of the popular portrayal of her life, but these two dimensional constructions do

not create any true connection between mother and son. Mito can only look back (for he tells us this from the vantage point of the present) and list Claudia's media saturation. He cannot relate to his mother not only because he has never met her, but also because he has never seen her films, never been able to use his imagination in connection with her presence. He has never touched her, nor can he imagine touching her, for he does not have a filmic template for such interactions: thus, his obsession with the spiders and the dead little birds. At this point in Mito's life film provides no framework, rational or otherwise.

The absence of Mito's mother from both his reality *and* his fiction leaves him with a loneliness that no one else knows or can share. Even his father, who does not explain what is going on, has abandoned him. This lack of explanations becomes a link to the spiders, an image that follows immediately on the heels of Mito's enumeration of all that he knows about his mother. The spiders and their watchmaker's detailed work allow Mito something on which to focus his attention. They exhibit the kind of focused reality he yearns to have in his own life. He wants to show the birds to the spiders, perhaps as an offering, perhaps as sacrifices, so that he can be a part of their world, be a part of their meticulous planning. They are something almost sacred to Mito, who calls their eyes, "las cúpulas de una iglesia o de un observatorio […] templos de la adivinanza" ["The domes of a church or an observatory […] temples of a riddle"] (Fuentes, *Zs* 52, *HP* 44). These creatures have something to impart to him, some secret pertaining to the darker recesses of hidden places. Yet, it is the little birds that Mito finally touches, rubbing them in an attempt to revive their breath, though they have been dead for too long. He wants to belong to the spiders, yet he is one of the tiny, flightless, featherless birds who

76

cannot survive falling from the nest and the only touch they will know, or that Mito will know, will be his own. The birds and the spiders thus provide action and a storyline that goes beyond the stillness of the posters. The animals allow Mito to use his imagination, something that even the newsreels cannot allow, since they present fact, not fiction (at least insofar as they try to present some version of reality).

This scene, then, expresses the seeds of Mito's madness.[51] Because of his abandonment, not only by his mother, but also by the rest of his family by the omission of information, Mito must turn to something for guidance. He wants to be active in something, wants to spend his imagination on something that will let him out of his loneliness. He tries to find a new pathway to community via the spiders, but his offerings die. He, like his birds, cannot survive for long without touch. This, coupled with the list of Claudia's popular images that come before, forebodes the next locus of Mito's obsession: cinema, especially Claudia's films, extending to both her fictional and non-fictional roles. Mito needs to be a part of something, needs access to someone else's illusions. Yet he also yearns for an intimate knowledge of *this* illusion, one that will give him more than just images – he needs to touch, to feel, and to be felt himself – which is why he maintains an obsession with his mother. She provides him a personalized access into a communal mythmaking machine.

We can, of course, look to Mito's first encounter with his mother as the turning point in his descent into madness. This would certainly point to a psychoanalytical reading and Mito's Oedipal complex. I would argue, however, that although Mito is obsessed with his mother, it is her link with cinema that shapes the manifestations of Mito's madness and therefore has the most effect on his world. The first encounter

between Claudia and Mito initiates fixation. Mito meets his mother for the first time when she kidnaps him from his life with his grandmother. His first impression of Claudia is revelatory: "Yo levanté la mirada y encontré, más entonces por ser la primera vez y ser la sorpresa, mi propio rostro de niño convertido en otra cosa, en unos labios que me besaban y luego se separaban de mí" ["I raised my eyes and found, more then, since it was the first time and a surprise, my own child's face turned into something else, into lips that kissed me and then separated from me"] (Fuentes, *Zs* 17, *HP* 19). In this revelation, Claudia is not an individual or even a person – instead, she is a reflection, a repetition of Mito's own face, and a disembodied pair of lips. Claudia is not a mother here, though some have pointed to her lips as an object *a,* a representation of the child's need for a mother. Instead, she is a sexual object and a reflection of Mito's own face. This first impression, as Mito says, though never repeated with the same vigor, sets the foundation for his interaction and adoration of his mother. He sees himself in her, a connection he has not yet had with the outside world. And he also sees the embodiment of sex, though at the time he may not have understood such urges. The lips that kiss him, yet are removed from him soon after, present an identification with the female. This could be considered Mito's first metamorphosis, when he first sees his face turn into something else. This stands as an important turning point in the novel because not only has Mito found something upon which to fixate, but he has also acted like a star-struck moviegoer, finding common ground with a larger than life screen star, seeing himself in something that has so far been foreign. He has been struck by the heightened aura that surrounds movie stars.

 Celebrity is therefore an important part of Mito's relationship with his mother.

Mito views her as both mother and star – his confusion between the two lead to many of his problems. David Marshall, in his book *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, considers celebrity to be the idealization of the individual and cites the celebrity as "the production locale for an elaborate discourse on the individual and individuality that is organized around the will to uncover a hidden truth" (Marshall 4). This would seem to say that celebrity, because of its connection and fascination with specific individuals, eschews the archetyping of movie stars. Fans want to know the intimate details of a star's life, want to know who they really are and what they really do. Yet, Marshall also calls celebrity "the ideal representation of the triumph of the masses," for, "Celebrity status evokes the message of possibility of a democratic age. […] The celebrity, in this sense, is not distant but attainable – touchable by the multitude" (6). This implies that though the fan wants to know the celebrity intimately and seems to be able to interact with the star on a personal level, he or she is actually connecting with an ideal, a representation of what he or she wants to find. Any action taken in the relationship is taken by the fan, who wishes to uncover the truth about the star, who wants to *be* the star. The celebrity is left motionless, powerless, a figurehead and not an actor. As Marshall goes on to state, "We are psychically drawn to identify with stars as ourselves. This, however, is only appearance. The dialectical reality is that the star is part of a system of false promise in the system of capital, which offers the reward of stardom to a random few in order to perpetuate the myth of potential universal success" (9). Though the consumer believes himself to be intimate with a star, he is, in fact, only dealing with a false idol, something he will never be able to attain. Stars therefore appear as archetypes, as the quintessential individual and not as actual individuals. And there

must be an interaction between celebrity and fan in order for the star to reach his or her full potential. The celebrity must exist, but it is the fan who makes him or her paradoxically become an archetype.

It is thus celebrity that enchants Mito, not just his mother. He is attracted to the mythological qualities of the star as well as the promise of interaction, of individual attention and vicarious excitement. He tries to find this quality wherever he goes, even in his boyhood lover, Giancarlo, "una especie de contrapartida masculina de lo que mi madre representa" ["a kind of masculine counterpart of my mother"] (Fuentes, *Zs* 75, *HP* 62). The Spanish conveys more than the English translation– this man is a kind of masculine counterpart of what his mother *represents* (de lo que mi madre *representa*). In the middle of Mito's fling with Giancarlo, as he waits in his bedroom for his friend (and soon to be lover) to come to him, Mito worships a movie poster that hangs over his bed like a religious icon. The poster depicts a silent film vampire, lounging in a sensual position. He tells us, "ese cartel, gastado en los bordes, barnizado de nueva cuenta, era la victoria cotidiana – la eternidad – de esa antigua actriz. Bastaba este acto de adoración para que Francesca Bertini retuviese para siempre el tiempo presente de su belleza. Dios te salve Francesca" ["That poster, worn on the edges, newly varnished, was the daily victory – the eternity – of that old actress. This act of adoration was enough for Francesca Bertini to retain forever the present time of her beauty. Hail Francesca, full of grace"] (100, 80). The woman in the poster is an archetype of femininity *and* celebrity, the two combined into one central figure: Maria the Holy Mother and Francesca the Actress (archetypes both) equated with the figure of a vampire. The woman in the poster offers pleasure and pain, seduction and violation. Mito's religious adoration of this

poster is therefore not simply ironic *or* iconic – his correlation between the Virgin Mary and a movie star exalts the woman's timelessness above her individuality.[52]

Mito becomes enamored by the image because he cannot disentangle his own personal life and celebrity, cannot divide his mother from all actresses and all actresses from their screen images. He chooses to revere the archetype above the person, denying Francesca (and by association, Claudia) her subjectivity as an individual. Mito is therefore able to partake in the illusion created by celebrity, by thousands of adoring fans who see the poster as Mito does and can thus connect to this poster, unlike the posters of his mother he saw as a child. Mito, in this instance, has become a fan because he has seen her movies (both Claudia's and Francesca's). Before he had never seen the films related to the posters and was thus unable to view them through the 'correct' cultural codes. With the added knowledge that comes with an understanding of his mother and her role as a star, Mito sees the still image differently. He has become a part of the community that can touch the communal illusions represented in the poster. The poster is not simply an object anymore, but a part of a larger story, a larger fiction – it is that which Claudia tries to retain through her own celebrity, the eternity of fame, where beauty remains forever. We need to therefore consider the poster as a relic, in all the connotations of the word. It is an item that stands outside of time, a piece that represents a whole, and a vessel that manifests, contains, and maintains a specific aura. The poster, like the vampire, is legend, illusion, yet also offers immortality. The differences between how Mito reacts to the first poster of Claudia and this new film poster can thus chart Mito's descent into madness – as he begins to immerse himself in fantasy, he begins to lose himself in larger cultural illusions.

It is *this* poster that watches as Mito is initiated into a new phase in his life, as he consummates his obsession with Giancarlo. The Italian lover poses before Mito "bajo la mirada de los angelotes y de las vampiresas, del arte que heredaste y el arte que creaste" ["under the gaze of the fat angels and the silent screen vamps, of the art you inherited and the art you created"] (Fuentes, *Zs* 103, *HP* 82). The second person to whom Mito narrates is an older version of Giancarlo and yet, at the same time, it is also the Giancarlo who lies naked before the younger Mito. This allows the scene to exist in two times, the past and the present, giving it the timelessness the star in the poster obtains. Mito wants this moment to live on in the present. We can see this in the way Mito phrases his memory – directly before the poster is mentioned the narration remains in the past tense, but starting with the phrase that contains the looming image, the narrator morphs the past into the present moment. What was passive becomes active and what was lost in the past becomes part of the present. Our narrator wants to recall Giancarlo as he was back then, as if the man, too, is caught up in a poster, an object to be worshiped for its constancy. Yet Mito's narration of the scene to Giancarlo creates a doubling of the images, a paradox that confuses the 'you' of the second person – Mito tries to create a 'you' that transcends history and time, yet cannot come to terms with the difference between the young Giancarlo and the old, fantasy and reality. This confusion, like Mito's deification of Claudia, presents Giancarlo as an entity created by community pressures (the inherited angels of familial obligation and morality, which were art to begin with) and a need to invent an individual identity from something else (the illusive vampires *he* turned into art). Giancarlo may not *be* any of these things (as we shall see by the end of the novel, the young Italian is *not* what Mito wants him to be), but Mito sees his lover this way

because he wants to project his own troubles onto others. He wants to see his own madness reflected in someone else's eyes.

Mito's life after his experience with Giancarlo, under the gaze of the cinematic vampires, is thereafter constantly bombarded by cinema, either because of his obsession or because of his mother's stardom. Galindo, in his reading of the novel, views the overall structure of the novel and Fuentes' narrative techniques through the eyes of the cinema. He sees Giancarlo's role as that of a spectator interpreting a screenplay: "the novel presents on one hand a cinematographic structure, while on the other hand it also intends to be a visual transcription equal to a technical screenplay. With this the listener and the reader experiment with the same process as Guillermo, as spectators" (Galindo 63, my translation).[53] The reader, as part of Mito's audience, shares both in Giancarlo's auditory relationship with the story and in Mito's own re-enactment of his life. As readers we are all therefore spectators of a half fantasy, half documentary film. The narration, then, is as close to the filmic as one can get without actually placing the story on film. Galindo sees this structural ploy throughout the novel, especially within the narrative structure, its three main sections specifically referring to the filmic structures proposed by Syd Field in his instructions to screenwriters.[54] He also sees cinematic techniques in the way in which the scenes bleed into one another spatially and temporally. Galindo believes that these scene changes create the illusion of watching a film, allowing the spectator/reader to see actions that occur at the same time though not in the same space. The simultaneity of film is thus translated to paper.[55] Galindo also insists that all of these allusions to film are important, not only in the structure of the text itself, but also in the way in which we as readers must relate to both the text and its

narrator. This insistence on film and its technical aspects allows us a grid by which we can approach the text.

Helmuth seems to agree with Galindo to some extent, for she also cites film as a logical locus for Mito's condition. The taint of film, at first, appears to give Mito a certain form of subjectivity. Helmuth argues, "Movie-viewing provides Mito access to a world of illusion that he appropriates without question as reality" and cites Mito as directing reality as film, posing his mother and describing scenes as if he is the camera's eye (Helmuth 34). This puts Mito in the director's chair and allows him to wield the power of imagination as a weapon against his own loneliness and abandonment, just as he did as a child offering birds to the spiders. Galindo follows this line of reasoning when he suggests that, "the novel emphasizes the cinema as a producer of myths and utilizes character's reactions in order to create the process of mythification inside a framework where content and form reflect these two processes" (Galindo 37, my translation).[56] Cinema, as a producer of myths, along with the myths created by cinema, thus lend Mito the power of rationality and the power of creation.

Taking the relationship between film and the novel only this far, we could perhaps say that film provides a rational, technical explanation with which we can approach the text and the narrator's madness. Filmic logic could provide an alternate explanation for Mito's madness – if we considered his madness as similar to what Foucault encounters, predating postmodern (cinematic) influences. If we consider Mito's *use* of filmic strategies, however, we will need to come to a very different conclusion. The cinema, as the inspiration for Mito's narrative, may superficially allow Mito the freedom to create, to mythologize his mother and worship her via his own versions of reality. It would seem

that as narrator of his own text, *Mito* is the one who manipulates how he will or will not

incorporate film into how he views his life. Because of Mito's obsessively *intimate*

relationship with film, however, he does not actually retain control of its influences on his

life. Cinema is not just a framework for Mito – it is his family, his lifeblood, his soul.

True to his fears, cinema has taken over his volition. He may *want* to be the director of

his surroundings, and may frame his narrative as if it were film, but this framing only

leads him back to madness, to the loss of his individuality in the face of communal

illusions. Here, cinema is personal *and* impersonal and therefore just as mad as Mito.

Cinema cannot be a *rational* framework for Mito, even as he spouts technical babble and

uses film as the foundation of his worldview and narration, because Mito knows cinema

to a dangerous extreme. He rules it and is ruled by it – uses it and is used in return.

We can see Mito's use of all things cinematic more specifically when we look at

how Mito interacts with the rest of society. These interactions complicate his role as

director. He wants to see himself as the one in charge, as someone who can change

reality through imaginative storytelling. When confronted with a leading man who Mito

believes is trying to woo Claudia, Mito imagines him a name, a face, and a fate. Filmic

epistemology allows Mito to make what he fantasizes into a simulacrum of the real. As

he gifts the anonymous actor a name he remembers how he used to invent creatures under

the bed at his grandmother's house. Yet he links this new act with vengeance, wanting to

harm his mother and her supposed lover. He says, "los traspasaré con alfileres mientras

gimen y resoplan encima de mí, sobre el colchón" ["I will pierce them with pins while

they moan and breathe heavily on top of me, on the mattress"] (Fuentes, *Zs* 25, *HP* 25).

In this fantasy world, Mito has combined the loneliness and imaginative yearnings he

85

knew as a child with the anger and betrayal he has come to know as an adult. His

dreaming transforms into a weapon; he also imagines that not only can he create these

men, he can also destroy them, "como si yo tuviera un lápiz y pudiese dibujar las

facciones de todos esos hombres a mi antojo. Y luego borrarlas" ["As if I had a pencil

and could draw the features of all those men at will. And then erase them"] (25, 25).

This reveals Mito as both director and aggressor, linking the act of creation with

destruction. Mito, by inserting an extra 'yo' ['I'] into his statement, also reinforces his

need for the act of owning the pencil that draws these characters to be his alone. Though

Mito narrates his sketching of character in the past subjunctive, it is still *his* action. We

would hope, as Mito the narrator believes, that this distance is one that can set him apart,

as an observer *and* a manipulator, a director who can mold the plot. Perhaps this could

allow Mito the possibility of possibility. However, because his power comes from under

the bed, because he can only direct films that will never be filmed, Mito's authority

cannot extend beyond his own imagination. What he views through his camera lens is

not real, cannot be shared by others, and is therefore impotent – he has no audience and

therefore no power.

We can therefore conclude that Mito's wish to be a director does not, in fact, dictate

his life. In reality, outside of Mito's head, the young man is little more than a glorified

film projector. Influenced more by his obsession with his mother's films than by his own

personal thoughts, his imagination, when it spreads beyond his own head, is locked into

re-runs, not original programming. Claudia notices this and reproaches her son, saying,

"nada más repites frases de mis películas. ¡Te las sabes de memoria! Eso que acabas de

decir lo dije yo allá por el 45. Como si importara lo que me hacen decir en el cine" ["all

you do is repeat lines from my movies. You know them by heart! What you just said, I said around '45. As if it mattered what they make me say in the movies"] (Fuentes, *Zs* 149, *HP* 117). Even when he speaks with his mother, Mito tries to create his own versions of her films – and here we get a glimpse of how others see his choices as director. Mito does not create his *own* films, but pieces together plots and scenes and dialogue from movies already made. He knows them from memory – they are more real to him than reality. Claudia knows that what she says on film does not matter. Only the repetition of her image, of her personality, is important – the assertion of her timelessness and her power over those who watch. Yet Mito is caught up in the details, in the trivia of film, of what is said and how it creates a storyline. He thinks film does matter, can have an impact on what happens outside the projector. His splicing of Claudia's films and his need to use his creativity as a weapon are thus impotent acts not only because they happen from under the bed, but because they are copies of copies and therefore do not affect the 'real' world; Mito lives too far removed from the original.

Of course, Mito does try to fit in, tries to play the part he ought to play, in order to join Claudia in her world. Towards the middle of the novel, he decides to live by her rules. He begins this process by wishing Claudia were *his* creation and his alone. He states, "quisiera que Claudia fuese sólo mi creación imaginaria" ["I wish that Claudia was only my imaginary creation"] (Fuentes, *Zs* 91, *HP* 73). Here Mito wants singular control over his mother, over the power she has not only over him, but over her worldwide audience as well. Mito soon ameliorates his own fantasy, however, by adding, "deberá hacerlo como en ciertas películas suyas, con aigrettes y polisón […] como una Bernhardt, una Duse, una Lillian Russell" ["she should do it as in certain movies of hers, with

87

aigrettes and bustle […] like a Bernhardt, a Duse, a Lillian Russell"] (91, 73). Mito's

personal control over his fantasy has given way to a need to see his mother as the rest of

the world sees her – via her films. And not only via her films, but also by way of other

film stars. His individual imagination has been overtaken by the culture industry and

though Mito does not realize it, his reliance on these popular culture archetypes in order

to formulate his fantasies undermines not only his sanity, but also his chance at ever

having a true relationship with anyone.[57]

Galindo notices Mito's tendency to be attracted to cinematic archetypes (and

stereotypes) when he considers Mito's descriptions of women. He writes: "women

become the object of desire, therefore the spectator identifies with that which the

masculine character directs […] and takes the also masculine position of he who

observes, that is to say the camera" (Galindo 61).[58] As both spectator and narrator, Mito,

like the camera, occupies a position of observation, tainted by a masculine approach to

women. Seen in this light, I would argue that Mito develops into a fan writing fan

fiction, wishing to be a part of the world of film, but as *he* wants to see it. Gyurko comes

close to hinting at this kind of reading of the text when he looks at how myth works in the

narrative. He writes, "The neglected son, unable to gain maternal grace in reality, creates

his own myth of family reconciliation, one that is patterned on the Homeric myth of the

homecoming of the wandering Ulysses" (Gyurko 317). Myth allows Mito to rewrite

what he sees, to reconstruct his life via alternative courses. Even this cannot give him

solace, however, for at the end of the novel the mythology no longer follows the story of

the Odyssey, but instead: "The positive myth of the noble Ulysses who finally returns to

his homeland and is reunited with his faithful wife Penelope and dutiful son Telemachus

is thwarted. Guillermo is forced into an alternate version of the myth, the one developed

in the *Telegonia*" (317). This alternate form of the myth, which changes, again, how

Mito's relationships progress, takes the power Mito gains via storytelling and converts it

into yet another empty promise. Fan fiction, like the alternative myth that does not allow

Ulysses to find his happily ever after, provides alternative recreations of events, but does

not involve the real characters, only the fan's own versions of what takes place.[59]

   We can look at Mito, then, as a representative of the stereotypical pathological fan

– obsessed, participatory, deviant, Othered; searching for an identity that he has lost or

that has been taken from him. John Fiske, in his article "The Cultural Economy of

Fandom," divides the 'normal' aficionado from the fan by pointing out the fan's need to

fill an emptiness of cultural capital with something else. He tells us, "Fandom offers

ways of filling cultural lack and provides the social prestige and self-esteem that go with

cultural capital. […] Lack cannot be measured by objective means alone, for lack arises

when the amount of capital possessed falls short of that which is desired or felt to be

merited" (Fiske 33). Fiske thus places the impetus for this need for filler, for something

to stop up the holes left by an absence of cultural capital, directly onto the individual.

Joli Jensen, too, in her article "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of

Characterization," claims that most critics define the fan as someone who is searching for

a way to define him or herself. She writes, "To be a fan, Schickel and others imply, is to

attempt to live vicariously, through the perceived lives of the famous. Fandom is

conceived of as a chronic attempt to compensate for a perceived personal lack of

autonomy, absence of community, incomplete identity, lack of power and lack of

recognition" (Jenson 17). The lack that perpetuates fandom comes not out of some

overwhelming societal pressure to belong, but instead from the personal need to regain or improve cultural standing.

We can therefore understand Mito's madness as a channeling of his role as a star-struck fan, an observer who wants to control what he sees. He is a victim the cult of celebrity, wherein, as Galindo says, "the spectator confuses the personality of the actor with that which he or she represents on screen or vice versa" (Galindo 48, my translation).[60] Mito thinks that his mother is the women she plays on screen and that those women all represent Claudia. To this end, Mito constantly views stolen footage of her films, taken before the official studio edits, splicing scenes and storylines together to suit his own needs. This sets Mito up as a man who can watch films and manipulate fantasy, but who cannot interact with anyone in real time. Mito can direct only in the present time of film, where the same things repeat over and over, in the simultaneous fantasy moments he imagines in his head, endeavoring to impose cinematic rules on quotidian narratives. This paradoxically allows Mito to combine the technical details of filmmaking with its more ideological underpinnings, intertwining his imagination and obsession with celebrity with an advanced knowledge of how these fantasies are actually filmed, spliced together, and put on screen.

Therein lies Mito's madness – by falling victim to the cult of celebrity, Mito has allowed his own perceptions of the line between fantasy and reality to waver, thus creating the gap of lunacy that separates him from everyone else. When Mito wants to end his story, wants the reader to stop reading at the end of the second chapter, he tells us, "Pero si, además, mi vida es en cierta manera un espectáculo, entonces algunas miradas sabrán descubrir la absoluta similitud – acaso, la confusión – de lo que ven con

lo que leen. Claudia pasa por la pantalla y no hay, para mí, diferencia entre el espacio y

el pensamiento" ["But besides, if my life is in a certain way a spectacle, then some eyes

will know how to discover the absolute similitude – maybe, confusion – between what

they see and what they read. Claudia passes over the screen and there is not, for me, a

difference between the space and the thought"] (Fuentes, *Zs* 156, *HP* 122). For Mito

there is no difference between what happens on screen and what happens in his own

mind. Here Mito recognizes the foundation of his madness, the overlapping of cinematic

fantasy and personal reality, but does nothing about it. He does not care if his readers

view his life as one would a film, nor does care if they see him the way he views Claudia,

with no difference between filmic space and individual thought.

    Mito therefore cannot *choose* to become anything, but instead falls into his

transformation because he cannot discern between *his* fantasies, *communal* fantasies, and

reality. The three become so intertwined that no one, not ever the reader, can tell which

is which. His madness stems not from a need to create, but from a need to react, to run

away from and at the same time embrace the monsters produced by the intersection of

individual freedom and collective destiny. We can see this clearly when we look at how

liaisons work within this text. Mito cannot turn to an asylum for help – when he returns

from a clinic towards the end of the novel "no me reconozco" ["I didn't recognize

myself"], but the change is only skin deep (Fuentes, *Zs* 181, *HP* 137). He says, "Ahora

razono lúcidamente" ["Now I can think rationally"], yet his delusions only heighten from

this point on (181, 137). Religion does not help him, nor does his family, not even his

own reflection. In the end, even his own narration comes back to haunt him. In the

penultimate section in the book, "Suertes de naipe" ["Card Tricks"], Mito's audience,

Giancarlo, turns on him. In this scene, Giancarlo is supposed to be taking care of Mito

after he has returned from the asylum. The young Italian takes Mito to see the movie

filmed in Giancarlo's apartment, the movie whose filming sent Mito over the edge and

into a nervous breakdown. After the screening, the two confront each other at a subway

station. Mito believes Giancarlo has stolen his life, taken over his position in Claudia's

world, and treacherously retold his stories (the ones we too have read in the preceding

chapters) to Claudia. Giancarlo denies this, stating, "No quieres entender cómo terminó

esa historia" ["you don't want to understand how that story ends"] (183, 139).   Then, in a

final act of cruelty, Giancarlo asks Mito what he could do if he *was* able to strip Claudia

of her cinematic trappings. He asks, "¿si yo te entrego a tu madre verdadera, desnuda, sin

máscara, ofendida, revelada al fin por un hombre imaginado que le ofrece la última

sorpresa: la sorpresa de que, contra todas la apariencias, yo no la reflejo? […] quieres que

te la devuelva así?" ["if I surrender your real mother to you, naked, maskless, insulted,

finally revealed by an imagined man who offers her the last surprise: the surprise that,

despite all appearances, I don't reflect her? […] Do you want me to give her back to you

like that?"] (183, 139). In this threat Giancarlo reveals Mito's dilemma – he has lived his

life worshiping something that is not real, the mask and not the woman. Because of this

he has made himself an imaginary man, in both senses of the phrase. He has formed

Giancarlo in his own image, placing all his hopes and desires and his own visage onto the

young Italian. At the same time, he has made *himself* imaginary, trying to reform his

subjectivity around an illusive model. Both constructs are flawed because they are based

on worshiping Claudia's masks. And yet, in the end, neither of these men, Giancarlo or

Mito, can fully replicate Claudia, a surprise that would devastate her (and Mito). None of

the reflections or refractions Mito has spawned actually work or mean anything.

Giancarlo, as either lover or brother, cannot bring Mito closer to his mother or his

cinematic image of her. Though Giancarlo tries to give Mito that option, Mito does not

want to come to terms with her without her celebrity. He does not want Giancarlo to give

her back to him stripped of everything that makes her something worth reflecting.

Giancarlo, then, as a 'real' man, cannot mediate Mito's madness, though he tries, because

Mito is not ready to give up on the one illusion that matters the most – the illusion of

control.

The final section of the novel, then, allows us to see how Mito has decided to react

to his revelation. React is the key word here – Mito does not create, but only responds in

kind. After returning from Europe, Mito tries to come to terms with his problems. He

enters Claudia's apartment and dresses in her clothes, parading before her mirror in her

high heel shoes. He does this in order to inform on her, to reveal to everyone that she is a

witch, a monster, so that they will condemn her and burn her at the stake. In his madness,

Mito rages against Claudia, crying out,

> ¿Qué les diré cuando la denuncie? ¿Qué, cuando la vea subir a la
> hoguera? ¿Que lo terrible es saber que la hechicera es inocente y que por
> eso es culpable? ¿Que no podríamos vivir sin ella y que no podemos vivir
> con ella? No. ¿Bastará mostrarme así, demostrar que soy ella, que ella
> usurpa mi identidad, que ella me ha convertido en esto que los espejos
> reflejan: en este príncipe de burlas, en este muñeco de cosméticos […] en
> este perro famélico que ya no puede sostenerse sobre los tacones altos,
> gigantescos, zancos, y cae arañando el vidrio, cae con el cofre vacío entre
> las manos y con él rasga los espejos? (Fuentes, *Zs* 186-187).

> [What will I tell them when I inform on her? What, when I see her go to
> the stake? That what's terrible is to know the witch is innocent and for
> that she is guilty? That we couldn't live without her and we can't live
> with her? No. Will it be enough to show myself like this, show that I am
> her, that she usurps my identity, that she has turned me into what the
> mirrors reflect: into this prince of mockery, into this puppet smeared with

cosmetics […] into this ravenous dog who can no longer hold himself up on these high, gigantic heels, stilts, and falls scratching the glass, falls with the empty jewel case in his hands and with it claws the mirrors? (Fuentes, *HP* 141).]

Here, Mito wants to reveal what his mother has done to him, so he takes on her form. He wants, essentially, to erase the myth that the star system has created out of her, to take her out of her everlasting present and place her outside of the fantasy world of film. Instead of stripping her down, as Giancarlo would, however, Mito decides to take over her mask, parading in front of an imaginary audience, a tribunal that will eventually burn her as a witch. This audience allows Mito to showcase his obsession in front of other fans, to present his *own* fiction. His madness, then, his metamorphosis, erupts out of a need all fans share: to possess what they revere. As Fiske notes, "The reverence, even adoration, fans feel for their object of fandom sits surprisingly easily with the contradictory feeling that they also 'possess' that object, it is *their* popular cultural capital" (Fiske 40). Mito wants to possess his mother and all she represents by becoming her, by letting her identity overcome his. His assumption of Claudia's image is thus a rebuke and a tribute, to both his individuality and hers. He has given up his own image for hers, yet retains his sense of self and is able to keep his consciousness separate from hers because she has become *his* through possession. Yet, this spectacle is a performance, in front of an audience. This replicates Claudia as well, complicating how we can read Mito's actions here. His perception of what happens will be different from the audience's, hence his formulation of what occurs as a question, instead of a statement – he does not know if what he sees and knows will translate. This hesitation emphasizes Mito's individuality, even in the face of assimilation, for it upholds his knowledge of Claudia as superior to all others'. It also calls his knowledge of her into question, however, for the only way for

him to really let them know what she is is by taking on her image himself.

This absorption of Claudia's image also highlights her own struggle with appearances and reality. Mito knows that Claudia is an abomination, a creation that has no reality, for he slips on her clothes as if donning a costume, both hers and his. Her hair is not real, her eyelashes are not real, and her mole is fake. Claudia is not a person, but a creation, and Mito recognizes the need to reveal her truth. Yet, Claudia is innocent of her crimes because she, as an actual person, is not 'real' – the only reality she can attain is via her celebrity, which distorts any vision of her with the director's / producer's / spectator's version. Claudia is thus guilty because she is innocent, because she has allowed others to fashion how she will be viewed. And Mito, at least in this section, recognizes that he is a part of the community of spectators that has framed Claudia the way they *want* to see her. His use of the word 'we' reveals that Mito is just as culpable in her treachery as any other fan. His transformation, then, from Claudia to prince of mockery, to puppet, and finally into dog form, reflects an inability to come to terms with multiple perspectives. Mito cannot be himself, for he feels the need to dress up as his mother. His mother, however, is not one entity, but the combination of Claudia the person and Claudia the construct. Because of this clash, Mito cannot become Claudia either. The mirror therefore reveals his failures because it can only reflect reality, not the fantasies Mito wishes to create. He is ridiculous because his need is ridiculous – he cannot be himself, a woman, and a cinematic creation all at the same time.

To retain his individuality, then, Mito reverts to the form of a dog, a symbol of all that he has hated about his relationship with his mother, and at the same time a symbol of all he has wanted to be.[61] His transformation is not a conscious choice – it pains him and

makes him fall to the ground, attacking the mirrors as he falls – yet ultimately Mito must fall. His life and the way he has been forced to live it will not permit Mito to find a middle ground. He is thus caught in a paradox – in order to reveal his mother's deceit and exterminate her cinematic myth, he must become her, yet his transformation will never be enough and only her extermination could end his suffering. But in order for her to be no more, he must somehow attain the unattainable: the source of his woes cannot be exterminated because too many people love Claudia, too many are fascinated by her. He reverts, therefore, into the one form that can avoid the paradox entirely; instead of running to his holy place, his apartment, he creates a holy place within himself by negating his humanity and transforming into the one thing that has shown him any loyalty and which will be accepted by his mother. Mito has become the ultimate fan: the faithful hound.

The next section of the narrative reveals Mito's full transformation with the words, "Gruño" ["I growl"] (Fuentes, *Zs* 187, *HP* 141). We do not know if Mito is truly a dog, with fur and a tail, or if he is a man on all fours who thinks he is a dog, but in reality this does not matter. What matters is how others react to his transformation and how Mito himself sees his new life. Helmuth agrees with this assertion, writing, "Whether this is physical or mental, it is a real transformation in Mito's perception" (Helmuth 36). And in this ending, Mito's life has been turned upside down. Instead of being the master of his own Holy Place, where he rules a pack of hounds given to him by his mother, he is now a dog himself, living under the dictatorship of his maid's boyfriend, Jesús. Instead of playing God, dispatching his hounds via indirect means, starving them, throwing them into the street, playing surgeon on their wounds, cutting off their tails and paws, Mito

must now submit to his own starvation and beatings. Worst of all, "No saben pasar la

película. Confunden los carretes, proyectan las copias al revés, todo es esa cacofonía y

esa confusión de cintas torcidas, regadas por el suelo, destripadas" ["They don't know

how to run the movie, they mix the reel, project the copies backward, everything is

cacophony and the confusion of twisted film, scattered on the floor, crushed"] (Fuentes,

Zs 187, *HP* 141). As a dog, Mito is beyond the influence of film. He can no longer

direct, nor can he even watch, and has therefore placed himself outside of cinema's

boundaries. Though his new life is not ideal, it is safe, predictable. Mito does not have

to worry about illusion any longer, or about asserting his subjectivity. By taking a dog's

body, Mito can finally take control of his own situation, even if he cannot cure himself or

even create a holy place free from outside influences, because by becoming a dog he

escapes the need for choice

    We know, finally, that Mito must be his own mediator because of this

transformation. When speaking of Mito's metamorphosis, Frank Dauster, in his article

"The Wounded Vision: *Aura, Zona Sagrada,* and *Cumpleaños*," asks, "What better

opportunity for one who needs to be humiliated, reviled, mistreated?" (Dauster 115).

Díaz ventures closer than others to a dynamic investigation of the problem, spending an

entire chapter of her book on *Zona Sagrada*, yet her conclusions lack a convincing

answer. She renounces the claims that the ending is Kafkan and rejects the idea of

placing blame.[62] For Díaz, "Mito becomes the animal that best emblematizes and

projects his extreme psychic condition and state of being" (Díaz 93). While I would

agree that a dog best symbolizes Mito's madness, I would argue, however, that Mito

transforms into a dog because in this way he can become the ultimate fan, the perfect

devotee. He does want to seek revenge and this form suits him best because it reflects his

actions as a man, but he transforms totally because he has lost all other forms of

mediation – he cannot be Claudia or Giancarlo and cannot rely on them to mediate the

world for him. By this point in the text, Mito knows that he is mad and knows *why* he is

mad and does not care. Since Mito does not want to contain his madness any longer,

does not feel he can make any more choices, he embraces his role wholeheartedly. Mito

as a human being cannot survive, so he must use himself as his own liaison, transforming

into what he considers his perfect form.

A contemplation of this ending and Mito's final madness can therefore lead us to

some conclusions about the novel and how it represents the trope of madness. I would

argue that in *Zona sagrada* the way in which film interacts with the main character

changes how the madman relates to both society and reader. There is no mediation by

way of myth, or filmic structure, or psychosis here; these so-called rational frameworks

only lead our narrator astray. Within the text itself mediators have a pivotal role –

Giancarlo even castigates Mito for having too many mediators between himself and

reality. Mito tells Giancarlo, and the reader, "dices que necesito mediadores […] Dices

que la verdadera visión nos restituye la pareja original: la visión libre, sin mediadores.

Porque se corre el riesgo de confundir al mediador con la mitad que deseamos y entonces

la visión se vuelve fugitiva" ["You say I always need mediators […]. You say that the

true vision will restore the original couple; the free vision, without mediators. Because

we run the risk of confusing the mediator with the half we desire and then the vision will

escape us "] (Fuentes, *Zs* 107, *HP* 85). Giancarlo's wisdom here almost perfectly

encapsulates what happens to Mito throughout the novel. Giancarlo is trying to tell Mito

that he needs to live for himself, using his own vision, free from the taint of anything else, be it religious, cinematic, cultural, or mythical. Mito should not allow others to stand between him and the real world. Yet, Mito does allow things to cloud his vision – he turns to myth and the cinema and his own brand of rationality in order to try to grasp what goes on around him. He uses these things as crutches in order to understand real life, yet also hides behind them to escape it. Because Mito cannot see clearly, because he is blinded by his fanatical obsession with film, he confuses film with what he desires – his mother, Giancarlo, affection, friendship, a sense of belonging. Yet, the mediators he uses, film included, are *not* rational and thus their mediation is flawed. This forces Mito to place himself into the gap left by false gods, since he refuses to take Giancarlo's advice and live freely.

We can, then, finally understand *Zona sagrada* as a novel about failed liaisons and passivity. In *Zona sagrada* the madman reverts to a passive role, welcoming his freedom from choice, from consciousness, if not from fate. A dog's life is a life of acceptance, of distance, of dispassion. Mito's victory comes about through his own particular form of annihilation. The laws that rule men (including Claudia's) no longer apply to Mito the dog and thus his existence/nonexistence and his desire for his mother and her stardom/myth no longer mean anything, or at least mean something new. Death holds no surprise for Mito now and he can finally be content in his own existence. The last lines of *Zona Sagrada* read, "Ésa es mi victoria. Un perro sabe morir sin sorpresa" ["That is my victory. A dog knows how to die unsurprised"] (Fuentes, *Zs* 191, *HP* 144). Mito is able to die without surprise because he is a dog and no longer a man. The abandonment that awaits Giancarlo and his mother when they die cannot touch him. Finally, Mito has

99

gained some control – he cannot change his fate, or cure his madness, or possess his

mother or her stardom, but he can discipline his emotions at last by embracing

compliance. Rejecting humanity and its options, he can use his madness to place himself

outside of the rules that bind the rest of us.

<center>**************************</center>

The next book we shall consider in this chapter, Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*, is

a novel that deals with the legacy of 1950s America, the Korean War, and the mass

consumerism that came with the steadily rising wealth in the United States at the time. In

the United States, while no huge literary transformation was underway, the 1960s was a

turning point, politically, socially and critically. Huyssen cites the 1960s as the end of

avant-gardism and points to this decade as one that embraces popular culture for the first

time with an uncritical eye (which is not a good thing from his point of view).[63] Huyssen

also emphasizes the differences between European and North American interactions with

the advent of postmodernism and popular culture happenings within the Art world.

Postmodernity in the United States, according to Huyssen, is characterized by a specific

sense of the future. For Huyssen "what concerns me here is the temporal imagination of

postmodernism, the unshaken confidence of being at the edge of history which

characterizes the whole trajectory of American postmodernism since the 1960s"

(Huyssen 166). This confidence, found during the 1960s, set the decade apart. Though

North American happenings, Pop Art, experimental music, etc., were novel in the United

States and North Americans viewed themselves as being on the edge of some new and

brighter tomorrow, these were, in Huyssen's vision, minor or marginal phenomenon in

relation to Europe. Yet it is this (supposed) pretense to innovation that allows the

American postmodernism to thrive. As Huyssen states, "The audience's expectation horizon in the United States was fundamentally different from what it was in Europe" and "it goes without saying that the postmodernist revolt against the institution art in the United States was up against bigger odds than futurism, Dada, or surrealism were in their time" (167, 168). Whatever the odds, however, we must acknowledge the importance of the 1960s as the decade that exerted the most influence over the flowering of the postmodern in the United States. While it did not oversee the birth of all that is postmodern, nor did it usher in the beginnings of the popular culture movement, this decade engendered the creation of contemporary postmodernism *and* its first positive critiques.

Published in 1960, Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*, his first novel, stands at an important turning point, not only in the cultural history of the United States, but also in the evolution of narrative in the Americas as a whole. This book is not quite a postmodern text, though it embodies several postmodern characteristics; nor is it a thoroughly modernist text, bounded by the writings of modernist Southern writers like Faulkner. Most critics firmly label the narrative an existential text, comparing it to Camus' *The Stranger* and analyze it via certain philosophers, mostly Kierkegaard (since the novel begins with an epigraph from that author). The main character, Binx Bolling, narrates a week in his life, the dates surrounding his thirtieth birthday, his relationships with his family, and his own philosophies of life. A college man with a good job and a large extended family, Binx should be content with his life. He cannot, however, get past certain details: his love for his crazy cousin Kate, an incident from the Korean War that haunts him, his lack of a father, his overbearing matriarchal aunt, and his sickly yet

saintly younger half-brother. Binx also complains of a malaise that plagues him (and everyone) and lists ways in which one can counteract this malaise, including rotations and repetitions, which repeat certain sensorial experiences in distinct ways. He finds these rotations and repetitions in his obsession with film and in his ritual attendance at movie theaters all over the city of New Orleans, where the novel is set.

At first glance, there is very little linking Percy's novel with Fuentes's. Both novels are narrated by young men searching for some kind of meaning in their lives. These men try to explain their lives and their struggles to someone else, but Binx's audience differs from Mito's in that Binx writes for strangers, while Mito speaks to an intimate acquaintance. These narrators also recognize that they are narrating and understand the power a narrator has over his text and his audience. Mito, however, cannot distance himself from his own story – he does not possess the critical self-irony necessary to gain perspective. Binx on the other hand, writes a more formal treatise, setting out to explain his way of life and his philosophy in a logical, ordered manner. His slightly ironic tone and use of set definitions and analytical tools allow him to create a narrative distance between himself and his subject(s). It therefore seems as if Binx is nothing like Mito at all, especially when one considers Mito's madness. Mito is plagued by much more pronounced symptoms of lunacy and his narration is wrought with larger indications of his madness. Yet, if we look closely at how celebrity, film, and place work within Percy's text, we will be able to see Binx's predicament as an ironic, half-speed manifestation of the madness that infects Fuentes's narrator.

To understand this we first need to know what happens in Percy's novel. The actual plot of the text revolves around two important journeys. In one, Binx takes his

secretary for a ride to the beach, where he intends to seduce her. They end up, however, spending the night with Binx's mother's family, a working class, bayou clan. His mother's family is very different from his father's family, with whom Binx lives out most of his days. His father's family – Aunt Emily, Uncle Jules, cousin Kate, and the rest – are part of the New Orleans social register. They are the kings and queens of the Mardi Gras parades and hold positions on the boards of charitable foundations. His mother's clan, however, come from a different Louisiana – a Catholic, church going, down-home tribe who would rather fish for their dinner than eat out. At his mother's summerhouse, Binx discusses life with his crippled half-brother Lonnie, a devout Catholic, and tries to come to terms with the legacy his parents have left him. He begins wondering about his place in the world and the existence of a higher power, one that could cure, or kill, his sickly brother. In the other journey, he takes his cousin Kate on a train trip to Chicago, where he must go for a business conference. On the train, the two come to terms with their volatile relationship. They observe the other passengers, discuss Binx's philosophies, and try to consummate their love for one another (though this act does not go as planned). On this trip Binx also confronts the validity of his system of getting through life – amidst the wilderness of downtown Chicago, he begins to doubt his path. By the end of the novel, Kate and Binx marry, Lonnie dies, and Binx seemingly turns his life around. Instead of wandering around in his malaise, Binx forgoes his moviegoing, finds religion, and becomes a doctor, like his father before him.

Most critics read the novel as either a coming of age story or a hero's quest, though set in a postmodern landscape. Philip E. Simmons, in his article "Toward the Postmodern Historical Imagination," can serve as a representative of those critics who

read the novel in this way. He writes, "It is not only a coming of age story but also the mythic plot of a hero's journey and return, except that Binx Bolling receives a properly ironized twentieth-century version of the hero's rewards" (Simmons 607-608). Simmons goes on to cite "the newly sprung wilderness of mass culture" as the site of this hero's quest (608). The critic also connects Percy's use of mass culture as "part of the older mythoi of the fall from grace and the loss of the values of the aristocratic, agrarian old South" (603). This kind of reading places *The Moviegoer* into a codified and canonized literary legacy, forcing readers to consider the novel as a slightly eccentric continuation of older tropes and archetypes. Edward J. Dupuy, in his book *Autobiography in Walker Percy*, reiterates this kind of reading, stating, "In its own derivation and originality, *The Moviegoer* sings a new song about something very old – the status of humans as neither angels nor beasts, neither theorists nor consumers, but as wayfaring pilgrims" (Dupuy 139). Dupuy reads in Percy's novel a kind of "retrieval," the destruction inherent in the postmodern condition allowing the hidden potential in older forms to come to the foreground (139).

Postmodernism, however, is a very potent term in criticisms of Percy's text. Throughout his narrative, the narrator of the novel stays removed from his subject, content to convey to us his life with the same objective irony he uses to dissect those around him. It is this tone, the way in which Binx approaches his predicaments, that sets the novel apart from the modernist designation. Simmons suggests, "This shift in tone is part of what marks Percy's novel as a transition from Faulkner's modernism to the postmodernist South of Bobbie Ann Mason" (Simmons 618-619). *The Moviegoer*, for Simmons, is thus, "a transitional text, treating postmodern themes in a late modernist

mode (621).[64] With this summation, at least, I will agree. The novel presents themes,

motifs, settings, and enigmas that correspond to a postmodern world, a world in which

the rules that have governed history until this point no longer have the same power. John

F. Desmond, in *Walker Percy's Search for Community*, comments on the novel's

postmodern aspects, writing, "With its many shifts and breaks in the story line and its

movement between action, memory, and reflection, the novel's form suggests the

fragmented state of modern culture and the difficulties of finding identity and community

in such a shattered world" (Desmond 43). Though the novel's tone, setting, and form

may be postmodern, however, or at least hint at the postmodern, our narrator is not a

postmodern man, though he would perhaps like to be. His tone may be ironic, his eye

may be jaundiced, but his gut reactions are not tailored to fit the world that he thinks he

inhabits.

This disconnect between the postmodern world and Binx's reaction to it is the

reason why so many critics label Binx with already known qualities or compare him to

earlier versions of the same archetype. Tony Tanner, in his article "*The Moviegoer* and

American Fiction: Wonder and Alienation," compares Percy and his main character to

earlier North American authors, pointing to the importance of a true way of seeing. In his

view, "their ideal is an eye of passive wonder" (Tanner 14-15). Harold Bloom also

compares Binx to other literary figures in his introduction to the anthology *Walker Percy*.

In discussing the novel Bloom remarks, "[Binx] is a kind of grown-up, ruefully

respectable New Orleans version of Twain's Huckleberry Finn. Like Huck, Binx longs

for freedom while fearing solitude. But an Existentialist Huck Finn is a sublime joke,

and this joke still seems to me Percy's authentic and very considerable achievement"

(Bloom 3). Bloom recognizes the paradox involved in Percy's text – Binx's search is like

fitting an existential peg into a postmodern (w)hole. Our narrator is just not equipped to

deal with the world he sees; the tools given to him do not allow him to create a newer,

fuller understanding. Patricia Poteat, in *Walker Percy and the Old Modern Age*,

recognizes this lack of proper terminology – she states, "Binx has been reduced to this

unhappy state precisely because the potent though unobtrusive legacy of the

Enlightenment is such that he is constrained to think of the self in just these terms at the

exclusion of all others" (Poteat 62). Binx does not have the will to create his own terms

or his own signs for what he observes, so he must rely on the words available to him.

Poteat points out that the epigraph of the novel, a quotation taken from Kierkegaard's *The

Sickness Unto Death*, sets up this dilemma. The epigraph reads, "… the specific

character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being despair" (Percy). This

quotation lets the reader know that not only is the whole novel about a despair that one

does not acknowledge, but also clues us in to the vocabulary used within the text itself.

We will be confronted with terms and ideas grounded in certain philosophers. This opens

the text up immediately to specific kinds of analysis and interpretation. As many critics

acknowledge, we are all but asked to consider Binx via the tropes and terminology of an

older regime or through the lens of a philosophical microscope.

   For these critics, then, Percy's novel comes down to the question of survival. How

can one live in a postmodern world if all one has are the weapons of an earlier age? To

answer this, most point to Binx's link with others. As Mary K. Sweeny notes in her book

Walker Percy and the Postmodern World, "What makes Binx unlike so many other

existentialist heroes or anti-heroes, is that his search is not merely a self-centered

investigation. He has great compassion for each person he touches" (Sweeny 31).

Compassion, for these critics, is what saves Binx. Poteat agrees with this wholeheartedly,

writing, "It is this – not reading fundamental books, not living as Anyone, Anyplace, not

endlessly going to movies – but this care and conviviality for and with the living creature,

mortal, guilty, beautiful, which defeats the malaise" (Poteat 69). Simmons agrees with

her, noting that the novel ends not with a reiteration of existential values, but with human

connections. Binx's moviegoing is therefore a false solution. As Lewis A. Lawson writes

in his book *Following Percy*, "Moviegoing, unconsciously questing for perfect moments,

in other words, guarantees our dissatisfaction with our incarnate lives" (Lawson, *FP* 94).

While there is something important to what Simmons, Dupuy, Poteat, Lawson and

all the rest say, I would argue that there is more to this novel than the clash between the

postmodern world and the individual and I would go so far as to say that Binx cannot use

compassion as an answer *because* of his link to both movies and movie theaters. To

understand this claim, however, we must first look at Binx and his relationship to

postmodern madness. Several critics have picked up on a relationship between Binx and

madness, though not all agree on its causes. In a review of *The Moviegoer*, Stanley

Hyman judges the novel to be, "A detailed pathology of modern neurosis" (Hyman 35).

This reading of the text implies that Binx is undoubtedly mad, but that his madness is

representative of a society that is itself mad. Dupuy, on the other hand, writes, "The

reader must decide whether Binx is a 'nut'" or if he functions as a representative of how

man must deal with contemporary culture (Dupuy 73). For this critic, we must either

consider Binx insane or a representative of the postmodern dilemma – he cannot be both.

Sally McFague, in her article "The Parabolic in Faulkner, O'Connor, and Percy," creates

a third reading of the text, in which society reviles those who *can* come to terms with a postmodern culture. She explains, "Percy creates parables in which people come to an awareness of the intimacy of the ordinary and the extraordinary only through distortion, violence, and the grotesque. The people who *do* come to such awareness tend themselves to be freaks" (McFague 127). In this reading, the ordinary and the extraordinary must mix, but this mixing creates a grotesque representative whom society denies endorsing. These three very different critiques reveal an important conundrum in Percy's novel – is Binx simply a lost soul who finds answers at the end of the novel? Or is he tainted by more than a simple need to define his place in the world?

    To understand how madness works in this text, then, we must first understand Binx's relationships with others, to see if his compassion actually exists or works to save him. Like Mito, Binx is an outsider, though his way of life is not as obviously Other as Mito's, whose antics and homosexual tendencies make his strangeness easy to acknowledge. Binx, simply put, does not fit into any of the possible plans laid out for him by his relatives.[65] Alfred Kazin, in his article "The Pilgrimage of Walker Percy," recognizes this aspect of the novel, calling it "a book about an outsider for outsiders. […] As Binx shows, in every passage of his involvement with the sophisticated upper-middle class in New Orleans, it is the South itself that today makes outsiders of its people, breeds a despair that will never know it is despair" (Kazin 95). For Kazin, Binx is twice removed from society because of his ancestry: he is a Southerner in a country where the South is ostracized, yet is also an outsider even within that society. Furthermore, the South itself has fostered his distance, for it does not allow room for any other choice except being Southern. The despair bred in the novel, however, is more than just the

despair of a Southern gentleman – it is also the desolation of the modern man in general. We know this because of the central theme of moviegoing, which can happen anytime, anywhere. All men are touched by the cinema, which stretches beyond boundaries of race, class, or birthplace. Yet, because of Binx's particulars, as a wealthy Southerner from New Orleans *and* an outsider's outsider, he cannot have sympathy for everyone. He is attracted to other moviegoers and that is all.

We can see how this manifests in the novel when we look at Binx's relationship with his cousin Kate, the only member of his family who seems to understand him. Everyone in the novel considers Kate mad, including Binx, yet her relationship with Binx is of utmost importance to the novel and to how we can come to understand madness in the narrative itself. In his review Hyman notes, "*The Moviegoer* is more than pathology because [Binx] and Kate are not only case histories but complex human beings" (Hyman 37). This reading takes into account the fact that both characters are mad, but that their madness is more than simple mental illness and that the novel itself is about more than tracking how their lunacy began. I would argue that while both these characters are mad, their madness differs in quality and kind. Kate is mad in the modernist sense, a hysterical woman who needs a caretaker; Binx is mad in the postmodern sense, a lost man in a lost world. Both souls are caught in the gaps created by the transition from modern to postmodern, but while Kate fits into the definitions that rule the old hegemony, Binx represents something new.

Our first introduction to Kate is a veiled discussion between Binx and his Aunt Emily about Kate's supposed suicide attempt. We then meet Kate very briefly at a luncheon with the family, where she says little and makes an exit early. During the

narration of the lunch Binx lets us know about Kate's "breakdown" which we, as

attentive readers, must link to the loss of Kate's husband, mentioned earlier in the novel.

Kate is therefore set up very specifically as someone with very real mental problems,

issues that exist because of her place in society. She is lost and alone, exactly where a

woman should not be. She is fragile and unstable and does not follow the normative

rules set down by the rest of the family. In essence, she is something that needs fixing,

something to gossip about. Desmond, in his reading of Kate, envisions her as having a

firmer grip on how to get out of her predicament. He writes, "unlike the hypocritical and

more accommodating Binx, she refuses to play a role at the cost of her integrity. […]

She tries honestly to face the catastrophe of alienation that has overtaken them in their

world" (Desmond 59-60). Kate, unlike Binx, recognizes her plight and wants to tackle

her issues head on. Desmond also notes Kate's "desire to find someone she can believe

in as an authority, someone whose words will tell her how to live. Kate intuits that

somehow this need is a key to her spiritual well-being, a relation that could begin to heal

her riven self, providing she does not exchange her crippling Gnostic 'flights' for

crippling dependence" (67). Kate is thus caught in a paradox, though one very different

from Binx's. Her madness does not stem from the clash between the need for

individuality and sublimation of an imaginary – instead, her madness and mental illness

cannot be separated, and can only be understood as part of the old regime. We know this

because Kate knows this – she knows she is in trouble and needs help, but in order to find

that help, she must submit to an authority, something she is unwilling to do, at least for

most of the novel. Kate thus needs a mediator separate from herself, a true doctor-patient

relationship. Her madness, seen by many of her relations as hysteria, attracts sympathy

and compassion from everyone, except Binx, whom she attracts in a very different way.[66]

After lunch, Kate and Binx engage in a conversation, in which Binx describes her not as one would a cousin, but as one would describe a prospective lover. He mentions her "derriere" and calls it "a very good one, marvelously ample and mysterious and nothing to joke about" (Percy 42). This description tells us right away that the relationship between Binx and Kate goes beyond formal familial ties. Kate, too, recognizes this link, though she does not see it in sexual terms. She off-handedly remarks, "'You're like me, but worse. Much worse'" (43). The two are linked, then, by Binx's lust for Kate and Kate's insistence that he is one of her kind. Yet, after Kate compares the two of them, Binx tells us, "It is not necessary to pay too much attention to her" and later in the novel, when she again tells him "'You're nuttier than I am'" and "'You're like me. So let us not deceive one another'" he again repeats, "I do not, to tell the truth, pay too much attention to what she says" (Percy 43, 192, 193, 195). Kate, as an individual, does not matter to Binx. She never takes on the characteristics of a true equal in his eyes – instead, she is an avatar, a symbol, or a game piece, depending on how Binx feels at a particular moment. She is a woman, but unlike his secretaries because of her hysteria. Though we must acknowledge Kate's authority in her comparison of herself and Binx, for she knows madness when she sees it, we must also recognize Binx's need to ignore her remarks. Kate is the only one who can see through Binx's façade, the only one who realizes that he plays a role every time he speaks to one family member or another. As John Hardy notes in *The Fiction of Walker Percy*, "Kate may be crazy, and variously perverse, and have very bad taste in houses and what not, but she is not stupid" (Hardy 52). Yet Binx cannot believe Kate because she is mentally ill and a woman – she

is a sexual object, not a confidant; a lunatic, not a person.

There are aspects of Kate's madness, however, that do inform our reading of Binx's own lunacy. As Harold Bloom states, "Kate's suicidal despairs are the dark center of the moviegoer's life as a man" (Bloom 4). Primarily, Kate verifies Binx's theories through her participation. After watching a film together at a very specific theater, the two are struck by the importance of seeing the neighborhood surrounding the theater in the film. It is Kate who announces the importance of this out loud, saying, "'Yes, it is certified now'" (Percy 63). By uttering one of Binx's terms aloud and using it in its correct definition, Kate attaches herself to Binx's worldview. Binx, however, sees this complicity as part of her madness. After he explains to his audience what certification means, Binx muses, "She sounds better but she is not. She is trapping herself, this time by being my buddy, best of all buddies, and most privy to my little researches. In spite of everything, she finds herself, even now, playing out the role" (63). Repeating Binx's own philosophy back to him does not make Kate a part of his world, any more than her insistence that they are the same makes him pay attention to her – Binx has no inclination to share anything, even his own terminology with her. He attributes her complicity with parroting, with trying to be something she is not. Role-playing, for Binx, is a sign of Kate's madness, a sign of her slipping away from reality and toward a world that she has created for herself.

Yet this role playing mirrors what Binx does himself, taking on the characteristics of the men and women he encounters, or at least taking as his own, for the space of a conversation, the philosophies and world views others extol. He, too, traps himself in this way. We can see this clearly not only in his dealings with Aunt Emily or Uncle

112

Jules, but also through Binx's seduction of his secretary, Sharon. From the beginning of his hunt, he takes on the role most suited to Sharon's expectations of how an amorous employer should act. Binx tells us, "Toward her I keep a Gregory Peckish sort of distance. I am a tall black-headed fellow and I know as well as he how to keep to myself, make my eyes fine and my cheeks spare, tuck my lip and say a word or two with a nod or two" (Percy 68). Here Binx not only puts on a new skin, he also takes on the role of an actor on several different levels. He uses his own physique, which could pass for the archetypical Gregory Peck character, in order to manipulate others. He, in essence, pretends to be someone who pretends for a living. Thus, Binx is not only trying to be someone else, he is also trying to be an archetype, a set group of characteristics labeled by the name of a man who best represents these characteristics in film. As Richard Pindell notes in his article "Basking in the Eye of the Storm: The Esthetics of Loss in Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*," "To act like Brando or Gable is to act like someone who is also acting. It is to be the shadow of a shadow" (Pindell 106). Binx's acting, which links him to Kate and therefore to Kate's own acting and her madness, is grounded in film, in the myths and archetypes created by cinema. Binx is mad because he, like Kate, plays a role. Binx is not only trying to emulate someone else, however; by trying to copy a copy, the representation of an ideal, he complicates the issue. If we were too look at the dilemma as the Greeks did, then Binx is moving further from the Truth by copying a copy. Yet, in postmodern terms, by idolizing and repeating a popular, mass culture ideal of manhood, Binx is actually getting closer to the only kind of truth available to those living in a postmodern world. The fact that Binx cannot come to terms with either of these options speaks to his placement on the edge of things. He is not wholly Gregory

Peck, only Gregory Peckish – neither fully a part of a rational world, nor fully engulfed by popular culture. As I mentioned in my introduction, postmodern madness is the confusion created when the euphoria of living in a mass-produced fantasy world clashes with the need to retain one's own individuality or one's own desires while doing so. By trying to assert his individuality via someone else's archetypal view of an actor, Binx stumbles his way into postmodern madness.

This is significant because it relates directly back to the warning we are given at the beginning of the novel. Though the paragraph is not titled as such, the author's note places boundaries on how we will read the narrative to come. Directly after the Kierkegaard epigraph we are told,

> What follows is a work of the imagination. Every character, except movie stars, and every event without exception are fictitious. No resemblance to real persons is intended or should be inferred. When movie stars are mentioned, it is not the person of the actor which is meant but the character he projects upon the screen. The geography of New Orleans and the bayous has been changed slightly. As for 'Feliciana Parish,' there are parishes named East Feliciana and West Feliciana, but I know not a soul in either place (Percy).

Why do we need to be told that the work is purely imagination? We know it is a novel and hence fiction – why remind us of that fact? And why remind us that the movie stars are real, though we need to see them in their fictitious forms, as the roles they play and not as human beings? We do know that Percy himself wrote this warning, not Binx as narrator, because of the "I" introduced in the last sentence, which warns that the author does not actually know anyone where part of the action takes place. The author has not lived in these places, though the narrator has. The landscape itself is mutated, transformed into what the author needs. This serves to remind us, along with the emphasis on other fictional aspects of the text, that Binx is not only a narrator, he is a part

114

of Percy's imagination. We cannot view him as omniscient, though he would like to be, nor can we take everything he says as truth. Though there is a narrator and an author in the book, the two are very separate beings; in the end it is imagination that truly controls the novel, not Percy or Binx. Most importantly, we need to note the prominence of role-playing in the text. The novel is about movies, we know this from the title, and it is more significantly about the act of going to the movies, of being a part of or being apart from the audience. But it is also about the character that one projects, whether one is an actor playing a part on the screen or, in Binx's case, a man playing the roles he thinks everyone wants him to play. The geography of this world is not quite true, things have been changed slightly, so narrator *and* reader must be careful – the line between acting and living has now been blurred.

The warning at the onset of the novel, then, opens up our understanding of Binx and how we need to read his reactions to his world. We need to recognize his uneasy behavior as the result of despair, as the result of some kind of mental anguish – he is an outcast and therefore separate from everyone else. Yet Binx is also part of the consortium of everymen, the audience in the movie theater, part of the masses who also try to come to terms with their own outcast natures. And we cannot, in the end, fully trust his own assessments of his situation, because he has become just another character on the screen, someone caught up in his own cult of celebrity. Binx's part has been written for him, though he needs to put his own flavor into the role. Binx is therefore a madman because he has been caught up in a postmodern paradox. He has an active imagination and intellect, but he cannot relate to modern society. His distance and objective behavior are just one role that he tries to play, among many. As an actor, then,

as a film star in his own autobiography, Binx is caught between reality and film, between normality in the spiritual sense and the potential he sees on the screen. Unlike Mito, who tries to become what he worships, who wants to enter fully enter himself into film, Binx wants *film* to enter *his* life, to make his everyday monotony less boring. This distinction allows Binx to approach his world with a much more controlled madness – he may be mad, but he still has the capacity to know fact from fiction. Binx's madness is therefore not one of *total* confusion between fantasy and reality, but one of *possible* confusion, where communal illusions and personal reality meet and slowly begin to mingle.

We can therefore come to understand how Binx tries to relate to a world that he does not feel a part of by considering how he utilizes film and filmic vocabulary. Binx can relate to the rest of the world through the language of film in its most popular sense. By using a vocabulary of actors and actresses, of titles and studios, Binx can finally use a language that others understand, a language that could, perhaps, allow him to express his dilemmas. As Hardy reminds us, "The films and actors he talks about are the standard popular favorites of his time. When he speaks of going to the 'movies,' that is just what he means, with respect both to the mood of his attendance and to the kind of thing he is seeing" (Hardy 32). Binx is drawn to what David Bordwell, in his section of the text *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, calls 'classical.' Bordwell sees the classical Hollywood film as "bound by rules that set stringent limits on individual innovation" (Bordwell 3). Classical Hollywood films, unlike more avant-garde fair, adhere to strict codes of conduct, which may offer a "*range* of alternatives," but do not stray too far from the norm (5).[67] This allows spectators to share a certain common language when discussing film, especially if we limit our definition of spectators to those who watch films as Binx

116

watches them – for their popular appeal only, without an eye for technical details. The

term "film" and the term "movie" can thus be used interchangeably here – movies are

motion pictures made for the masses, while classical Hollywood film is the all-

encompassing genre to which these movies belong (as opposed to the avant-garde or

documentaries, etc.). In his definition of classical Hollywood cinema, Bordwell also

notes that this style of film "should be comprehensible and unambiguous" and possess "a

fundamental emotional appeal that transcends class and nation" (3). This transcendence,

born out of a need to reach as many people as possible on the same level at the same

time, provides an imaginary that *anyone* can join. This allows Binx to become a part of

something when he enters the theater, the realm of the film.

Yet, Binx also rebels *against* the 'anyone, anywhere' qualities of the cinema.

Without specificity, a film is always the same, re-presenting the same lines and the same

actors, over and over. The only thing that makes a film different is when and where one

sees it and whom one sees it with – and, most importantly, how one cares to remember it.

Binx remembers pieces of films and ties each picture to the theater, or the manager, or the

neighborhood because he feels the need to locate these timeless, placeless entities, giving

each an individuality of experience. He tells us, "If I did not talk to the theater owner or

the ticket seller, I should be lost, cut loose metaphysically speaking. I should be seeing

one copy of a film that might be shown anywhere and at any time. There is a danger of

slipping clean out of space and time" (Percy 75). This defines Binx's madness, in which

he wants to be an individual, yet also wants to be a part of something greater. The films

he goes to see are meant to ground him, yet *he* must also ground *them*. Films are

universal in their way, shown to millions of people all over the country, so Binx must try

to find a way to make each viewing specific to him. He cannot find himself if he cannot place himself inside and outside the film at the same time. He cannot simply be part of the fantasy; he must also be above it, looking at it objectively from a long way off.

This, of course, sits in contrast with how Mito views film. Mito is a technician, someone how is intimate with the inner workings of how one makes a film. He never belongs to a mass audience, nor does he ever truly enter into a theater mind-set. Instead, Mito rewrites his own life to conform to moviemaking standards. There is no separation for Mito, no way to leave film behind. Binx, however, enforces a separation between his emersion in spectatorship and his life as an individual moviegoer. He makes his moviegoing specific not only to certain moments, but also to certain places in order to try and maintain a barrier between communal illusions and personal reality. This could potentially keep Binx from madness; his system could compartmentalize fantasy and reality in such a way that the two do not mix. Binx's interaction with film, however, because he wants to extend his moviegoing outside of the theater, yet also wants to observe such communal fantasies objectively, does not live up to this potential. We can therefore look at the difference between Mito and Binx as one of intensity. Both men are drowning: Mito immerses himself in his insanity, plunging further and further into chaotic waters, while Binx overanalyzes his condition, slowly sinking in the mud he churns up in his wake.

We can start to understand, then, why Binx is not interested in film as a critic. Binx is a self-proclaimed moviegoer and he constantly refers to films, actors, theaters, plots, and all the other bits and pieces of film that pervade the vocabulary of the average city dweller. As Lawson informs us, however, in his follow-up book *Still Following Percy*,

118

"Binx shows no interest in cinematographic technique, nor indeed does he say much about acting technique; he comments on a film narrative or a character's action only if it re-presents in some way some aspect of his life" (Lawson, *SFP* 30). Binx does not care about the technical aspects of filmmaking, nor is he drawn to those features of a film that are foreign. He also does not care about the fantastical elements of filmmaking, the way in which writers, directors, and actors take reality and condense it into fiction. All Binx cares about is the everydayness of a film, of how closely a film can resemble real life, and more importantly, how well he can map it onto his own. Tanner tells us, "It is not that films give romance where romance is lacking, nor that they offer the escape of a dream world. Rather they render fixed and inevitable what in life seems to him to be fluid and contingent" (Tanner 11). Film, for Binx, is not about the stories themselves, but how he can relate the stories to his own versions of reality, how he can tailor them to fit his own agenda. In essence, Binx's madness stems from a need to remove *himself* from the illusion of film, while still trying to allow the fantasy to inform his life.

When describing the film *Red River*, Binx mentions an "absurd scene" where Montgomery Clift whips John Wayne (Percy 75). The scene, as several critics of the novel have noted, is absurd because in reality Clift could never beat John Wayne. Because Binx cannot separate fact from fantasy and prefers the real to the fantastic, he finds the scene absurd. As Lawson notes, "Binx *knows* that Montgomery Clift, the actual man, could never beat John Wayne, the actual man, in a fist fight; for once he uses his own immediate experience to reject a supposedly higher level of truth. And if immediate truth is superior in one instance, might it not be in others?" (Lawson, *FP* 117). The cinema is supposed to let us in on truth as we are meant to see it, privileging our

status as witnesses. Yet, the truth beyond the screen, the truth of the actors as Actors, as

set archetypes, seems to trump the truth on film. Surely what he sees is truer than what

he has been shown? This quandary leads Binx to start to question what he witnesses on

the screen, yet we have to also remember that Binx still attends the cinema, attracted to

these obviously fanciful, hard to believe stories and plotlines. He does not go to see

documentaries or gritty dramas – he continues to see classical Hollywood cinema.

However much his mind wants to rationalize film, Binx still wants to believe, wants to be

taken in by the fictions. He tries to validate reality through film because reality cannot

give him what fiction can – that special aura that heightens reality. This places Binx in

an awkward position in relation to the films he loves. His opinion of film is even

contemptuous at times, for he claims: "Movies are onto the search, but they screw it up.

The search always ends in despair. They like to show a fellow coming to himself in a

strange place – but what does he do? […] In two weeks time he is so sunk in

everydayness that he might just as well be dead" (Percy 13). If we take Binx at his word

here, then movies are important because they inspire questioning, inspire searching, but

do not follow it to its endgame. They promote an involvement in life, but one that

remains removed. They, like Kate, are caught in a cycle that only repeats itself. The

viability of film as relief only lasts a little while, and therefore does not allow the

searcher to find the connection with reality he needs. Without that vital disconnect from

the everyday, which allows one to live every day without the malaise of everydayness,

the moviegoer is as powerless as the amnesiac.

    We can see Binx's conflict with how he approaches film through the uses of film

techniques within the text. Hardy notices that although Binx does not mention film

techniques outright, he does use them in his own narration: "The influence of film techniques is persuasive in this novel […] with the camera eye of Binx's imagination frequently creating optical effects beyond the power of normal vision […]. But it is important to note that Binx has very little to say about the art of filmmaking" (Hardy 32). Binx unconsciously invokes the art of film, with *unconscious* being the operative word. Unlike Mito, whose use of filmic jargon and techniques is a conscious ploy to make reality (and film) part of *his* world, Binx diffidently dabbles in such games. Binx's actual use of cinematic techniques links film and its more technical aspects with his imagination, yet Binx does not rewrite his own reality, as Mito is prone to do. Instead, Binx tries to use film to gain a new vision of reality, a new way to see. We can see this clearly when we look at an incident that Binx finds important to tell his readers in order to explain how he came about his search. After waking from a dream about the war, about the time when the idea of his search first occurred to him, Binx looks at the everyday objects in his room in a new way. He writes, "They looked both unfamiliar and at the same time full of clues. I stood in the center of the room and gazed at the little pile, sighting through a hole made by thumb and forefinger. What was unfamiliar about them was that I could see them. They might have belonged to someone else. […] Once I saw [them], however, the search became possible" (Percy 11). The viewfinder Binx creates with his hand gives him the distance he needs by allowing him to look at his own life through the camera lens. It puts something between himself and what he sees, between his mind and his possessions. By placing himself behind a camera, by making these objects anyone's, Binx is able to make them visible. The viewfinder does not give Binx answers, only clues, but it does open up his limited point of view to a wider scope, giving

him more options. The lens thus provides distance and possibility – Binx can now look at his life as if it were someone else's, opening up the plurality of meaning. The possibilities provided by this cinematic distance allows Binx the possibility of a search, though there is no hint here of an end to such a search. Film, therefore, provides clues and more questions, but no answers.

This is, perhaps, why Binx does not immerse himself in film wholeheartedly. Possibility is not probability. Binx does not want to create his own versions of reality, but instead tries to adhere to the realities in front of him, as he does when considering *Red River*. On the train to Chicago, Binx may muse about what a man might be thinking, or may assign that man a recent history, but he does this in order to give himself a kindred spirit, not to give himself the power of creation, a power so coveted by Mito. Binx, caught up in a daydream, describes the scene, telling us that a certain man must have eaten at a certain restaurant and that he must be a pleasant man to thus "occupy pleasant space with his pleasant self" (Percy 188). During this encounter, Binx becomes attached to this man, not only because he assigns him an identity, but also because the two, for an instant, become one. Binx writes, "When he first goes through his paper […] I have no choice but to read the left page with him. We pause at an advertisement […]. For a second we gaze heavy-lidded and pass on. Now he finds what he wants and folds his paper once, twice and again […] Dreaming at his shoulder, I can make out no more than […]" (Percy 188). This encounter progresses swiftly. First the man and Binx are separate entities, one reading the paper, the other left with no choice but to be complicit in this act. The fact that Binx has no choice in the matter tells us that he wants dearly to not have a choice, at least for a moment. This accounts for the 'we' in the text, where

Binx and the man become one, both acting in the same way, reading the same thing, focusing all their energy on a single unified deed. Yet all too soon the two separate when the man finds what he wants and Binx cannot make it out completely. Binx must be himself again, singularly.

This scene reiterates Binx's madness and allows us to understand more fully his relationship with illusion and fantasy. Binx wants to use fantasy as a way to connect with others – since he cannot totally immerse himself into the fantasy provided by film within the confines of the theater, he must find some other way to create the closeness found within a theater audience. His daydreams, then, serve as alternate film illusions, where he gives up his own free will and acts as part of a unit, a whole made up of different parts. In essence, Binx would rather be *part* of a film than be a spectator *of* a film. Unlike Mito, who uses film to create, to rearrange his world, Binx wants someone else to write his script, so that he, too, can be an actor in a heightened reality. The man Binx so wants to join is not part of the audience, but is instead, "a bit like the actor Gary Merrill" (Percy 188). Binx's connection with this man reveals his own need to be connected not through active spectatorship, but via passive involvement.

We can see this need for passive involvement even more clearly when Binx sees William Holden on the street. Binx comments on how different people react to seeing the star and how these reactions eschew the malaise of the everyday, at least for a little while. He comments that it is the "aura of heightened reality" that surrounds the star that draws him: "their peculiar reality which astounds me" (Percy 16, 17). This phrasing, which brings to mind Walter Benjamin's thoughts on mechanical reproduction and what it does to the aura of originality on an individual work of art, places the movie star in a peculiar

position. The movie star can have an aura because *he* cannot be reproduced, though he plays the same roles over and over in films that run anytime, anywhere. Not an author, but a piece of art, the Actor is made through his involvement in film *and* reality. We were warned at the beginning of the book, "when movie stars are mentioned, it is not the person of the actor which is meant but the character he projects upon the screen." The movie stars mentioned are neither true men and women nor the characters they play. Instead, these actors are *stars*, caught up in their own celebrity, which causes an aura of heightened reality. The star is neither a real person nor total fiction, but a combination of the two, an archetype of individuality.

Lawson, in his consideration of this scene, recognizes this cult of celebrity at work. He critiques the Northern couple who speak with Holden: "Having unquestioningly accepted an education which teaches that the highest reality can be perceived only through science and technology, they feel that the camera presents a Person, something more real than they. […] The couple speak to Holden, and for an instant they escape time" (Lawson, *FP* 93). Lawson then goes on to note that other characters in the novel, like the romantic and the scientist whom Binx meets on the train, are also moviegoers, since they are able to escape time and place. Even Emily is a moviegoer to some degree. I agree with Lawson, in that the camera has presented the couple with something more real than the real, but cannot agree that any of these people's acceptance of this reality is due to a perception influenced *only* by science and technology. The couple are influenced by Holden and escape time not only because of the shared language of the camera that teaches them that the actor is more real than they are, but also because the actor himself stands between two realms, the real and the fictional. Holden, as a star, is

an Actor, part of a star system, where, as Bordwell notes, "the star's traits and the character's traits became isomorphic" (Bordwell 14). The Actor is an amalgamation, a product born from production codes and public opinion. Holden is therefore more real not only because he appears on screen, but also because he represents an illusory perfection we, as spectators, know is false, but yearn for anyway.

At the end of the whole affair, with Holden gone and everyone going about their business, Binx cries, "Ah, William Holden, we already need you again. Already the fabric is wearing thin without you" (Percy 18). Binx needs someone with the aura of a star to make his own life interesting. This need permeates the novel and is, in my view, the reason why he emulates actors and will even narrate his story specifically to Tony Curtis or Rory Calhoun. Desmond reads these scenes in a slightly different way. In Desmond's view, this emulation, "lure[s] Binx into false role playing as an exalted hero, an escape from the burden of undertaking the search with another person in the actual here-and-now" (Desmond 45). Thus in certain sections of the novel, "Percy focuses not on the content of the films but on the movie experience as part of a larger semiotic context" (45). We must therefore notice that,

> Percy acknowledges the transfiguring power of film in the semiotic web of modern culture – as diversion, as sign of the times, or as clue to the search. But like Binx […] the moviegoer must be 'on to' the illusory nature of film as sign, enjoying its satisfactions while recognizing that the truer reality is to be found not as a solitary moviegoer but in the suffering community of the world (45).

This reading of the text allows film a certain role in Binx's life, but does not privilege it.

While I am not in total disagreement with Desmond, I would argue that by evoking these actors, by speaking directly to them, Binx complicates his adoration of them. They are not just stars to him: they are intimates. Though Binx is not a fan, he is a devotee: he

does not want to be these men, but he wants to have their power. Unlike Mito, who, as a fan, adores the stars' timelessness and wants to *be* one of them himself, Binx decides to adore their individuality and wants to be *like* them. The difference is important – Binx is more interested in *seeming* than *becoming*. Towards the end of the novel, as Binx and Kate finally try to consummate their relationship, Binx writes, "I'll have to tell you the truth, Rory, painful though it is. Nothing would please me more that to say that I had done one of two things. Either that I did what you do […]. Or – do what a hero in a novel would do" (Percy 199). Kate and Binx, at least in this instance, cannot bring themselves to become physically intimate. The fact that Binx evokes Rory Calhoun in his disappointment and despair says something important about how he reveres the Actor. Binx wants to be *like* Rory, or at least like any fictional character who has his life already set out for him, like the plot of some heroic tale, so that incidents like this could not occur. Binx finally wants to share his life with someone and looks to his idols for an answer, not to his philosophies or his Aunt Emily's Southern values. Binx would give anything to be able to act as those men act, in all meanings of the term. He wants to be able to put up that front, to be able to live in that archetypal world between reality and fantasy, where everything is more Real. The moviegoer Binx wishes to be must be 'onto' the illusory nature of film as sign, but this recognition does not negate the importance of such illusions. Binx see the sign, the illusion that is the illusion, as the most attractive aspect of film.

   We can conclude, then, that Binx's madness revolves around his obsessive moviegoing and his relationship with the actors he sees on screen. His lunacy is not as overwhelming as Mito's, does not manifest itself in spectacular, dynamic ways, yet it is

just as insidious and just as affecting. Binx is mad because he cannot fully come to terms

with how he should utilize moviegoing and cinema in his search for subjectivity. Binx

knows that the cinema gets it wrong, but is at least onto the search. And he also knows

that the camera lends a distance that mirrors his own irony and allows him the space in

which he can search, yet also traps him in a cycle of everydayness. Cinema on its own is

thus too generic, not individualized. Actors, however, because of their relationships with

the imaginary world created by the camera and the real world created by their own

personal natures and the audience, become templates for what Binx desires: a heightened

reality, separate yet parallel to the everydayness rampant in film or reality, when viewed

solely on their own.[68] We can read the main body of the novel, then, as a rehearsal, as

Binx trying out different acting techniques and different ways of saying the same thing.

He plays at acting, but cannot get the part right. Movies, in this setting, *could* be liaisons

between madman and society, but only briefly.

　　The epilogue in *The Moviegoer* is therefore a critical point in our analysis of the

text. If the novel did not contain the epilogue, then we would be left with a very different

text, one in which Binx remains a moviegoer caught up in a search that could last forever.

This Binx would not have found a liaison between himself and society, though

moviegoing would still remain a viable option as a mediator. The inclusion of the

epilogue, however, reveals how Binx, as a madman, comes to terms with living in the

everyday. The epilogue, unlike the rest of the text, is not written in the present tense. It

details what happens to Binx after his trip to Chicago with Kate and his subsequent

troubles with the rest of his family. We are told in quick succession that Binx has

married Kate, is on his way to finding a place in the world as a doctor, has followed

127

everyone's advice, and has finally come to terms with not only his family (even the death of his brother Lonnie, another moviegoer), but also with religion and his own place within society. Most critics read this ending as a conclusion that draws all of Binx's loose ends together. Poteat tells us, "all that was restless and at times a little manic in Binx has disappeared, to be replaced by a sense of quiet assurance, the assurance of a man at home with the world and with himself. This quiet is not, however, that of dumb passivity. Rather, it is that of a man who stands ready to hear the newsbearer whenever and wherever he appears" (Poteat 69). This argument, which most critics would agree with, sets Binx up as a changed man, one who is no longer mad. This Binx does not need the search anymore because he has found a mediator that will save his life – namely, religion. Binx has finally gained the heightened reality he so desperately wants by way of the liaison that allowed Lonnie to find happiness and accept his fate. Many critics point to the religious aspects of *The Moviegoer* as a way to come to terms with Binx's quest and his path toward individuality. These readers almost manically consider the epilogue as a sure sign that Binx has found the light and forgone his old moviegoer ways in order to live the purer life of a sane, saintly man.

Hyman, at least, disagrees, and so do I. Hyman writes, "There are occasional pretentious attempts to make [Binx's] search seem not neurotic but deeply spiritual […]. These are minor failings in a considerable success" (Hyman 38). Though I would not call Percy's nods toward salvation, which crop up more and more often in his successive works, failings, I would dissuade anyone reading *The Moviegoer* from seeing the end of the novel as Binx's redemption. Desmond, too, disagrees with the typical reading of the text, pointing to Binx's new life as a *possibility*, not a probability, his fate still cloaked in

mystery, even if we are forced to recognize his new care for others. He writes,

> Does Binx's anticipated 'new life' signify a kind of conversion? Percy
> establishes this, semiotically, as a *possibility*. […] His chosen vocation of
> medicine […] suggests a new care for others and a sense of their
> communal destiny, a turn away from the egoistic consumerism of the
> culture at large. But Percy does not 'say' this explicitly, and so remains
> faithful to the mystery (Desmond 78).

I would even go so far as to state that Binx's new vocation says nothing about any

newfound compassion or an end to his consumerism. Doctors can be just as lost as any

other profession; just as cynical and just as craven as the rest of us. A change in

profession does not dictate a change in mood.

Hardy, out of all Percy's critics, heartily rejects the saintly ending, pointing to the

"curiously varied narrative technique of the epilogue" and the "instability of Binx's time-

conscious narrator" as indicators that Binx is " more isolated than ever" (Hardy 49).

Hardy does not care if the deepening alienation he sees in the ending is intentional on

Percy's part or not. Continuing this line of reasoning, I would argue that the epilogue *is* a

transformation, but not one that has anything to do with rejoining society or finding

religion. Instead, the epilogue shows Binx taking on the role of Actor, capturing the aura

of heightened awareness that so captivated him when he saw William Holden walking

down the street.[69] Instead of a moviegoer, Binx has become his own version of a movie

star. He is no longer acting but Acting, no longer playing at being a movie star, but

Being one. He has thus become his own mediator, placing himself in a role that will

allow him to interact with society while remaining apart from it, still mad but hiding it

well. Thus, Binx is able to use his transformation into mediator to his advantage – he can

now live a life that appears normal.

We can see the epilogue as a transformation quite readily. The last chapter of the

novel ends with Binx trying to make sense of things he cannot understand. As he sits with Kate in her car, trying to hash out the details of their future together, he also watches a black man enter and emerge from a church across the street. Binx and Kate seem to come to an agreement: Binx will go to medical school and Kate to treatment and they will remain together while they do this. The two seem to have found a way to deal with their madness, each having found a mediator through acceptance, Kate of her condition and Binx of his duty to play a role in society. Yet Binx's ruminations on the black man and his reasons for being at the church shed doubt on the outcome of their solutions.

Binx creates several scenarios for the man to occupy. The man has an "Archie Moore mustache" and is "more middle class than one could believe" (Percy 233). Binx reads the man's mannerisms as if he is at the drive-in, watching a film. Binx raises questions that any moviegoer would consider when viewing this man come out of the church. Did he enter to receive ashes, since it is Ash Wednesday? Is he a salesman? Is he coming up in the world? Has he come to find God? Or is he any or all of these things? For Binx, however, the answer to these questions is: "it is impossible to be sure" or "it is impossible to say" (235). These words close the chapter, leaving us to wonder if Binx and Kate's fates are also impossible to judge. At this point nothing is certain, not even how our heroes will fare. All we know is that though Binx and Kate will try to re-enter society, Binx is still inclined to watch the world go by as if it is a film, as a spectator removed from the action itself. Kate also occupies the car, but does not watch. Unlike before, however, Binx is now unwilling to jump to conclusions about others. He will no longer try to place everyone into categories.

This allows us to come to the conclusion that treating everything as if it were a film

does not provide the best way to approach life, because it is impossible to say for sure what is actually happening. This ending rejects spectatorship as a way to interact with society. And this rejection of moviegoing, as Binx sits in Kate's car and watches, sheds doubt on their solutions as viable options. Binx wants to "listen to people, see how they stick themselves into the world, hand them along a ways in their dark journey and be handed along, and for good and selfish reasons" (Percy 233). But how can he do this if he cannot continue to decide what people are doing, what they represent, and why they represent these things? How can Binx interact with society if he is no longer a true moviegoer?

Our answer comes to us through the epilogue, which reveals to the reader how our hero will cope with a world that cannot allow him moviegoing as his liaison. *The Moviegoer*'s epilogue opens with the line, "So ended my thirtieth year to heaven, as the poet called it" (Percy 236). This declaration marks a final ending to Binx's moviegoing, for it eschews any hint of despair or malaise. By referencing heaven and poetry, Binx shies away from his usual ironic gestures, instead opting to present his readers with a future, a possible ascension into heaven. This Binx is no longer troubled by time, trying to ground the timelessness of film with the everyday and making the everyday exotic through film. Instead, this Binx rushes through time swiftly, dryly listing all the important family news that happened between the end of the last chapter and the writing of the epigraph. Irony seems to have no place here and one can sympathize with those critics who wish to see Binx as a changed man, one who has finally found God. Yet, at the end of this list of incidents, Binx includes his own warning to his readers. Binx writes,

> As for my search, I have not the inclination to say much on the subject.
> For one thing, I have not the authority, as the great Danish philosopher
> declared, to speak of such matters in any way other than the edifying. For
> another thing, it is not open to me even to be edifying, since the time is
> later than his, much too late to edify or do much of anything except plant a
> foot in the right place as the opportunity presents itself – if indeed
> asskicking is properly distinguished from edification (237).

This passage warns the reader that although Binx may not have given up on his search, he no longer considers it his duty to teach others the morality involved in such a search. The vocabulary he has been using, like the knowledge of the Danish philosopher, is a thing of the past, something that no longer has a place in the future. One can only try to jolt others out of their own malaise when an opportunity arises, for the only form of edification left to the contemporary man is, as Binx says, asskicking. This sets the entire novel we have just finished reading in a strange light. Is his narration, "a document of this kind," meant to edify or is it meant as a kick in the ass? (237). Is Binx being serious here or is this just another form of his self-irony?

We can judge the tone of this warning by the incident that Binx narrates next. He introduces this last scene by telling us, "Reticence, therefore, hardly having a place in a document of this kind, it seems as good a time as any to make an end" (Percy 237). This remark seems to be Binx's way of offering us, finally, a narrative without pretense, wherein Binx will communicate to his readers all he has left out of the rest of the story. Yet the narrative we are given is almost devoid of emotion, of life, of the humor and irony we found throughout the rest of the novel. As Hardy notes, "The only notable difference, alas, now [Binx] has got religion, is that he is not nearly as funny as he used to be" (Hardy 55). We are lead to believe that this Binx is *not* the Binx we have heard from before, not the man who was searching for something more, some other form of

truth. This man has seemingly tamed his ways, buckled down and given in to what society and his family want of him. This man is no longer mad.

Yet, there are hints of the old Binx hidden in the text. He considers Kate and her ideas silly, "an extravagant womanish sort of whim, what I call privately a doubling, or duplication" (Percy 238). Now, as before, Binx ignores what Kate says and does, using her as a tool (when he sends her to pick up some papers at the office) or an avatar (of foolish womanhood). He also continues to use empty terms to define his surroundings, though now he does not share this terminology with others, not even with Kate. As Hardy claims, "The trouble with the Binx of the epilogue is not that he has changed too much, or too abruptly or unaccountably, but that he has not changed enough" (Hardy 55). Binx has not changed as much as he would want us to believe – it is only his tone that has changed, the way in which he presents himself. He has, in fact, simply taken on a new role, a permanent one.

No longer the moviegoer, Binx is now the Actor he once invoked, the man who carries his own aura of heightened reality about him. Binx is now, as Kate accuses him, "thick-skinned and bumptious like a medical student" when confronted with Lonnie's death, for that is how a medical student should act (Percy 238). It gives others hope and a calming influence. He is "very sweet" with the children because that is how an older brother should act (240). And, finally, just the thought of Binx is what gets Kate through a harrowing streetcar ride. Only when she can imagine Binx imagining her can she endeavor to leave his side. She asks him, "And you'll be thinking of me just that way?" (242). He has become her guidepost, the one thing that allows her to travel through her own labyrinth of malaise, just as William Holden once allowed Binx to get on with his

133

day.

As an Actor, then, as the perfect archetype of the contemporary man, Binx becomes his own mediator. He is able to relate his madness to the rest of society by taking on a role. His Acting is therefore both a symptom of his madness and a cure. By taking on a role, Binx perpetuates the consolidation of communal illusions and personal reality in his own life – he continues his madness. Yet, this role allows him to pretend to be sane, to appear to the world at large as just another normal guy. Thus, he transforms into the only mediator that has worked for him in the past and that will work for any madman or woman in the future. The link that provided a bridge between Binx's madness and the rest of society, before Binx's transformation, was the Actor, whether the tangible William Holden on the street corner, or the muse-like Rory Calhoun Binx invoked with such fervor. The Actor (the paradoxical combination of the character on film, the celebrity, and the 'real' man) represented reality *and* fantasy, the heightened reality of the known and the unknown, the everyday and the illusions of cinema. The Actor, in this sense, is the quintessential madman, someone who lives in two worlds. In the epilogue, Binx has stepped into that role, placing his feet in Holden and Calhoun's shoes, making their momentary status as mediators continuous. In this way he embraces his madness, decides to live it instead of examining it. And Binx thrives in this position. Because of his ironic distance and his paradoxical relationship with film, as neither a fan nor a critic, Binx is able to make his transition work. By holding himself apart from humanity, by embracing not reality but heightened reality, the paradoxical aura of archetypal originality, Binx is able to place himself back into the real world. He does not re-enter reality via compassion or religion, but through the symptoms of his own affliction.

In *The Moviegoer*, then, the madman must place himself into the space left empty by mediators or liaisons that cannot function properly. He must, essentially, turn himself into his own ideal in order find a place in society that is comfortable for both him and everyone else. Spectatorship cannot be a mediator, for though it combines individuals into an audience, connecting them through the act of watching, it also divests them of any sort of individuality. Binx's moviegoing, where we sit together, but do not experience the same thing, where we search for meaning, but do not ever find the same answers, cannot exist as an intermediary either.[70] The search, when conducted in the wilderness produced by the culture industry, has no real end. Therefore, in order for the searcher to make sense of things, to come into contact with the rest of society while still maintaining his subjectivity, one must pretend. One must role-play. In *The Moviegoer*, the madman must essentially take on the role of the Actor in order to become that which everyone else wants to be, admires, looks up to: the subject of fandom, not the fan. This paradoxically alleviates much of the tension that created Binx's madness to begin with. As an Actor, Binx can play both sides, be an individual *and* live in an illusion, *his* fantasy world, not *a* fantasy world. He can escape the dictatorial regimes of societal *and* cinematic norms by converting them to his own ends. He can, in the end, use the symptoms of his madness to manufacture a fantastical cure. Of course, we must remember that Binx's future, though seemingly more optimistic than Mito's, revolves around deceit. Mito may have found a better life through his transformation, for at least he has had his revenge, and can die happy. Binx, as an Actor, can never truly be himself again, can only be what others want him to be, and is therefore caught in his own solution.

CHAPTER III

THE MADNESS OF UTOPIAN DREAMS: CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD ILLUSIONS
AND THE FANTASY OF SCIENCE FICTION

Andreas Huyssen, in *After the Great Divide*, points to the importance of an artistic

shift toward cultural theory when he considers the 1970s and its approach to the avant-

garde and experimentalist work. He notes that this feature distinguishes 1970s

postmodernism from that of the 1960s. The implications of such a shift, toward the

inclusion of cultural studies into serious artistic scholarship, allowed the decade to

engender more positive outlooks on the incorporation of mass culture into high art.

Huyssen also notes that in the 1970s "the great divide that separated high modernism

from mass culture and that was codified in the various classical accounts of modernism

no longer seems relevant to postmodern artistic or critical sensibilities" (Huyssen 196-

197). The separation between modernism and postmodernism was no longer an issue of

intermingling two aesthetics. Now there was no space for the confrontation between a

modernist man and a postmodern world, as we saw in Chapter I with Walker Percy's

moviegoer. Nor could one produce a text like Fuentes' *Zona sagrada*, wherein the author

tries to dignify automatized repetition, as Jean Franco claims in her article "Narrator,

Author, Superstar."[71] Instead, the erasure of the borders between popular and elitist

culture within the boundaries of postmodernism now greatly influenced not only the

literature produced in the time period, but also the critical reactions related to such works.

Mass culture no longer need be dignified in order to be a part of a serious work. It did

not have to be rescued at all, but could instead stand all on its own as an influential form

of theory in its own right. If we look at the two narratives we will analyze in this chapter, Manuel Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña* [*Kiss of the Spider Woman*] and Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*, we can come to understand how this particular manifestation of postmodernism affected the trope of madness and the triptych of madman-mediator-society. In these novels, madmen serve as mediators for one another, for only the mad can fully read the cultural codes, both personal and popular, used by other lunatics. This form of mediation, which disconnects the madman from society, has the potential to create new communities, new ways of living. Yet in both *El beso* and *Breakfast*, this potential implodes – none of the madmen can maintain a society separate from reality for very long. Eventually, any potential mediator/madman loses or misuses his latent ability to connect with other lunatics and destroys any chance of becoming a true intermediary or gaining any real connection with others, mad or sane.

To understand these texts, however, we must first understand the Americas in the 1970s. Huyssen points to the 1970s as a pivot point in the growth of postmodernist thought. The decade that finally turned a positive eye toward both high and low culture, the 1970s also belayed the belief that the avant-garde was the only form of resistance against stagnation. Huyssen notes that by producing a culture of eclecticism, which "abandoned any claim to critique, transgression or negation," the 1970s allowed critique and negation of the status quo to be redefined "in non-modernist and non-avantgardist terms" (Huyssen 188). This opened up postmodernism to a "recuperation of history and the reemergence of story," which were for Huyssen "not part of a leap back into a pre-modern, pre-avantgarde past, as some postmodernists seem to suggest" (174). Instead, these tendencies were, in fact, "attempts to shift into reverse in order to get out of a dead-

end street where the vehicles of avant-gardism and postmodernism have come to a standstill" (174). The 1970s produced literature and art that realized the limitations of approaching the postmodern, contemporary condition via outdated, or at least no longer viable schools of thought. Huyssen, simply by using a mechanical metaphor in his critique of this change, points to the inevitability of such a move.[72]

This brings us, therefore, to a consideration of how these issues came to light in the narrative of the time. As Barbara Lupack reminds us in her book *Insanity as Redemption in Contemporary American Fiction*,

> An experimental fiction emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, one that was fabular […] and fantastic, surreal and absurd. Self-reflexive, it evidenced a fascination with the springs of creativity and narrative, with the tactics of fantasy and grotesquerie, with the wicked delight of black humor […] – all evidently shaped by the need to react artistically against the horror and grossness of the real historical world (Lupack 14).

The fiction of the 1970s was one that dealt not only with plot and storyline, but also with the very act of writing itself, with the whys and hows related to envisioning a narrative that is not 'real' or that needs to be real even if it is not. This desire to focus not on the narrative aspects of narrative, but on its technical and constructional details was a reaction, a lashing out against a world that did not work the way it was supposed to. Linda Hutcheon, in *The Poetics of Postmodernism*, concisely exclaims, "The position of the producer of the text […] is being rethought" (Hutcheon 81). Lupack acknowledges this when she states, "The heroes of the experimental novel of the '60s and '70s reflect the plight of the novelist as well as of the later postwar generation: materially content but spiritually bereft, alienated from self and society, overwhelmed by the forces of an Establishment in which they have little faith or hope" (Lupack 15). The heroes of these novels are not only representatives of a lost generation, confronted directly by the horrors

138

of war or reliving them vicariously through media interpretations; they are also the authors who try to make sense of such atrocities, who try to put into narrative form the agony of alienation in a society that condemns such separation. Lupack goes on to note, "these protagonists are indeed captive to a system that seems less than sane. Correctly perceiving that all relations are power relations, they in effect lack any power to relate to others or to their environment" (15). We can therefore draw connections between the decenteredness of the postmodern protagonist and the insane world he inhabits, *and* once again correlate the madman with those who live on the margins. Though Lupack's theories are aimed at a North American experience of the world, specifically reacting to the decades after World War II, we can co-opt this model to fit the experiences of Latin America as well, especially in light of the often violent and tumultuous events and dictatorships that shaped their own history, with the included intimacy of having to fight these wars (both open and clandestine) on their own soil.

The 1970s in Latin America was an era laced with violence and political upheaval. As Neil Larsen comments in *Reading North by South*, "When the populist illusions of the 1960s are dispelled by the brutal reaction of the 1970s in Latin America (in fact the death of Che in 1967 can be taken as the symbolic inauguration of a period of counterinsurgency and repression that begins as early as 1964 in Brazil) the seeming right/left aphasia of the 'boom' vanishes with it" (Larsen, *North by South* 72). The idealism brought about by the Cuban Revolution was coming to an end.[73] The death of Chilean president Salvador Allende, who was killed by his own troops in 1973, along with dictatorships in Uruguay and Argentina, marked the political and social climates of these countries with violence, oppression and hatred. The CIA and the United States

government sponsored several of the coups during this time, which only helped to fuel already anti-North American sentiments throughout the Southern continent.

Latin Americans, too, were attracted to North American popular culture, though they used the products of the culture industry not to overthrow governments, but to escape not only the workday and its drudgery, but also the oppression and fear that comes from living in certain states that negate individuality not only on the corporate level, but on the social and political level as well. As Franco states, "At the very peak of its achievement the Latin American novel thus faced a powerful rival – an international pop culture which appealed to young people as a force of liberation from the oppression of the family" (Franco 150). Hollywood cinema, fashion magazines and rock-n-roll provided a way for youth to rebel against families and governments who reviled the United States or who imposed strict dictatorial boundaries on what was or was not appropriate to read or see or even think.

Argentina, where the first novel in this chapter is set, experienced the 1970s as a decade of political upheaval and insurgency. In 1966, a military coup had overthrown the government. For three years, the military regime seemed to govern easily, but on May 29, 1969, thousands of workers and university students flooded the streets of Córdoba, the second largest city in Argentina, in a spontaneous protest against the government. The uprising, called the *Cordobazo*, lasted several days and was only quelled when the city called in the army. The army forced demonstrators off the street, but the protests did not end; the *Cordobazo* served as a catalyst for future violent protest against the military regime in Argentina. Future rebellions, insurgencies, and guerilla warfare took advantage of the government's weaknesses, incited by the vulnerability caused by the *Cordobazo*.

After the *Cordobazo*, radical sectors of the middle class, university students, and Catholic groups began to see Juan Perón, the former President who was ousted by the military, as a revolutionary leader. They believed that, with the help of guerilla organizations, he would lead the popular sectors in a mass national uprising against the military regime. Perón supported the radical groups, seeing political might in their ranks. Once Perón gained power again in 1973,[74] however, he distanced himself from such factions, publicly coming out against terrorism. Under his regime, Federal Police officials and other members of the Argentine security forces formed paramilitary groups, which encouraged death squads and aimed to eliminate all revolutionaries, progressives, and leftist intellectuals from the Peronist Party. By 1974, when Peron died, Argentina was at the brink of self-destruction, fighting an all out war within its borders, between the military, the police, and political rebels.

This history is crucial to our understanding of the first novel we will consider in this portion of our study: *El beso de la mujer araña* [*Kiss of the Spider Woman*] by Manuel Puig. The novel tells the story of two men sharing a cell in an Argentine prison during Perón's repressive political regime in the 1970s. Most of the book is structured as a dialogue between the two men, without an omniscient narrator, speaker tags, or other descriptive interludes. Instead, Puig provides only the words spoken between one man and the other. The first to speak, Molina, is a homosexual charged with the corruption of a minor; the second speaker, Valentín, is a younger man being held indefinitely because of his radical political views and involvement in a worker's strike. The novel begins *in medias res*, with Molina retelling the plot of one of his favorite films to Valentín as a way to pass the time. We are introduced to the characters and their own particular worldviews

via how they react to and interact with several of these film plots, spaced carefully throughout the narrative. As the novel progresses, the implied author/narrator also provides us with additional information via footnotes, transcripts of conversations between Molina and the prison warden, official government reports, and several semi-lucid dreamscapes. Throughout the course of the novel, the two prisoners come to relate to each other through the help of Molina's film narrations and Valentín's renderings of political dogma. The two become friends, and for a brief time, lovers. In the end Molina is released, only to die as he tries to deliver a message to Valentín's activist friends. Valentín is once again tortured for information, though he dreams of love, not political gain, in a morphine-induced sleep that closes the novel.

All of the differing narrative ploys within *El beso* add up to what most critics consider a quintessential postmodern text. Linda Hutcheon even uses the novel as a postmodern exemplar in her study of the poetics of postmodernism. She writes, "Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* works precisely to combat any aestheticist fetishing of art by *refusing* to bracket [the referent]. What such fiction does, however, is problematize both the nature of the referent and its relation to the real, historical work by its paradoxical combination of metaficitonal self-reflexivity with historical subject matter" (Hutcheon 19). For Hutcheon, the most important postmodern aspect of the text is its reflection on the relationship between fiction and 'real' history/reality. Puig's novel, via its realist techniques (official documents, dialogue, lack of any real narrator, etc.), self-awareness as a novel (footnotes), and interaction with 'reality' (political background) goes beyond simple nostalgia for the past or Fredric Jameson's impure narrative pastiche. It is a postmodern novel that points to problematics without trivializing them.[75]

142

We are not here, however, to prove what kind of postmodern novel Puig created, whether his book adheres more to Jameson's view of the term or if it justifies Hutcheon's definitions. What we do need to note is *El beso de la mujer araña*'s interaction with popular culture, its play on the narrative form, and its codification of madness within both the text itself and the reality it manifests. Since insanity is not a term that comes to the foreground in most critical analyses of the novel, it is here where we will start our own inquiry. In order to truly understand the role of madness in the text, we must first understand the term "transgression" and all it implies, for it is "transgression" that makes madness possible in *El beso*. Foucault uses the term transgression as a synonym for madness, especially in relation to the way society views, condemns and interacts with madmen. Transgression literally refers to the violation of a law, command or moral code – overstepping a limit. A transgression is an offense, a lapse, or a disobedience, whether committed against God, the Law, or society at large. Transgression is essentially the reason why madmen need mediators, for an act of transgression separates the madman from the rest of the populace and only by way of a mediator can such an act be either negated or rectified. Yet, it is not simple transgression that separates the madman from society, for if that were true, every criminal would be mad, and every adulterer, or liar, or atheist considered loony. Transgression leads to madness when it leads to the Other, when it transforms a man into something else, into something society cannot tolerate. We can see, then, that deviant sexual orientation and deviant politics, the crimes that hold Molina and Valentín locked in jail, set the two men apart not only from the rest of the prisoners, but also from society at large. Criminals can be locked away for a certain amount of time and then freed. Madmen, even in prison, stand apart from everyone else

because they have been lost on the margins: decentered and Othered. And this Otherness

leads us to question the community they form through the narration of film plots – can

their interactions, their narration, become a liaison, perhaps even provide sanity?

The most obvious outcast in *El beso de la mujer araña* is Molina, the man who

speaks the first lines of the novel and who narrates the several film plots imbedded within

the narrative. As a homosexual, Molina is foreign to everyone. His sexual orientation

sets him apart from others, both inmates and guards, for he is essentially a woman

trapped in a man's prison. Though he is imprisoned for corrupting youth, it is implied

that his sexual inclinations fueled his arrest, not any actual physical contact.[76] Yet,

before his relocation to cell 7 with Valentín (the political prisoner), he is imprisoned with

other "procesados amorales" ["sexual offenders"] (Puig, *El beso* 151, *Kiss* 148). This

designation places homosexuality on par with rape, pedophilia, and other violent crimes

associated with amorality. By labeling him as a sexual offender, the prison authorities

brand Molina's homosexuality as not only illegal, but depraved. This explains the

comment the prison warden makes in his phone conversation with a higher-ranking

government agent. In this conversation, in which we 'hear' only the warden's words, the

prison official remarks, "Es difícil prever las reacciones de un tipo como Molina, un

amoral en fin de cuentas" ["It's hard to fathom the reactions of a type like Molina, a

pervert, after all"] (250, 246). Molina, or any homosexual, is a closed book to the warden

– he cannot come to terms with the man's lifestyle, so he cannot wrap his mind around

any of Molina's thoughts or actions. The warden rejects one aspect of Molina's life and

therefore rejects all of it. As the warden explains further on in his phone conversation, if

Molina does not fulfill his role as a spy, then his life can be used as bait for a trap – they

can always set him up as a traitor to the cause, luring out the revolutionaries who will want to eliminate him. By regarding Molina in this light, as a 'thing' and not a man, as a stereotype and not an individual, the warden pigeonholes him, pushing him to the margins not only of society at large, but also of the human race in general.

Valentín, too, finds him unfathomable, at least at first, echoing society's views on homosexuality. After hearing a few details about Molina's life, Valentín wants to hear more because, "Si estamos en esta celda juntos mejor es que nos comprendamos, y yo de gente de tus inclinaciones sé muy poco" ["If we're going to be in this cell together like this, we ought to understand one another better, and I know very little about people with your type of inclination"] (*El beso* 65-66, *Kiss* 58-59). Here Valentín lumps Molina into a category, as someone ruled by his inclinations and not by his personality or his individuality. Valentín sees him not as a man or a human, but as a stereotype, a Homosexual with a capital H, just as the warden does (though Puig does not reveal the warden's feelings until much later in the narrative). The juxtaposition of the two men's impressions of Molina places emphasis on the unknowable nature of a man who is not a 'real' man. We can compare Valentín to the warden, who, according to José Amícola in his book *Manuel Puig y la tela que atrapa al lector* [*Manuel Puig and the Web that Traps the Reader*], "appears to correspond to the voice of conservative society in which Molina is inserted and which, in the end, condemns him," (Amícola 119, my translation).[77] Unlike the warden, however, Valentín is at least willing to try and understand a part of what makes Molina tick.[78]

Immediately following Valentín's comment, Puig provides us with the first footnote explaining certain scientific views on homosexuality. As Santiago Colás

explains in *Postmodernity in Latin America*, "the footnotes are engaged in the same process as the characters: they constitute themselves on the basis of a repression of a threatening Other […] the character of Molina. They form in this way another appendage to the repressive machinery of the state that has physically imprisoned Molina" (Colás 91). Read in this way, the footnotes, like Valentín's remark, force Molina into a specific role – he *has* to fit into the definitions others place upon him. The fact that the first footnote follows Valentín's remark reinforces not only Valentín's place as a representative of society in this instance, but also Molina's place outside society's bounds. He is a specimen, a man whom society does not recognize as a man: a transgressor.[79] And as a transgressor, an unfathomable entity, Molina must be beyond our power to understand. Even the reader must find him unknowable in this instance; Molina is so different, so marginalized that we cannot fully understand his role in the novel, or even understand the novel itself, without the information we receive in the footnotes. It is implied that only science can make sense of such an aberration; only through psychoanalysis can we come to terms with such a transgression.[80] Molina is thus a corrupting factor, an Other, because he is different, not only to society at large, and to Valentín, but to the reader as well. Simply by reading Molina as an Other, however, we cannot consider him truly mad. Though marginality does relate to madness, madness is not a prerequisite for marginality. We therefore need to look at how Molina interacts with popular culture, specifically the film plots he narrates, in order to understand more fully how madness relates to Molina and how he in turn relates to madness.

Molina narrates his films in installments, like any detective story or serial, a fact that we learn as we read the rest of the first few pages. He also tells the story from

memory, intertwining past and present tenses in his narrative, combining loyal retellings of the story and imagined details. This places Molina in an awkward position, as both narrator *and* spectator. As a spectator, Molina is the perfect receptacle for the classical Hollywood film. As we noted in Chapter I, classical Hollywood film is, according to David Bordwell, "bound by rules that set stringent limits on individual innovation" (Bordwell 3). Classical Hollywood films, as opposed to documentaries or avant-garde cinema, adhere to strict codes of conduct, which may offer a "*range* of alternatives," but do not stray too far from the norm (5). This allows spectators to share a certain common language when discussing film, permits them to believe what they see on screen without question. Bordwell also defines the classical Hollywood cinema as film that "purports to be 'realistic' in both an Aristotelian sense (truth to the probable) and a naturalistic one (truth to historical fact)" and remarks, "Hollywood film strives to conceal its artifice through techniques of continuity and 'invisible' storytelling" (3). In addition, these films should "be comprehensible and unambiguous" and possess a "fundamental emotional appeal that transcends class and nation" (3). The classical Hollywood film should thus *appear* to be true, *seem* to be true, present a straightforward, easy to follow narrative, and appeal to the masses, from whatever background. These films make spectatorship easy, for they allow the audience to get caught up in narration, agreeing with absurd plot lines or blatantly implausible action sequences because the narrative form of the Hollywood film encourages such oversight. Molina is therefore the perfect spectator for such films; he buys into cinema's form of narration and does not question illogical plot devices or characterization. Molina's spectatorship, in fact, replicates Hollywood's median demographic – the thirty-something, middle-class Housewife.

As a narrator, however, Molina does not retell a proper classical Hollywood narrative. Instead, he inserts his own views and opinions into his retelling, creating a verbal history of his personal, specific version of each film. This complicates not only Molina's relationship with his own narration, but also his relationship with his audience, blurring the lines between fantasy, reality, classical Hollywood plotting, and 'real' life. Molina's madness stems not only from his role as a transgressor, but also from the fact that he allows such specific terms to bleed into one another.

Since Puig's novel opens with one such film plot, it seems advantageous to start there.[81] In the opening sentence of the novel the speaker (who has not yet been named) states, "A ella se le ve que algo raro tiene, que no es una mujer como todas" ["Something a little strange, that's what you notice, that she's not a woman like all the others"] (Puig, *El beso* 9, *Kiss* 3). Here Molina, who we later learn is this first speaker, tells his story to an audience, yet is also an audience member. His inclusion of "se le ve" ["that's what you notice"] places him in this awkward position. Molina *saw* this movie and now he is *retelling* it. This relationship between film and narrator/spectator is an important one – it supports the view that an audience member is not simply a passive viewer, hand fed information that does not need to be digested. As Bordwell writes in his overview of the classical Hollywood film style, "The spectator *participates* in creating the illusion" (Bordwell 7). Bordwell mentions the act of 'gap-filling,' stating, "just as we project motion on to a succession of frames, so we form hypotheses, make inferences, erect expectations, and draw conclusions about the film's characters and actions" (8). When we read Molina's film narratives, this is the process we experience – a spectator's interaction with a classical Hollywood production.

Molina's description of Irena, of that strange woman from the opening lines, can serve as a perfect example of how this manifests in *El beso*. Most of Molina's descriptions are peppered with sentimental details, long paragraphs itemizing what Irena wears and how she looks. These lists reveal much about Molina, about his life as a homosexual and his feminine, sentimental traits. Multiple critics have devoted long pages to how these descriptions interact within the text – for our purposes, we need only look at Molina's description of Irena's first encounter with the panther. Molina tells Valentín, "El guardián le pone la carne cerca de las rejas, y no puede entrar ningún olor de afuera, a propósito para que la pantera no se alborote. […] Y la pantera la mira, es una pantera macho y no se sabe si es para despedazarla y después comerla, o si la mira llevada por otro instinto más feo todavía." ["The keeper drops the meat near the bars, and it blocks out any smell from outside, that's the point, so the panther won't get excited. […] And the panther watches her, a male panther, and its hard to tell if he's watching to tear her to pieces and make a meal of her, or if he's driven by some other, still uglier instinct"] (Puig, *El beso* 9, *Kiss* 3). Within this description, we learn that the panther is caged, not only physically, but mentally as well – he cannot move or smell or even feel emotion without interference from an outside authority. The zookeeper and the cage prohibit any individual exertion of will, with the exception of the animal's baser instincts. This description could be mapped perfectly onto Molina's own situation. He has projected his own fears and desires onto the characters on the screen. Though we cannot say that Molina, also locked in a cage and subjugated by a higher authority, has been driven to the point of pure instinct, this scene certainly illustrates the man's fear that he may someday be driven to this point. This fear, along with the fear associated with

149

confinement itself, is more than enough to push anyone over the edge into madness.

Rubén Gómez-Lara writes, in his book *Intertextualidad generativa en El beso de la mujer araña, de Manuel Puig* [*Generative Intertextuality in Manuel Puig's Kiss of the Spider Woman*], "In this case, besides the physical inconveniences, there exists a psychological disequilibrium provoked by maltreatment and by the distance of loved ones […]. And it is because of all these privations and sufferings that the imagination will take hold of one's perception of reality" (Gómez-Lara 69, my translation).[82]

The panther is thus a manifestation of Molina's darker self, just as it is a representation of Irena's. The panther is the part of his nature that is willing to devour, that goes beyond the stereotypical image of either the Homosexual or the middle-class Housewife he wishes he could be. Amícola notices the more dangerous side of Molina when he states, "perhaps even Molina himself does not understand to what length, when he identifies himself with the panther woman from the film, he is declaring in front of an unwary Valentín his condition as a devouring figure and, therefore, menacing" (Amícola 56, my translation).[83] Because of his captivity, Molina's baser instincts will come to the foreground, instincts that in other situations would be either buried or harmless. In the confines of the cell, these instincts come out, manifested not only through Molina's actions, but also through his narration.

Yet here Molina has also mapped himself onto Irena, both consciously and subconsciously, identifying with the character as any other middle class female audience member would. By doing so, he equates himself with a certain group, a certain category of spectator. Even Molina's refusal to give the panther a specific motive is indicative of such spectatorship. Bordwell insists, "Classical narration usually calls our attention to

gaps and allows us to set up simultaneous, competing hypotheses" (Bordwell 39). By

presenting two differing reason behind the panther's rage, Molina once again sets himself

up as the quintessential audience member – he is able to hold two possibilities in his mind

at the same time, even though, by narrating the film, he is repeating something whose

ending is already known. Thus Molina reveals himself, at least at this level, to be an

audience member who wishes to relate his experience inside the movie theater to others.

In this way, Molina fits the profile of the postmodern madman. Though condemned by

mundane society to be an outcast, he wishes to return to some sort of communion with

other human beings. Unable to rejoin the 'real' world, he seeks refuge in the fantasies

created by classical Hollywood cinema. As part of an audience, Molina can hide his

abnormalities and focus on what he has in common with other audience members.

Yet, Puig's protagonist is more complicated than just this level of reading allows.

Molina is not *just* a spectator, for by retelling the film, by narrating it to his fellow

inmate, he complicates the spectator's role. As a narrator he asserts his personal

authority over *his* audience, emphasizing the power of his own opinions and therefore his

individuality. Molina makes the film into a tragic love story and a film noir by the way

he interprets the scenes, by the way he retells the action, and by the way he describes

Irena. Though distributors and subsequent film critics labeled the 'real' film a horror

movie, by reevaluating its genre Molina reveals much about how he views the world.

The genre switch between the real film and his version reveals the passive-aggressive

spectator-creator duality that lives within Molina's makeup. Herein lies the true kernel of

Molina's madness: the confusion and heartache resulting from the dueling forces of

spectator and creator within Molina.

We need, therefore, to look at how Molina describes Irena's psyche as she sits watching the panther on that first day, in the first scene, for it provides a perfect example of how Molina's madness manifests and of how Molina and Valentín, as spectators, interact. Since Molina admits that he sympathizes and even identifies with Irena (and thus the panther), his assessment of her situation is also a reflection on his own plight. He explains,

> - No, no se acuerda del frío, está como en otro mundo, ensimismada
> dibujando a la pantera.
> - Si está ensimismada no está en otro mundo. Ésa es una contradicción.
> - Sí, es cierto, ella está ensimismada, metida en el mundo que tiene
> adentro de ella misma, y que apenas si lo está empezando a descubrir
> (Puig *El beso* 10).
>
> [- No, she's not thinking of the cold, it's as if she's in some other world,
> all wrapped up in herself drawing the panther.
> - If she's wrapped up inside herself, she's not in some other world. That's
> a contradiction.
> - Yes, that's right, she's all wrapped up in herself, lost in that world she
> carries inside her, that she's just beginning to discover (Puig *Kiss* 4).]

Here, Molina unknowingly compares Irena's drawing to his own narrative act. He, like Irena, is a creator, copying the movement he sees before him in a stylized representation of what he has seen, lost in his own world. Many critics have been drawn to the parallels between this film and Puig's own narrative. Colás compares Irena's sketching of the panther to Molina's narration, for they both represent imprisonment, not only of that which they are sketching, but also their own incarceration. The panther is caged and cannot be let out except by someone else; he cannot find his own food or live his own life without the input of some outside authority. Irena, too, is trapped in her own life, though the bars of her cage are not as physically evident. Molina, who identifies with Irena, is

152

imprisoned as well, not only by the bars of his own cell, but also by his own life, by the Other trapped inside of him.[84]

I would argue, however, that Molina must also, like Irena, be a spectator; Irena needs a model for her art and Molina models his own stories after the films he sees. As a spectator, Molina simply recreates what he has seen before, joining in with others in their interpretations of the film. As a creator, Molina discovers himself as he relates these film plots, adding details that reveal more about himself than about the film. The plots become extensions of his own psyche, just as Irena's sketches reveal her intricacies. When Molina tells his stories, he is not thinking of his cell or his imprisonment, but is instead in some other world, wrapped up in what *he* considers important. Yet, we also need to note that Valentín, as *Molina's* audience, has influence over how Molina creates his narratives. Valentín makes Molina clarify himself, confronts him with the possibility of contradictions or overzealous sentimentality. By asking for clarification or by rewriting certain parts of the narrative, as he does when he calls Irena a madwoman instead of a monster, Valentín changes the genre of the film (from film noir to psychological drama), creating new possibilities in how one can (re)interpret the movie once again. Valentín, in his own way, creates his own vision of the film, recreating a smaller version of Molina's active spectatorship.

Valentín is therefore more than just Molina's captive audience – he also represents an alternative version of how a spectator can approach film. Bordwell insists, "Classical narration's reliability habituates the viewer to accepting regulated impersonality and sourceless authority" (Bordwell 83). Classical Hollywood cinema is meant to indoctrinate spectators into viewing life in a certain way, into conforming to certain

cultural norms or goals. These norms, however, may not agree with norms promoted by society at large. Rick Altman, in his book about genre studies, *Film/Genre*, agrees with Bordwell, but adds a new dimension to the relationship between the viewer and what he or she views. Altman claims, "Hollywood has over the years designed techniques assuring a certain uniformity of perception, even if this involves chastising conduct that in the real world may under certain circumstances be entirely acceptable, or recommending behavior that is far from universally recognized as desirable" (Altman 157). Hollywood dictates a kind of normative behavior that does not always sync with 'real' life, complicating the spectator's view of his own reality. Hollywood is a purveyor of illusions, of fantasy, of a life that may not co-exist with society's views on what is acceptable. Film thus allows the Other, the outsider, to find consolation, to encounter an acceptance he or she may not be able to find in reality. Film, in this way, especially classical Hollywood narrative, *could* allow the Other the potential for solace, if not become an outright mediator, even if this solace can only last as long as the film remains on screen and the audience in their seats.

The illusion of comfort classical Hollywood narrative can provide, however, has its limits, as we can see if we look at how Valentín interrupts Molina's narratives. Viewership puts Molina and Valentín at odds, for while Molina is the perfect classical Hollywood spectator, Valentín, at this moment in the novel, is a dissenter, someone who cannot immerse himself in the illusion. Molina, as the primary spectator, connects with the heroine of the story, aligning himself with film not only through the act of retelling/narration, but also via his identification. Valentín, at least during the first film, does not take on the role of spectator, but instead tries to be a critic. He equates himself

with the psychoanalyst and therefore with 'reality,' with norms that do not match the

illusion provided by the film. This explains why Valentín agrees that Molina's films

provide an illusion, yet he cannot keep himself from breaking that illusion.[85] Puig writes,

> - Mirá, tengo sueño, y me da rabia que te salgas con eso porque hasta que
> saliste con eso yo me sentía fenómeno, me había olvidado de esta mugre
> de celda, de todo, contándote la película.
> - Yo también me había olvidado de todo.
> - ¿Y entonces?, ¿por qué cortarme la ilusión, a mí, y a vos también? ¿qué
> hazaña es ésa?
> - Veo que tengo que hacerte un planteo más claro, porque por señas no
> entendés. (*El beso* 23).

> [- Look, I'm tired, and it makes me angry the way you brought all this up,
> because until you brought it up I was feeling fabulous, I'd forgotten all
> about this filthy cell, and all the rest, just telling you about the film.
> - I forgot all the rest, too.
> - Well? Why break the illusion for me, and for yourself too? What kind
> of trick is that to pull?
> - I guess I have to draw you a map, because you sure don't get the idea.
> (*Kiss* 17).]

This repartee between Molina and Valentín reveals the dichotomy between the two

spectators. Molina reveres the illusory quality of being a spectator – he loves the fact that

film can take one away from the 'real' world. Valentín, however, though he is also

caught up in the reverie provided by spectatorship, feels the need to ground his viewing

in reality, in a more 'centered' view of how things work. In this sense, Molina, though he

represents a sentimentalist, feminine approach to film, is Othered by his conformity to

Hollywood's dictates. Valentín, by trying to map 'reality' onto Molina's dreams while at

the same time acknowledging the importance of those dreams, transforms the act of

viewing into a form of criticism, an act of judging. This is what instigates the dialogue

between the two men, this opposition between conformities.

The tension between these two different takes on spectatorship also brings us closer

to understanding how madness works in *El beso*. Valentín, acting here as a representative of mundane society, has the power to frustrate Molina, who in this case adheres to a more fantastical, Hollywood view of life. At this point in the text Molina is already mad, but Valentín is not, since he upholds communal realities, not illusions. By instigating a dialogue between these very different perceptions of spectatorship, however, Puig provides an avenue by which Molina's madness can spread. For, as Altman notes, "certain assumptions about films must be shared by all spectators in order for them together to share the experience we call cinema" (Altman 157). Until Molina and Valentín share certain assumptions, they cannot share the same cinematic experience, an experience critical for the inception of madness. But once the two participate fully in the *same* illusion, an illusion so many others maintain, both can partake in postmodern madness, a madness based on communal fantasies. And until Valentín and Molina can come to an understanding, the reader, as the third audience member, cannot come to terms with his or her own relationship with the novel.

This brings up the importance of Valentín's own personality. Though he more often than not takes stances similar to 'normal' citizens, he, too, is marginal, indoctrinated by his own party's propaganda. Valentín, like Molina, is a transgressor – as a political activist, he is blatantly set in counterpoint to the rest of 'normal' society, specifically the Argentine government and the conservatives in power at the time. The fact that he was arrested in October of 1972 but is still awaiting judgment in April of 1975, when he moves in with Molina, speaks to society's reaction to his rebellious nature. Valentín is a man in limbo, specifically set on the margins of society, in a liminal state, due to his nonconformity. His conduct in the prison is termed, "reprobable por

rebeldía" ["reprehensible, rebellious"] and before moving in with Molina he served ten

days in solitary confinement for taking part in a hunger strike (Puig, *El beso* 152, *Kiss*

149). Even in jail Valentín is set apart, not only because of his political views, but

because of his willingness to take action against his 'oppressors,' be they the prison

guards, the law, or the government itself. As Gómez-Lara states, "Valentín, by being

involved in political activities, represents a grave danger to the system, who use him to

try and acquire information and, when they do not get it, use him again in order to serve

as a warning to others like him – to those who try to collapse, or at least debilitate, the

columns of totalitarian oppression from the outside" (Gómez-Lara 68, my translation).[86]

Valentín is dangerous because, instead of simply corrupting youth, he has the ability to

threaten an entire power structure. He may not live as far out on the margins as Molina,

but his threat to the center is more palpable and therefore more hazardous. We can see

this clearly when the warden mentions Valentín in his phone conversation with the

government official. He unconsciously places Valentín exactly opposite Molina – both

outside the bounds of normalcy, yet at opposite poles on those extremities: both

dangerous, but to different extremes.[87] Valentín, in this case, is portrayed as a ruthless

automaton who will stop at nothing to forward his political agenda, "vaya a saber con qué

métodos" ["using who knows what sort of methods"], corrupting Molina, the

government's own spy (*El beso* 249-250, *Kiss* 246). The torturers accuse him of torture,

thus ironically placing him in the same category that we, as readers, want to place them.

    As a political transgressor, however, as opposed to a moral transgressor like

Molina, Valentín is seemingly more approachable, especially for certain readers – we

need no footnotes in order to understand his actions. He may be an Other, but he is an

Other we can understand, if not admire. True, we are at times reminded that his political fervor is overly dramatic and zealous, yet his transgressions seem less menacing when compared with those of Molina because his transgressions are based in the 'real' world, not the world of fantasy.[88] At this point in the narrative, then, Valentín is not mad. Though he is an Other, rebellious, caught up in a world of party lines, half-truths and political cant and has transgressed through obedience to Marxist propaganda, he is not confused, has yet to try to reassert his own subjectivity in opposition to this conformity. Only when Valentín is able to immerse himself fully in the act of viewing, ignoring the everyday and replacing it with classical Hollywood illusion, can he hope to find the contentment (and inevitable confusion and devastation) found in the progression of postmodern madness.

Popular culture, therefore, specifically classical Hollywood cinema, provides a common ground within the text, for narrator and audience, on all levels of the work. It also allows madness, as a contagion, to spread. It connects Puig and his readers, Molina and Valentín, and the two men and those who eavesdrop on their dialogue. As the novel progresses, Valentín, because of the conflict involved with being a spectator who cannot choose between his marginal status and his 'centered' views of film, begins to change. His questioning, the lure of illusion, the threat of the madness inherent in captivity and his weakened state (throughout a good portion of the novel he is poisoned) open him up to a more receptive state of mind. Away from the outside world and removed from Marxist indoctrination, Valentín is able not only to start seeing himself as an individual, but is also able to understand the lure of a fantasy life. We can see this in the way the two men's dreams parallel each other when each man becomes violently ill. Molina

becomes ill first, eating rice he knows to be poisoned. He decides to tell himself a movie

plot, one he knows Valentín will not like because of its romantic contents. Yet, in this

movie plot Molina mixes in his own life and opinions openly, remembering, "la cara

linda y alegre del muchacho en el recuerdo de la sirvientita" ["memory of the young

man's happy lovely face still in the mind's eye of the little maid"] yet also thinking,

"¿qué es lo que la hace linda a una cara?" ["what is it that makes a face so lovely?"]

(Puig, *El beso* 109, *Kiss* 105). This question then leads him to a contemplation of

Valentín's face, and his own attraction to the young revolutionary. The mixing of film

plot and Molina's idealized versions of his own life, portrayed only in his dreams,

reemphasizes the importance of fantasy in Molina's psyche. Film and real life mingle

here more readily that they do in his waking narrations because here Molina has no

audience, only himself.

Soon after this incident Valentín also becomes ill, having eaten a different bowl of

poisoned rice. Molina continues to narrate film plots every night before the two go to

sleep and as Valentín's constitution wavers due to the poison in his system, his dreams

begin to revolve around Molina's film. In his waking life Valentín refuses to believe that

his own experiences could be mirrored in film. When Molina mentions that his own

mother is "un poco como la película que te estaba contando" ["a little like the film I'm

telling you"], Valentín replies "No… estás loco" ["No… you're crazy"] (Puig, *El beso*

125, *Kill* 121). Valentín considers it mad to equate filmic fantasy with actual reality. In

his dreams, however, he takes advantage of such a phenomenon. He, like Molina, inserts

himself into the filmic landscape, though not as directly as the other man. In this version

of Molina's film, Valentín inserts his own prejudices and personal experiences into a

rewriting of the motivations of the main characters. The two women in the dream/film resemble the two women in Valentín's life, whom we learn about in the next chapter, one an intellectual who will not give up her life for a cause, the other a revolutionary who will give everything for hers. Even the protagonist takes on Valentín's own convictions and the end of the dream/film sequence reveals Valentín's concerns about his own situation. As the protagonist dies at the end of this version of the film, Valentín describes him as "un muchacho que antes de morir quiere pedir perdón y no puede ya emitir la voz, un muchacho que ve en los ojos de la campesina una condena eterna" ["a fellow who before dying wants to beg forgiveness but can no longer utter a word, a fellow who sees in the eyes of the peasant girl an eternal condemnation"] (150, 147). Here the protagonist echoes Valentín's own fears of failing the Marxist agenda and alienating his own girlfriend, who lives for the cause. This inscribing of his own preoccupations into the body of this filmic narration places Valentín on the path to a madness similar to Molina's. The lure of the illusory filmic world has touched even this hardened revolutionary.

To confuse the issue even further, this gradual opening allows Valentín to influence Molina as well, who simply wishes to share his own version of spectatorship with someone else. Therefore, as Norman Lavers notes in *Pop Culture into Art*, "These characters […] have no language to speak, cannot even think their deepest thoughts, except with the vocabulary of popular culture, the only vocabulary given to them" (Lavers 39). These two marginalized men, existing at opposite poles, equidistant from the center along a straight line, yearn to have a common language that can connect their experiences and that common language blossoms out of the language of film. Though Lavers implies that this language is also forced upon them, just as the cell is forced upon

them, at least they will be able to communicate on some level, both to each other and to the reader.

Lois Zamora, in the article "Clichés and Defamiliarization in the Fiction of Manuel Puig and Luis Rafael Sánchez," also remarks on the importance of a shared language. She states,

> The antidote to their inhuman isolation is precisely the language which they speak together, language which is in its very essence sociable, shared, common. The conventionality of their idiom strengthens rather than dilutes the communication – the communion – which they establish within their cell. Their clichés, precisely because they are clichés, offer a means of social affiliation, even integration, which neither has attained in society at large (Zamora 425).

This shared language, created by the culture industry and adopted through spectatorship, allows freedom through conformity. Once the two men accept the language of film as their idiom, they can communicate because the words and the cultural codes they use are seemingly fixed, and have specific and precise definitions. Their own lives, in contrast to the cinematic models they reproduce, are not so well delineated, thus making a language and lifestyle that has such defined boundaries enviable.

Once each man has been poisoned and has had the chance to dream his own film narrative, we are allowed into their thoughts as Molina relates the second-to-last of his movie plots. This film is about a zombie woman and as the film opens, both men are transported by the sound of drums heard by the protagonists in the film. We read,

> - […] se oyen los tambores de los nativos […] y el capitán entonces le dice que no se deje engañar por esos tambores, que a veces lo que transmiten son sentencias de muerte. *paro cardíaco, una anciana enferma, un corazón se llena del agua negra del mar y se ahoga*
> - *patrulla policial, escondite, gases lacrimógenos, la puerta se abre, puntas de metralletas, sangre negra de asfixia sube a las bocas* Seguí, ¿por qué parás? (Puig, *El beso* 164).

[- […] you hear some native drums […] and then the captain says don't let yourself be taken in by the sound of those drums, because they can often as not be the portents of death… *cardiac arrest, sick old woman, a heart fills up with black seawater and drowns*
- police patrol, hideout, tear gas, door opens, submachinegun muzzles, black blood of asphyxiation gushing up in the mouth Go on, why did you stop? (Puig, *Kiss* 158).]

As Molina narrates the plot of the film, we are given insight into what the two men think. Both react to the implications of the film by imagining the death most horrifying to them personally – Molina imagines the death of his mother, while Valentín imagines the death of his compatriots. Their real lives, their personalities, and the illusions created within the film start to intertwine. Though the two men still do not share the same fantasies, by utilizing the potential for illusion inherent in the act of spectatorship, they finally share the act of viewing. They hear the same sound and react to it in the same way, triggering not only memories, but also possible futures; each lost in thought, but wishing the story to continue.

This shared language, the language of film, thus opens Valentín up to Molina's madness. We know that society (the warden, etc.) believe the two men to be Others, fit only to be imprisoned and used, one as a spy, the other as a source of information. Yet, as the narrative progresses, the two are able to share not only the burden of imprisonment and Otherness, but also the euphoria of living a communal fantasy life (the life of film). Colás considers the union between Molina and Valentín as the formation of a utopian state, though he cites this utopia as a paradox, for it is limited to cell number 7 and contingent on the cell walls themselves. Only apart from society can this perfect union exist. As Colás insists, "The text itself finally reveals the limitations of the utopian space – founded, as it is, on the psychological repression of psychological and state-sanctioned

repression – constructed by Molina and Valentín" (Colás 96). The freedom that Molina

and Valentín find, constructed out of the repression of repression, cannot, therefore, last.

Though Kimberly Davis, in her book *Postmodern Texts and Emotional Audiences*, argues

against Colás, stating that the novel is not anti-utopian because "it places considerable

hope in the power of individuals to make change on an intersubjective scale," I would

argue that this repression of repression, in my estimation the outcome of madmen trying

to ignore their own madness by exulting it, does resist a utopian finality (K. Davis 158).

For, in the end, Molina and Valentín cannot retain their perfect union and the authority

and repression they try so hard to defy breaks their union apart. Yet, we cannot ignore

the utopian tendencies of the novel, especially their link to film. As Graciela Speranza

points out in her book *Manuel Puig: Después del fin de la literatura*: "The realism

integral to cinema represents the utopia of authorial absence without refuges or secrets

that annul the limits of personal language and reach the naturalness of social languages"

(Speranza 127, my translation).[89] The cinematic experience reveals no outward author

for its text, the camera's eye linked to the audience's own perception. This makes a

filmic template that much more necessary in a world in which its inhabitants have

absolutely *no* control over their lives. The fantasy provided by film trumps a reality ruled

by authoritarianism, creating a utopia beyond the boundaries of reality. This utopia may

be doomed, but at least it exists for a moment.

  We can see this clearly when we look at what happens to Molina and Valentín after

the older man's madness infects the younger revolutionary. The two consummate their

relationship physically as well as mentally, a relationship brought about through their

shared interactions with Molina's film plots. After their first physical sharing, both feel

that they have changed. Molina believes himself to be a different person, stating,

> - […] soy otra persona, que no es ni hombre ni mujer, pero que se siente…
> - … fuera de peligro.
> - Sí, ahí está, ¿comó lo sabés?
> - Porque es lo que siento yo (Puig, *El beso* 238).

> [- […] I'm someone else, who's neither a man nor a woman, but someone
> who feels…
> - … out of danger.
> - Yes, that's exactly it, how did you know?
> - Because it's what I feel. (Puig, *Kiss* 235-236).]

The conversation between the two reflects the change in their way of being – the

sentences they utter are short and to the point and Valentín is able to finish Molina's

thought without any trouble. They are, at this moment, sharing a unified language. The

two, for a moment, become one, neither man nor woman, but instead an Other together.

This sharing, at least for now, places them outside their cell, out of danger. They thus try

to ignore their Otherness by forming their own community of outcasts, a community

based on filmic versions of real life. They have finally become *one* audience, at least at

this instance sharing the same goals and expectations, reacting to outside stimulus in the

same manner. As Lavers notes, "It is the synthesis of their partial views that has in the

end made them complete human beings. And once more, the synthesis has had to be

effected through the clichés of popular culture, since they had no other vocabulary with

which to formulate it" (Lavers 43-44). Only together, conjoined by their use of the

culture industry to provide them with a common language with which to speak, can the

two men reach a state of shared illusion, a place where their own strangeness no longer

registers.

    This represents one of the most important differences between the way film works

in *El beso de la mujer araña* and how it works in novels like *Zona sagrada* and *The*

Moviegoer. All these narratives play upon the importance of the fantasy life available to those who use film as a focal point in their lives. Film, in all three novels, provides the gateway through which each man enters into madness. In Fuentes' novel and in Percy's, however, film represents something to idolize, to yearn for, whether one wants to be a fan and possess a star, or if one desires to become an Actor and possess the aura associated with celebrity. In these novels, one can choose to remain a part of the film experience, to counter the confusion of living a communal lie with more of the same. Mito finds his life overrun by film and chooses to literally become his mother, a film star. Though in the end this solution cannot sustain itself and he must become a dog, his action, inserting himself *into* his fantasy, is a blatantly participatory act. Binx transforms himself into an Actor, becoming the embodiment of what he considers the best aspect of the film industry. Though this leads him away from moviegoing, it leads him toward fantasy, toward the heightened reality he craves. In these works, then, film is not only part of the cause of madness, but is also part of each individual's solution.

In Puig's text, however, film is language, a common thread that connects characters together, but does not allow the protagonists to actually participate in cinema itself, except as part of the audience. Molina may map parts of his life onto the films, and we may be able to discover much about his own thoughts and fears via the plots he chooses to narrate, yet because these cinematic moments are *mediated*, *revised* and *shared* they take on a very different role. Though Molina is a narrator, he is *not* a director – a reviser, perhaps, or an adapter, but not a creator. Molina and Valentín, by the end of the novel, are not fans, or directors or actors, though each does, on occasion, exhibit some of the tendencies attributed to these roles. Instead, they remain creative spectators, caught up in

a personal web of illusion based on the illusion shared by all film audiences. The two men can therefore be both passive and active, conforming to cinematic interpretations of reality instead of trying to live by normal standards of conduct, yet also using these cinematic illusions as the foundation for their own, personal utopian society.

We can infer from Valentín's gradual seduction into madness, then, that madness needs company. As a madman, Molina needs a liaison between himself and society, one that society will very obviously not provide, as we can see by they way the two men are incarcerated. Because of his relationship with film, however, Molina cannot be his own mediator – as a spectator and a creator, he needs other audience members, both to share in his experience and to listen to his own versions of the story. Molina thus manipulates Valentín into becoming his audience. Yet, because the prisoners are both Others and are able to use film as a shared idiom, their fates become linked. Valentín becomes a mediator for Molina – the activist's version of moviegoing allows the homosexual to come to terms with his own conformity. And Molina evolves into a mediator for Valentín – the film plots allow the political activist a way to access his own sentimental nature through his role as moviegoer. We can therefore state that within *El beso de la mujer araña*, the madman must be a mediator, but this role must be *shared* – he is not a mediator for himself, but for other madmen.

In order to understand how this relationship functions, we must understand not only how Molina and Valentín interact with each other once their symbiotic mediation has occurred, but we must also look at how others interact with them after. Has anything changed now that liaisons have been found? We can see the end result of the interplay between Molina and Valentín when we look at their actions after they have been removed

166

from cell number 7. Once Molina leaves the cell, we, as audience members, no longer have any contact with him – we only receive the rest of his story via official government reports. As Colás comments, "If ever we are lulled into believing in the general viability of Molina and Valentín's utopian space, that illusion is systematically dismantled by the terse police communiqués. We read the chapter simply waiting for Molina to walk into the trap, powerless to help him avoid it" (Colás 98). These reports signal the futility of Valentín as a mediator, for even though his influence changes Molina's character, this change makes no difference outside the prison walls. Once Molina leaves Valentín's sphere of influence, he no longer has any chance at a true dialogue with anyone. We are told that he speaks with several people, including his old friends and flames, but when Molina converses with these former intimates, he cannot truly communicate with them. He must instead fall into his former patterns and former roles, playing the part of the flighty woman or the supportive female. He cannot be the person he found himself to be while in prison because the rest of the world expects him to remain the same man he was before. Dialogue is no longer an option because he no longer has the support of his counterpart, a mediator between himself and the rest of the world. Molina does seem to have changed because of his stint in prison, as several critics point out – he talks back to his godfather and even asks the police for their credentials moments before he is shot – yet these instances of rebellion, leftovers from his time with Valentín, are, in the end, futile. Molina, because he has lost his mediator, can no longer consider himself part of a shared audience, a communal experience, and therefore cannot maintain the utopia he and Valentín formed.

Even Valentín cannot know the reasons behind Molina's death, whether he died trying to uphold Valentín's own political aspirations or if he simply wanted to be a film heroine. In his morphine-induced dreams, which end the novel, Valentín ponders this enigma, questioning his right to even guess at Molina's justifications. In this dream Valentín speaks with his old girlfriend, Marta, the middle class woman he had to abandon because their love would have corrupted his commitment to his political cause. That Valentín speaks to Marta, who may or may not also represent Molina, speaks to his own affinity with Molina's sentimental ways. The homosexual's views of film and life in general have obviously compromised Valentín's own way of viewing the world, for at the edge of death the political activist thinks not of his dogma, but of his lovers. And when he thinks of Molina and the intentions behind Molina's death, he notes, "no hay que ponerse triste porque el único que sabe es él, si estaba triste o estaba contento de morirse así, sacrificándose por una causa buena, eso solamente lo habrá sabido él" ["there's no point in being so sad because the only one who knows for sure is him, if he was sad or happy to die that way, sacrificing himself for a just cause, because he's the only one who will ever have known"] (Puig, *El beso* 284-285, *Kiss* 279), Once Molina and Valentín were one, finishing each other's sentences and knowing exactly what the other was thinking. Now, though we have hints that Molina was permanently influenced by Valentín's mediation, even if only tangentially or marginally, Valentín cannot guess at his erstwhile partner's motives. Marta suggests that Molina may have died a filmic death, trying to be a tragic heroine, but still Valentín maintains Molina's unknowability, stating, "eso lo sabrá él solo, y hasta es posible que ni él lo sepa" ["that's something only he can know, and it's possible that even he never knew"] (285, 279). Forced to leave the

confines of his cell, Molina leaves behind any hope of redemption or understanding. Even the bond he once shared with his partner-in-arms is gone.

Valentín, too, is finally crushed by the authoritarian regime that incarcerated him. Once Molina leaves the prison without giving the warden any information gleamed from Valentín, the prison officials soon resort to torture in order to elicit from the prisoner whatever Molina could not give them. The last chapter of the novel reveals that his torturers have so deformed Valentín that a medic, someone who is part of the system that has imprisoned him, takes pity on him and slips him a dose of morphine to dull the pain. The rest of the chapter is the resulting fever/drug induced dream. It is to this section of the book that Stacey Olster draws our attention in her book *The Trash Phenomenon*. She negates the reading of the novel as a "relinquishing of identity" and the "transcendence of all oppression" (Olster 110). Instead, she maintains, "all there is, and continues to be, is an oppressor and an oppressed, constantly reversing" (110). Olster sees Valentín's ravings as a continuation of his own gendered role from the beginning of the novel. For at least this critic, nothing has changed.

I would argue, as do several others, that Valentín does change, though his transformation is on par with Molina's – once his mediator is out of reach, he only maintains traces of his counterpart's influence. As Valentín himself notes, "en la celda no puedo dormir porque él me acostumbró a contarme todas las noches películas, como un arrorró" ["in my cell I can't sleep anymore because he got me used to listening to him tell films every night, like lullabies"] (Puig, *El beso* 285, *Kiss* 279). In Valentín's reality Molina's influence remains as a memory, like one's remembrance of a mother's lullaby from childhood. And though Valentín, at the very end of the dream sequence, mistakes

Molina for Marta, attributing his insistence on not knowing the names of the other

political activists to his former girlfriend, this melding of lovers does not signify love

conquering all. For, as Valentín remarks, "yo tenía miedo de que me lo preguntaras y de

ese modo sí te iba a perder para siempre" ["I was so afraid you were going to ask me that

and then I was going to lose you forever"] (287, 281). Valentín's mind still puts his

political agenda ahead of love, above both Marta and Molina. He loves these two

because they never asked him to betray himself, but by asking this of them, they must

betray their own natures. Thus, though Valentín was willing to give up information to

Molina while the two where together in cell number 7, once separated from his mediator

he no longer has that option. Valentín can no longer be a spectator because the illusion

has been broken – reality has prevailed over the filmic utopia the two once shared.

We need to note, however, that while in the end Valentín's obsession with his

political goals trumps illusion and the utopia he tried to create with Molina, it also comes

back once more to illusion – the illusion that everything will turn out all right, that

nothing will be betrayed, neither love nor rebellion. Molina's influence on Valentín

returns, in the end, because Valentín finishes the book inside his own head, inside a drug-

induced dream. This is why in the last few lines of the book we are told, "este sueño es

corto pero es feliz" ["this dream is short but this dream is happy"]; at least in his dreams

Valentín can continue to rely on a liaison between himself and the real world (Puig, *El*

beso 287, *Kiss* 281). This dream is Valentín's entrance into true madness, for if we are to

read the novel as the commingling of Valentín and Molina then we need to look at the

end as the reversal of their roles as madmen. Molina is at his maddest at the beginning of

the novel, influenced the most by his homosexuality and his obsession with popular

culture. His interaction with Valentín mediates his madness, so when he comes out the other side of their relationship, his interaction with Valentín diminishes his connection to sentimentality and gives him an opportunity to find a different place in society. Molina therefore finds a place in society that considers him a little less mad – he retains his individuality at the end, and therefore remains in reality. Valentín, however, who was the saner of the two outcasts at the beginning of the novel, has now become that much more insane and finishes out the novel trapped in fantasy. At the end of the novel he has no hope of contact with society and must dwell in illusion in order to retain even a semblance of self. The dichotomy between the need to find safety in filmic fantasy and the need to keep hold of one's true self defines his last moments. At the end of things, Valentín must live with the agony of true madness, for even the freedom of his dream is not real, but induced by outside influences.

We can therefore come to the conclusion that Molina and Valentín are both redeemed and doomed by their roles as symbiotic mediators. It makes them more knowable, yet at the same time obscures their own endings. For, as we are told at the end of the novel, we do not need to find out the significance of everything. In his dream, Valentín speaks to the titular spider woman, who is and is not a representation of Molina, entrapped in a web growing out of her own body. He tells Marta, "yo le pregunto por qué es que llora y en un primer plano que ocupa toda la pantalla al final de la película ella me contesta que es eso lo que no se sabe, porque es un final enigmático, y yo le contesto que está bien así, que es lo mejor de la película porque significa que… y ahí ella no me dejó seguir" ["I ask her why she's crying and in a close-up that covers the whole scene at the end of the film she answers me that that's just what can never be known, because the

171

ending is enigmatic, and I answer her that it's good this way, that it's the very best part of the film because it signifies… and at that point she didn't let me go on"] (Puig, *El beso* 285, *Kiss* 280). This scene encapsulates much of what madness comes to mean in the whole of the novel. Madness goes hand in hand with tragedy. It cannot be separated from popular culture. And at the end of things, at the end of the film, it could signify anything. We do not need to find significance, solace, or condemnation at the end of Puig's novel – the outcome of mediation between madman and society is not important. Only the relationship between madman and mediator matters, the relationship between audience members trying to come to terms with the story they see (and want to see) on the screen.

<center>*****************************</center>

The 1970s was also a decade of upheaval in the United States, though the US was not plagued with the same caliber of political mayhem as Argentina. George Mowry and Blaine Brownell, in their history *The Urban Nation: 1920-1980*, call attention to the growing urbanization of the United States as one of the most important factors in the nations troubles in the 1970s. A large majority of the population lived in urban centers, but these centers were not limited to downtown districts, but instead extended out into clusters around the city, extending toward out-lying suburbs. Because of this, "Urbanization and urban culture were so pervasive, so dominant, that the very existence of the city as a discrete congregation of people was called into question" (Mowry 282). The city was no longer a nodal point of culture and commerce; instead, it had become divided into distinct districts, spread out across a much wider area, creating a "suburban nation" (282). Mowry and Brownell also remark, "Transportation and communications

<center>172</center>

technology linked the destinies of American citizens as never before, while also

fragmenting the urban landscape into discrete pockets of black and white, rich and poor"

(281-282). Seen in this light, the 1970s was defined by technology and communication,

by a culture obsessed not only with keeping up to date with the right kinds of cultural

capital, but also with maintaining individual cultural tastes. Essayist Tom Wolfe called

the seventies the "Me Decade" for a reason – as Mowry and Brownell assert, "Individual

self-discovery and improvement grew into national movements," movements promoted

by television programs and magazine articles that made individuality a mass market

product (311).

Even North American architecture began to live by such production codes, for the

1970s marks the time, according the architect Charles Jencks in his book *The New*

Paradigm in Architecture: The Language of Post-Modernism, "when Post-Modernism

came on the scene" (Jencks 1). For Jencks, the Post-Modernism that defined the

architecture of the 1970s was based on pluralism and heterogeneity, "and it

acknowledges the variety of taste cultures and visual codes of the users" (2). This kind of

architecture responded not only to artistry or simple function, but also to the needs of the

consumer, to those who will inhabit or use the building created. As Jencks goes on to

assert, "High on the Post-Modern agenda was the idea of speaking to a pluralist society,

the notion that architecture should cut across high and low taste cultures with a double

coding that still holds the integrity of different voices" (151). Architectural

postmodernism tried to react to the elite *and* the masses, the city *and* the suburb, the rich

and the poor (or perhaps in this case, the moderately well-off). Of course, Jencks also

comments, "The inherent danger? That each voice is compromised" (151). By aiming to

answer and incorporate so many voices, one runs the risk of conceding the vital points of each view and creating nothing more than oversimplification.[90]

To understand these reactions, then, we need to realize some of the important historical moments and movements that influenced literary postmodernism in the 1970s. As Jencks explains, postmodernism "sends complex messages, ones that often carry ironic, dissenting or critical meanings, those that challenge the status quo" (Jencks 2). These challenges, in architecture and in other manifestations of culture, reacted to a United States that was uncertain of its future. Mowry and Brownell note that during the 1970s the nation's economy was being reshaped by a decentralization, "with sales personnel, business affiliates, and branch offices strung across the country" (Mowry 283). This shift promoted a service-oriented economy, instead of the heavy industry that so dominated the United States in the previous decades. The two historians point to this suburban shift of economic power as one of the leading factors in the election of Richard Nixon as President of the United States. Nixon's presidency was defined by aggression and a "heroic conception of political leadership," which often led the country down difficult paths (284). Nixon ended the Vietnam War in 1973 with the Paris Peace Accords, though as the combatants returned home, protests over the war and its fallout cluttered the decade with the social repercussions of war. Armed confrontations in Cambodia and elsewhere also caused the American people to lose faith in their government. By the time Nixon resigned in August of 1973, due to charges surrounding the infamous Watergate scandal, the American public was leery of their own government and suspicious of what would come next. The 1970s was thus a decade of almost

constant flux, wherein new patterns of urbanization, economic changes, and political

unrest defined how the citizen (and consumer) reacted to his or her social environment.

Our next book, *Breakfast of Champions* by Kurt Vonnegut, is very much a

reaction to the social and economic situations prevalent in the United States during the

beginning of the 1970s. Kurt Vonnegut, at the beginning of his career, was considered

little more than a hack science fiction writer. Joe David Bellamy, in his article "Kurt

Vonnegut for President: The Making of a Literary Reputation" comments, "The volume

of hack work he *did do* in the fifties, to keep himself afloat, tended to confirm this

judgment; and even if some of these early stories were not science-fiction stories, many

were, at best, skillful, and, at worst, slick, gimmicky, and 'popular'" (Bellamy 140). This

reputation for economically stimulated work seems to have overshadowed his early

novels, as Bellamy goes on to note, though this critic also asserts that, when we consider

works like *Cat's Cradle* or *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, "Vonnegut's 'mistake' here

was in being […] slightly ahead of the times" (141). The publication of *Slaughterhouse-*

Five, however, changed all this: Bellamy writes, "if any skeptics were looking for more

proof of Vonnegut's legitimacy, they now had it, in the form of both a splendid novel and

an enthusiastic reception of it" (146). *Slaughterhouse-Five* is still considered today as

Vonnegut's masterpiece.

Breakfast of Champions, however, published four years after *Slaughterhouse-Five*

and supposedly a continuation of the prize-winning narrative, stands at the crossroads of

Vonnegut's career, a product not of the radical 1960s, but of the more individually

precarious 1970s. As William Allen remarks in his book *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*,

"Vonnegut not surprisingly seemed to run out of emotional capital in the 1970s" (Allen

6). Allen cites Vonnegut's divorce, his move to New York City, and his son's schizophrenic breakdown as the impulses behind what he considers a novel that "does not work well as fiction" (6). He does, however, note that *Breakfast of Champions* is very much a novel about families, about "ways that other lonely Americans might recover that psychic necessity so often subverted by modern ways of living" (6). *Breakfast* is therefore not only a very personal novel, but also a novel meant to react to the 1970s and the way in which Americans become lost within their own culture of consumption, "the strained social fabric of American society" (104). For Allen, "the American landscape through which the characters move has been polluted, strip mined, and made horrifically ugly with advertisements of all kinds" (104). This blatant criticism of consumer culture and the culture industry in general points to Vonnegut's insistence on the erroneous call of mass culture, a mass culture that has lost itself in a decade that has no beacon to guide one to shore.

   Breakfast of Champions is thus a confrontation of individual and cultural changes that sprung up in 1970s North America. It is a novel that heavily criticizes the culture industry and its products, while at the same time co-opts such products for its own use. Though this novel does not deal with the illusions created by classical Hollywood film, as we saw in *El beso de la mujer araña*, it does reflect on the importance of fantasy and what fantasy could mean for those caught in an otherwise mundane, consumerist world. Vonnegut's world is the world of science fiction, bounded by the specific rules and functions of the genre. Like classical Hollywood cinema, science fiction, especially the pulp variety, expands the mind through fantasy, but adheres to specific forms and functions. The illusions created by science fiction are controlled, proscribed by specific

archetypes, canonical forms, and reader expectations. Such constraints, paradoxically, allow readers of science fiction a way to *believe* the fantasies the genre creates – and these fantasies in turn provide readers with an escape from the rules that bind the common man's everyday actions. Though classical Hollywood cinema and science fiction narratives do not map perfectly onto each other, the way the two genres promote fantasy through the use of constraint allows us to compare madness in *El beso* and *Breakfast*. By replacing the glamour of cinema with the world of science fiction, *Breakfast* creates an interplay between madness, madman, and society that makes an even more virulent and persuasive argument about the role of madness in the postmodern world. Here, too, we will see the madman caught in a feedback loop, serving as liaison for other madmen. And here, too, we will not see the mediator triumph, though in Vonnegut's text the characters' relative dooms come about in a distinctly different manner.

Breakfast of Champions, as a narrative, does not have a very well defined plot. Allen points to the "lack of a sufficiently dramatic center to hold together all the disparate events of the novel" as one of the novel's more serious problems (Allen 104). The text follows the actions of two characters: Kilgore Trout, a failed science fiction author whose books and short stories can be found only as filler in the pages of pornographic magazines, and Dwayne Hoover, a run-of-the-mill car salesman whose 'bad chemicals' will ultimately lead to a maniacally destructive rampage. The plot follows the two men as they journey toward a meeting at the Midland City Arts Festival. Dwayne, who does not have to travel far physically, being a resident of Midland City, hovers around the city, traveling from one business to another, from one friend to another, descending deeper

into madness. Each interaction he has with a fellow inhabitant of Midland City reveals a hidden issue or problem caused by society's need to follow the social status quo or the more commercial aspects of the culture industry. Trout must travel physically from his own hometown on the East Coast, through New York City, to Midland City, hitching his way along the highways of an America as absurd as the fictions he writes. As Trout travels across the country, he becomes bored by silly conversations, over-abundant advertisements, and a dearth of readers who know his novels, or even care about the stories he writes.

We know that the two, in the end, will meet, Trout's work sparking Hoover's lunacy, for the narrator informs us of this from the very beginning of the novel. The narrator, who may or may not be Vonnegut, constantly comments on how he wants to write his novel, on how well the novel is progressing, and on how he manipulates and positions characters and events. As the Creator of the Universe, the narrator is thus ultimately responsible for drawing Dwayne and Trout together and revels in revealing the paths each man must take on his particular quest. The novel is thus a bundle of timelines, each thread leading to an important nodal point, where a book sparks off insanity. Dwayne's wanderings and Trout's journey, as well as the meanderings of other secondary characters, all lead to the confrontation between the two men.

From this nodal point the timelines, each related to a character's own life, shoot off again into different directions. Dwayne is eventually imprisoned in a mental institution after wounding eleven people in a lunatic frenzy sparked by the reading of one of Trout's novels. Trout, a victim of Dwayne's madness, physically losing half a finger to Dwayne's teeth, will eventually turn his misfortune and his guilt about driving the

madman to his madness into a need to champion the cause of mental illness via his own

science fiction texts. The novel ends with Dwayne silenced, leaving Trout to come to

terms not only with the implications of his works, but also with the implications of our

own narrator's works – the last scene in the novel is a confrontation between the Creator

of Trout's Universe and Kilgore. The Arts Festival in Midland City and the meeting

between Trout and Dwayne, then, is not only the focus of the novel and its climax, but

also its center, the underlying foundation of the rest of the book. The production of

blatant madness, its transformation from underlying threat to tangible reality, thus also

stands at the center of every character's actions or reactions. Each character, minor or

major, even the narrator, must deal with the repercussions of Dwayne's transformation.[91]

Of course, to understand *Breakfast of Champions* and how it deals with

postmodern madness, we must first note how critics have reacted to the novel. Donald E.

Morse, in his book *The Novels of Kurt Vonnegut: Imagining Being an American*, notes

the division critics tend to have over *Breakfast of Champions*. Morse states that many

critics love to hate the novel, especially its tone and its narrator's so-called self-

indulgence. Others can only approach it using critical clichés or literally link Vonnegut's

voice to the narrator's, a mistake that Morse takes very seriously. Morse wishes to

defend *Breakfast*, asking, "What are Vonnegut's literary offenses in this wonderfully

self-reflexive, postmodern, fantastic comic novel that so infuriated critics and

reviewers?" (Morse 100). This is a tactic taken by many critics and reviewers who wish

to defend the novel: taking the charges leveled by the most negative of critics and

evaluating their validity.

Other critics, however, regard the novel on its own merits, especially in relation to its place not only in Vonnegut's career, but also in the postmodern tradition. The novel, as Leonard Mustazza states in his book *Forever Pursuing Genesis*, "is less a novel in the sense of 'pure' narrative than it is an exploration of ideas in loose narrative form, ideas that involve, among other things, self-definition with respect to the writer's own craft, to his national heritage and its bankrupt legacy, to the nature of human behavior and existence itself" (Mustazza 116). From Mustazza's point of view, Vonnegut uses *Breakfast of Champions* to "take stock of where he has been […] and to prepare the way for things to come" (116). The book therefore represents a critical fulcrum around which all of Vonnegut's other works balance. Other critics also tend to link *Breakfast* to a turning point in Vonnegut's career, recognizing in its pages a coming to terms with the supposed nihilism of his earlier works. Robert W. Uphaus, like Mustazza, notices in his article "Expected Meaning in Vonnegut's Dead-End Fiction" a difference in how Vonnegut represents the past, present, and future in *Breakfast of Champions*, which contains "an obsessive split between Vonnegut's nostalgic lament for a lost past and his bitter denunciation of a coercive present" (Uphaus 171). Though Uphaus's statement reflects a more negative view of the change in Vonnegut's work, it acknowledges the importance of *Breakfast* in Vonnegut's turn away from an obsession with the past and toward a consideration of the present/future. Time travel may drive *Slaughterhouse-Five*, mingling past, present, and far future together, but machinery drives *Breakfast of Champions*, presenting the present as herald to future possibilities (good or bad).

Breakfast is more than just a turning point in Vonnegut's career, however. There is no question that this is a postmodern text; almost every critique, praiseworthy or not,

refers to it by this label, referencing Vonnegut's use of illustrations in the work, the short

sections within each chapter (set off by arrows, which give a jumbled urgency to the

text), and the self-referential, metaficitonal qualities of the text our narrator creates.

Vonnegut's novels invite the reader to actively participate in an analysis of the text, at

least according to Bellamy, who writes, "the texture of Vonnegut's work invites, if not

literally *cries out* for, critical analysis and interpretation. The jolting connections, the

recurrent imagery, the extractable meat of seductive material, the elusive simplicity of

technical virtuosity, the cross-references from book to book […] are intriguing to even

the casual reader" (Bellamy 147). Leslie Fielder, in his article "The Divine Stupidity of

Kurt Vonnegut," links the author's works with the death of the Art Novel, and notes that

Vonnegut's innovation lies in how he addresses the legacy of both High Art and 'mass

culture' in his works. Uphaus goes further, pointing specifically to *Breakfast of*

Champions as an important postmodern work, noting, "it is deliberately constructed as

Vonnegut's inner dialogue with himself about himself" (Uphaus 173). The novel conveys

to the reader the author's battle with how to represent a postmodern reality. The

postmodernism of the novel, especially in its form and how it interacts with the act of

both reading and writing, takes the narrative beyond the simplicity usually associated

with writers of science fiction. This is an important literary work because it takes the

popular vernacular of science fiction and applies it to the postmodern conundrum.

　　　To understand how madness works in *Breakfast* we must therefore start our

inquiry with Dwayne Hoover, who succumbs to the lure of bad chemicals *and* science

fiction. For all intents and purposes, Dwayne is an average man, living in an average

city. He is by no means an outcast, as Molina and Valentín are, but instead outwardly

represents a perfectly normal citizen of the United States. Yet, as Lawrence Broer notes

in his book *Sanity Plea: Schizophrenia in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut*, "He was already

a soulless victim of Midland City's machine-ridden culture, owner not only of the Pontiac

agency and a piece of the Holiday Inn, but of three Burger Chefs and five coin-operated

car washes. That in itself causes incipient insanity" (Broer 103). Dwayne is a consumer,

an ultra-consumer, for not only does he participate in a consumer society, he also owns

several pieces of it as well. He devours his own shares of American capitalistic culture

and sells the products of such a system to his fellow Americans. Dwayne is therefore

caught up in what Todd Davis, in his article "Apocalyptic Grumbling: Postmodern

Humanism in the Work of Kurt Vonnegut" calls "the dominant narratives of America"

(T. Davis 160). As Broer tells us, "the people of Midland City occupy themselves with

the most mundane, brainless, and materialistic subjects and cultivate, in the name of

culture, a reverence for the insipid and soulless junk of mass production that clutters their

lives" (Broer 99). These citizens, inhabitants of a culture of commodities, are condemned

to reproduce in their own lives the quality and quantity of the soulless junk they worship,

as seen on the T.V. or heard on the radio. Their lives, like their junk, must follow a

specific order and serve a specific function.

Dwayne, therefore, like all the other citizens of Midland City, has been

categorized and forced to obey the rules set down for each category. Though not actually

caught in a prison cell, incarcerated for a rebellious act like Valentín or Molina, he *is*

imprisoned in his own mundane life. He is a white male, "fabulously well-to-do," so he

must act as such, for "everybody in America was supposed to grab whatever he could and

hold onto it" (Vonnegut 13). As a white, rich capitalist Dwayne is limited in his scope, in

the way he can interact with others and with himself. Even his language, the way he speaks, is mitigated by his place in society. The narrator tells us, "Most white people in Midland City were insecure when they spoke, so they kept their sentences short and their words simple, in order to keep embarrassing mistakes to a minimum. Dwayne certainly did that" (138). The narrator then blames this on their English teachers, who want them all to speak like English aristocrats and to fully understand and adore literature. This comment firmly labels both Dwayne and his teachers as absurd, ironically condemning the teachers who have such lofty and ridiculous expectations *and* Dwayne, who still obeys, who still tries to reach these goals, but cannot fulfill them. Dwayne, then, is like everyone else in that he tries to satisfy requirements, even if they are out of date or utterly ludicrous.

This complicates how we can view Dwayne as a madman. Seen in this light, he is not an outsider, not an Other in the sense that he does not fit into society as a whole. Since American society as presented in this novel is filled with categories and sub-categories, however, we can begin to see how being termed an Other takes on a new meaning within the text. Dwayne conforms and through this compulsive conforming opens himself up to manipulation. After all, "Almost all the messages which were sent and received in his country, even the telepathic ones, had to do with buying or selling some damn thing. They were like lullabies to Dwayne" (Vonnegut 53-54). The molding of opinion and consumer tastes, from what one wears to where one lives and what one eats, represents the majority of communication in Dwayne's America. As Dwayne's lullabies, these messages not only send him to sleep, they also influence his dreams, limiting and circumscribing his imagination. Dwayne thus belongs to several sections of

society. He is rich, white, and successful, but he is also susceptible to advertising, a

model consumer. By limiting not only his life, but also his fantasies, the culture industry

thus makes him part of a community, yet also alienates him from living a life that is truly

free, a life lived via the ideals of the American dream.

Yet Dwayne has a problem that makes him different from the rest of society and

this is where his madness takes root. He is filled with bad chemicals; his brain does not

function the same way as everyone else's. As our narrator tells us, "Dwayne's incipient

insanity was mainly a matter of chemicals, of course. Dwayne Hoover's body was

manufacturing certain chemicals which unbalanced his mind" (Vonnegut 13-14). These

chemicals create strange and often comic effects, causing Dwayne to see things and say

things that others would not. They force him to break the status quo, berating his co-

workers and his lover. He sings random songs in public and wanders about town

aimlessly, with no goal or plan. His chemicals even produce echolalia, which compels

him to repeat the last word anyone says to him. These actions should separate him from

the rest of society, as Molina's homosexuality separated him.[92] Yet the residents of

Midland City, Dwayne's friends and admirers, ignore these symptoms, choosing to

remain caught up in their own lives of conformity. Dwayne's echolalia only prompts his

waitress to apologize for using the wrong word; his singing makes his lover believe he is

finally happy; his verbal attacks on his friends make them reevaluate their own lives, but

do not make them question his. For, as our narrator reminds us again and again, "Every

person had a clearly defined part to play […]. If a person stopped living up to

expectations, because of bad chemicals or one thing or another, everybody went on

imagining that the person was living up to expectations anyway" (142). This view of

aberrations homogenizes society, making it very hard for anyone to become an Other. As long as a madman's insanity is run by bad chemicals, confined to some odd behavior and a few quirks of temperament, then the community's captive imagination can take care of the rest. This imagination, restricted by the norms set down by the English teachers and consumer mentality, cannot cope with Dwayne's real problems. As our narrator explains, "Their imaginations insisted that nobody changed much from day to day. Their imaginations were flywheels on the ramshackle machinery of the awful truth" (142). These citizen's imaginations, instead of creating fantasies that open the world up to new possibilities, regulate the speed and accuracy of the machines used by the culture industry, which in turn confine their imaginations. The men and women of Midland City share communal illusions, but these illusions are bounded by conformity, by the culture industry and community standards. Madness has no place in such a cycle because these people's imaginations cannot unfold enough to encompass insanity and do not allow the individuality necessary to become insane.

In the Preface of the novel, however, our narrator gives us a clue as to how we are to read Dwayne's 'bad chemicals.' He writes,

> My own mother wrecked her brains with chemicals, which were supposed to make her sleep.
> When I get depressed, I take a little pill, and I cheer up again.
> And so on.
> So it is a big temptation to me, when I create a character for a novel, to say that he is what he is because of faulty wiring, or because of microscopic amounts of chemicals which he ate or failed to eat on that particular day (Vonnegut 4).

This admission hints at the impetus behind the narrator's creation of Dwayne Hoover and his 'bad chemicals.' Our narrator is compelled to create such a character, run by a mental illness, created by an imbalance, because of his own experience with the problem. The

185

narrator *can* imagine what might happen or what may be because he has experienced

such troubles in the past. These lines refer to the ambiguous qualities of such chemicals,

however, for they kill, but also cure – chemicals can wreck your brains or cheer you up.

On their own, chemicals are neither good nor bad, though they always affect their host in

some way. Dwayne's chemicals are 'bad' because they create bad situations for him;

they need to have the adjective 'bad' added to the noun because to refer simply to

chemicals would not clue the reader into the correct connotations of the word. In

addition, our narrator only *mentions* his temptation to create such a character here –

whether he gives into that temptation or not is yet to be seen. We only know that these

thoughts drive his narration, not that they rule it. Yet, that this temptation exists makes

us question where we need to draw the line between mental illness and madness in the

novel. When do bad chemicals become something more?

The narrator's second statement about Dwayne's affliction is therefore of utmost

importance in our understanding of madness in this text. He tells us, "But Dwayne, like

all novice lunatics, needed some bad ideas, too, so that his craziness could have shape

and direction" (Vonnegut 14). Caught in the paradox of an imagination confined by

consumerism, Dwayne needs something that will knock him out of his somnambulism.

His madness needs to be more than bad chemicals in order for people to notice, in order

for him to gain any freedom – and freedom is the goal of madness in this text, a chaotic

and morally blind freedom from submission and curtailed illusions. Halfway through the

novel, unable to control his waking or sleeping desires, lost in the clutches of his 'bad

chemicals,' Dwayne tries to find a new meaning to his life. He decides to go to the Arts

Festival, where, as his lover Francine says, there are people who, "don't think like other

people" (167). Dwayne believes, "The Festival could give me a brand new viewpoint on life!" (167). A Festival for the Arts will put Dwayne in contact with men and woman who *are* outside the status quo, who think and feel for themselves. These others, who are in fact just part of another category of pretentiousness and not true Others at all, may be able to guide Dwayne, remove his dependency on the 'bad chemicals.' This contrasts greatly with the growth of madness we saw in Valentín. Though he, like Dwayne, starts the novel not yet fully mad, Valentín does not seek his madness, but is instead seduced into madness by way of his own spectatorship. Dwayne, however, goes forth truly seeking that new perspective, thus changing the way in which it will affect him.

Ironically, however, surrounded by important ideas, "so open to new suggestions about the meaning of life that he was easily hypnotized," Dwayne returns to the culture industry and not the Arts community for instructions (Vonnegut 196). Instead of listening to Rabo Karabekian, the minimal painter whose words inspire Kilgore Trout, Dwayne listens to the dogma set down in *Now It Can Be Told*, a science fiction novel written by Trout. The text, written in second person, addressed to the reader, to a 'you' who is also the hero of the narrative, is a letter from the Creator of the Universe to his only creation, the only real human in existence. The Creator tells the Man that the whole world has been an experiment, to make sure the Man works properly. Everything else, everyone else, is a machine, programmed to create a worthy environment, "to get a reaction from Y-O-U" (256). Dwayne, as a consumer and therefore one who has no experience reading and analyzing texts, cannot distance himself from the fictional YOU of the narrative. He has been programmed to receive messages – his 'bad chemicals' only make him more receptive – and his assumption that the book has told him the truth

leads him to no longer care about blending in. If everyone else is a machine, why pity

others? Why care about what others think?

As Josh Simpson states in his article "Science Fiction and Madness in Vonnegut's

Troutean Trilogy," "Dwayne's violent outbreak occurs because Trout's science fiction

destroys his understanding of the human 'other'" (Simpson 269). Dwayne's madness,

therefore, his rejection of the humanity of other humans, turns him into the ultimate

Other, the only man who is truly a man. Everyone else is a machine, a robot designed for

a specific function. He concludes that his wife committed suicide because she was "that

kind of machine" and rambles on about the punctuality of certain black people he knows

stemming from them being "programmed that way" (Vonnegut 259, 261). As Mustazza

notes, "Trout's fiction moves Dwayne […] away from confusing but docile mechanism

to self-centered and violent freedom" (Mustazza 118). Dwayne can be mad, and others

can now recognize his madness, because he is, at long last, an Other and this otherness

allows him, finally, to find the freedom from conformity for which he has secretly and

unconsciously yearned.[93]

Dwayne's madness, then, hinges on his contact with Trout's science fiction

narrative, for it is this book that allows him to fulfill his potential as madman. As

Mustazza notes, "[Dwayne] has used, albeit involuntarily, science fiction to lift from his

shoulders the burden of anxiety and the fear of victimization" (Mustazza 120). The

narrative, by allowing Dwayne to become an Other and by giving him a fictive universe

in which to live, lifts him clear of his quotidian dilemmas. But why a science fiction

novel? Why not use classical Hollywood cinema, as our other authors have? First, we

must acknowledge the fact that, for most of his career to this point, Vonnegut himself has

been considered little more than a science fiction writer. Critics mark even his most

provocative and critically well-received novel, *Slaughterhouse 5*, as a science fiction

novel. Myriad reviewers remark on the problems of taking Vonnegut's work seriously

because of its science fiction overtones. Others, however, look at the inclusion of science

fiction in these texts as either an ironic use of the genre, aimed at undermining its often

utopian goals, or as a co-opting of the genre for more altruistic purposes. Simpson

claims,

> far from being a science fiction writer, Kurt Vonnegut is a writer whose
> works, when read closely, ultimately warn against the dangerous ideas that
> exist within science fiction. At the center of his canon resides the notion
> that science fiction is capable of filling humanity with false realities and
> empty promises for Utopian societies that do not and, perhaps most
> important, cannot exist (Simpson 262).

Critics who offer this kind of reading believe that Vonnegut is unabashedly not only

criticizing the genre of science fiction, but also laying open to the public its nefarious plot

to gull readers into believing its wildly untrue claims of human and societal perfection.

While there may be some truth to the claims that Vonnegut uses the science

fiction embedded in his texts to warn against accepting such obviously impossible

utopian vagaries, I would argue that such readings of Vonnegut's works, especially of

Breakfast of Champions, ignores the importance of the genre in reflecting the fears *and*

desires of a populace wishing for societal change. Donald Morse, in his study of how

Vonnegut re-imagines being American, remarks, "within his novels science fiction

becomes an effective method for asking the truly important questions about the nature of

humans and their universe" (Morse 24). Peter J. Reed, in his article "Hurting 'Til It

Laughs: The Painful-Comic Science Fiction Stories of Kurt Vonnegut," agrees with this

claim, stating, "While he shows little reluctance to address current social issues directly,

189

science fiction becomes an effective device for achieving distance from which to address an issue that, close up, may be too controversial or confused" (Reed 36). Read this way, Vonnegut's use of science fiction becomes a tool of inquiry; its archetypal characteristics and fantastical elements, though not of this world, allow readers and critics alike to take a step back from reality in order to reassess the situation with a new perspective.[94]

But, to reiterate the question, why use *science* fiction? Why not just fiction in general? What is it about science fiction that sets Dwayne off and allows authors such as Kilgore Trout (or Kurt Vonnegut) to produce works that can jolt readers out of the status quo? For, as Kenyei Tamas claims in his article "Leakings; Reappropriating Science Fiction – The Case of Kurt Vonnegut," "In *Breakfast of Champions*, science fiction cannot help being anything else than a textual tradition" (Tamas 432). The conundrum seems to reside in the fact that the novel deals with two forms of science fiction, two different sides of the same coin. As Tamas goes on to state, "Within a very limited space, Kilgore Trout incarnates two models (critical constructions) of science fiction, and these two models might be read as allusions to the difference – and the impossibility of distinguishing – between elite and pulp science fiction" (446). For most readers, science fiction (referred to as sf by enthusiasts) is usually of the pulp kind. In his book *Reading by Starlight: Post-modern Science Fiction*, Damien Broderick asserts that academia "deems most sf to be stimuli tailored to the evocation of soothing daydreams, a species of craft writing directed to the satisfaction of lower middle-class and working-class hungers for solace and consolation in their presumed misery" (Broderick 9). Pulp sf is therefore part of the culture industry, a tool used to entertain the masses, to help them forget, for a moment, their mundane existence. Like classical Hollywood cinema, pulp science fiction

allows the imagination to expand, but in a controlled manner, each fantasy world or invented future dominated by proscribed archetypes and canonical forms.

Seen in this light, science fiction is little more than trash, which has little literary or high culture value. Jeanne Murray Walker, in her article "Science Fiction: A Commentary on Itself as Lies," notes, "Science fiction, according to this view, runs on the same tracks over and over. Because it is repetitive, it is merely repetitive. It reiterates fictional conventions thoughtlessly in an effort to get its ideas across or to entertain its readers. That is, science fiction is irresponsibly unconscious about its own aesthetic processes" (Walker 29). Pulp sf does not know what it does and therefore cannot truly influence the reading public in the way that it should or in the way that it wants to. It offers utopian dreams, but ones that cannot and will not change anything in reality. As Broderick so aptly states, "science fiction is an outlet for what might be called 'black science'. Dreams of omnipotence through abstract knowledge, hunger for gods out of the machine. These are dangerous desires. […] They are, in short, a regression to the pleasures of infancy, the endlessly accepted temptation to which commercial sf all too often delivers itself" (Broderick 8). In this way, science fiction feeds upon and feeds into the captive imaginations of Midland City natives and Americans in general.

Not all science fiction, however, needs to adhere to this code of conduct. Walker continues, "it is simply wrong to fault science fiction for offering its readers dull, thoughtless repetition of conventional plots and characters. In some examples of the genre, at least, the process of reading requires that the reader think about what those conventions mean and whether they may ultimately lead him to the truth" (Walker 36). This form of science fiction, elite sf, can break through the barriers placed upon it by

consumer culture, producing not only literary merit, but also an interaction with its audience that goes beyond simple entertainment. Walker cites Ursula K. Le Guin, Robert Heinlein, and C.S. Lewis as paragons of this elite form of science fiction.[95] Though I would not agree with including Heinlein in the halls of the elite, I would agree with her readings of Le Guin and Lewis and would add to that list Isaac Asimov, Philip K. Dick, Ray Bradbury, and William Gibson.[96] Walker sees within elite sf "the conflict which has entered the genre of science fiction from mainstream literature, the conflict over the truth-value of literary acts" (36). Though filled with the same kind of flotsam and jetsam inherent in pulp science fiction, this elite form of the genre contains within it a kernel of literary value, a questioning of literature itself. Sf at this level therefore examines the production and consumption of fiction by way of fiction. Broderick writes,

> To read fiction of any kind is to help create a world, built out of words and memories and the fruitfulness of imagination. Usually we miss the complexity of this process. Like poetry and postmodern fiction, all sf tests the textual transparency we take for granted, contorting habits of grammar and lexicon with unexpected words strung together in strange ways (Broderick 15).

Science fiction, at its best, produces the unexpected and allows its readers to share in questioning how we, as members of society, string things together, and why we do this in the first place.

Science fiction, therefore, is an appropriate genre for *Breakfast of Champions* because it follows the conventional, popular norms in its pulp forms, yet at the same time encourages inquiry and challenging the status quo in its elite manifestations. The key to how science fiction interacts with society, however, is not only in how it is written, but also in how it is read. Broderick reminds us,

> The very best sf, modern or postmodern, does not repudiate extremes, the
> sublime, the utopian. It appeals to something eager and open within the
> crustiest adult heart even as it dazzles the mind with the riches of abstract
> knowledge and the hard, constrained ambitions of scientific practice. So
> there is often something joyfully exuberant and romantic in sf, fatally
> kitschy to the cultivated literary intellectual. Like those heightened screen
> epics that star Charlton Heston or Kirk Douglas—Anthony Mann's *El Cid,*
> Kubrick's *Spartacus*—sf may play with the consequences of huge
> historical change through the rhetoric of melodrama (Broderick 107).

Elite science fiction appeals to fact *and* fiction, to science *and* imagination. It deals with
themes and textures on a grand scale by dazzling its audience. It depends upon the
audience as to whether one can go beyond the melodrama in order to pick up on the
underlying texture of each text. Leslie Fiedler, in his reviews of Vonnegut's works, picks
up on this. He writes,

> [Vonnegut] has, in any case – as writer of, rather than *about*, mythology –
> written books that are thin and wide, rather than deep and narrow, books
> which open out into fantasy and magic by means of linear narration rather
> than deep analysis; and so happen on wisdom, fall into it through grace,
> rather than pursue it doggedly or seek to earn it by hard work. Moreover,
> like all literature which tries to close the gap between the elite and the
> popular audiences rather than to confirm it, Vonnegut's books tend to
> temper irony with sentimentality and to dissolve both in wonder (Fiedler
> "Divine Stupidity" 7).

Though here Fiedler writes about *Slaughterhouse-Five*, his words could easily apply to
Breakfast of Champions as well, or even to Kilgore Trout's own texts. Because science
fiction is wide instead of deep, because it falls into wisdom through grace, it is a genre
that depends upon its readers. Anyone can read a science fiction novel, but not everyone
can gain something from it because its revelations do not depend upon diligence and hard
work, but upon chance and the intuitive comprehension of irony and sentimentality at the
same time.

This is why science fiction proves such a fertile ground for the transformation of Dwayne's madness, from docile to violent. Dwayne, an unbalanced blank slate, absorbs Trout's words literally, reading, "tens of thousands of words of such solipsistic whimsy in ten minutes or so" (Vonnegut 257). A man ready for some sort of philosophical epiphany encounters, instead, a speed-read science fiction novel that even the author considers farfetched, self-indulgent, and a bit silly. Dwayne cannot digest what he receives; he has read it too fast to understand the nuances and irony involved in the art of science fiction. He does not, in fact, understand the fiction of science fiction. And this is what drives him over the edge – a literal reading of a text not meant to be read literally.[97] He digests elite sf as if it was pulp and this is what allows Dwayne's lunacy to present all the signs of postmodern madness. The car salesman yearns for a new outlook on life, one that will set him free from the conformity forced upon him by consumerism and the confined imaginations of his neighbors and friends. He finds that freedom by juxtaposing a science fiction novel onto his reality, yet because he does not fully understand the nuances of the novel and its universal nature, he misinterprets its message. This causes chaos, for Dwayne's actions after reading *Now It Can Be Told*, his assertion of his supreme subjectivity, clashes with the reality not only of the text, but also of reality itself. Postmodern madness, in this sense, can therefore be seen as the confusion created by the clash between pulp and elite (perhaps even between mass culture and High Art?).

Reading the text the way he does, Dwayne sets in motion an important inquiry into not only the relationship between author, text, and reader, but also the relationship between popular culture, textual interpretation, and madness. To understand all of this, we first need to look at the authors in Vonnegut's text. Like Molina, Trout is able to use

194

his creativity to invent tales that provide an insight into how he views society and how society's inner workings function. Though Trout's contributions are more original in design, not based on someone else's work, these very different narratives do share a link with their popular culture vocabularies. Both Trout's and Molina's stories are based on idioms provided by popular culture, even if one uses film vernacular while the other creates science fiction novels. These popular culture languages allow for a wider audience, giving Molina the chance to speak with Valentín via a shared language and giving Trout the chance to speak with *anyone*, for the novel is "addressed to anybody who happened to open it" (Vonnegut 15). Shared language, therefore, equals power, a power that can allow two men to create a new life together or change an unbalanced car salesman into a raving lunatic. Reading, however, is the key for Trout. Though the similarities between film and science fiction could make us believe that Trout's book should function the same may as Molina's film plots, for each has a witness who interacts with the text, reading is a solitary act, while spectatorship involves sharing an experience. As spectators, Valentín and Molina *share* their experiences, using the language of film as a way to connect to each other and to open up new possibilities in viewing their own lives. Dwayne, however, as a reader, as a *bad* reader, does not share his experience with others – he cannot even imagine that the book could be written for anyone else but him, even if it is written for *anyone*. The way in which Dwayne encounters his bad ideas, then, limits the number of people with whom Dwayne can interact. Unable to recognize the 'we' in the act of reading, he can only deal now with the creator of the text, the author himself.

The personal relationship formed between author and reader through Dwayne's

bad reading of the text therefore places the author in a position of great power. Mustazza

recognizes the importance of such power, claiming, "Though he will eventually regret the

evil influence that his fictional creations have had upon Dwayne Hoover and therefore on

the world at large," Trout still maintains an awareness of "human god-playing and his

own such activity" (Mustazza 122). This leads Trout to a belief in free will hindered by

circumstance: "most people […] are confronted with what amounts to a Hobson's choice

between captive survival and free death – in other words, no choice at all for most

people" (123). Yet, Trout himself does not give in to this paradox, for, as an author, he is

able to regard the world through various different perspectives. For Mustazza, "this

greater freedom of will and motion is, we must conclude, a function of his trade, or, given

his lack of material success at it, his avocation" (124). The author, then, any author,

whether successful or a hack, can go beyond the pitfalls of the normal because of the

perspectives available to him or her, in this case perspectives provided by the malleability

of science fiction. Unlike Molina, who manipulates the plots of his movies but does not

invent them outright, Trout is able to claim total control over his works. This allows

Trout to include more than one perspective in his narratives – he does not only provide

escapism for his readers, but also forces them to think about issues that go beyond the

individual experience. Molina's plots, on the other hand, though revelatory for all those

who share the act of spectatorship, are not meant to make commentaries on civilization in

a larger sense (though at the beginning of *El beso* Valentín tries to use Molina's plots to

that end), nor are they meant for larger audiences beyond the immediate spectators.

Trout, through the act of writing, opens his ideas and narratives up to a larger world. As

Simpson suggests, "Dwayne's descent into madness causes Trout, for the first time in his career, to gain a conscience and an understanding of the power that is both possible and available in and with the written word" (Simpson). The written word, in this sense, offers a larger potential for misinterpretation, for the author does not and cannot share a dialogue with his readers, yet offers a wide variety of commentary on all sorts of subjects.

We can understand how this relationship between popular culture, authorship, and readership come into play if we take into consideration how we, as readers, experience Dwayne's rampage. First, after Dwayne finishes reading Trout's novel, the car salesman approaches his homosexual son, who is playing piano at the bar in the Holiday Inn, where Dwayne has gone to drown his confusion, where Trout had come to participate in the Arts Festival, and where our narrator has condescended to join his creations. We are given a glimpse into Dwayne's psyche at this moment and are reminded of his warped thought process. The narrator tells us, "He was going to respond to his new understanding of life with finesse, for an audience of two – himself and his Creator" (Vonnegut 257). Dwayne knows he is participating in a spectacle, though he believes his audience to be only himself and the Creator of the Universe, for the book has told him this. In truth his audience is several layers thick: he performs for the men and women of Midland City (his victims), for Trout (who penned his inspiration), for the narrator (his real Creator), and for the reader (the Creator's intended audience). By acknowledging his role as both participant and audience, Dwayne sets himself apart from everyone else – in this sense he is mad because he is aware of and acknowledges his paradox – he is an individual, but also part of a larger whole. To use terminology introduced in Roland

197

Barthes's *S/Z*, Dwayne's madness manifests because he believes he is living inside a writerly text, a text that can only be whole when the reader writes part of the narration. And by being a part of such a paradox, by being the catalyst for many of the paradoxes envisioned in the novel, Dwayne's madness reveals its need for another Other. There needs to be an audience of two, a Creator and a Man, an author and his creation, a spectacle and spectators, each interrelating with the other, outside the normal bounds of passive interaction. Dwayne's madness needs an author *and* an audience, all jumbled into one being.

This is where our pursuit of mediators becomes important. Dwayne, like Molina, plays two roles – he is a reader as much as he is an actor and therefore cannot stand alone in his madness. Though Dwayne will not take on the role of creator, as Molina and, to some extent, Valentín do, he still presents two sides to his character. This means that, like the Argentines, Dwayne has to rely on someone else, on both an author for the catalyst of his madness and on a Creator who will share his spectacle. This sets Trout up as a mediator of sorts, for he is the one who authors the bad ideas that alter the way Dwayne interacts with the rest of the world. *Now It Can Be Told* not only places author and reader in proximity to each other – it also affects how both author and reader relate to others. Yet, we have another author in *Breakfast*, the real Creator behind Dwayne's insanity, the narrator of our actual text. The narrator, then, must also have a place in mediating Dwayne's madness, for he, too, has a stake in what happens.

Madness, then, becomes the fulcrum around which our narrative must revolve – after all, even Trout and our narrator have insanity in their make-up. Though Kilgore Trout may not be the most demonstrably loony madman in the novel, his actions do

reveal a certain amount of madness in his life. Like the protagonists of *El beso de la mujer araña*, Trout lives a lifestyle out of step with the rest of society. No one at his 'real' job knows that he is a science fiction writer. He does not keep copies of what he writes and what he does get published ends up in pornographic magazines: "They used his stories, which usually didn't even have women in them, to give bulk to books and magazines of salacious pictures" (Vonnegut 20-21). Society considers his vocation and his talent worthless; they ignore the content of his work and simply use it to take up space. Even the titles of his works are changed and his publishers insert pictures into his texts that in no way represent what his words express. Trout is therefore not only a writer set at the outskirts of society because he writes science fiction and publishes in porn magazines, but is also a man pushed to the limit of that outcast tribe, for his works are not bought for the words, but for the pictures. Trout cannot even find copies of his own works, "so he had to search them out in pornography stores" (21). Even after Eliot Rosewater reads his novels and invites him to attend the Midland City Arts Festival, no one takes his work seriously, except for Milo Maritimo, the homosexual clerk at the Holiday Inn. Milo, however, though an exception to the rule, can read and recognize Trout's work because he, too, is an outcast and prone to wistful bouts of fancy. Our narrator informs us, "Milo Maritimo was the only person in Midland City who knew anything about Kilgore Trout. It was wishful thinking on his part that the upper crust of Midland City was about to be as ga-ga as he was about the works of Kilgore Trout" (231). As Morse reminds us, "Trout emerges in *Breakfast of Champions* not only as a central character but also as *the* exemplary failed author. […] As the failed author *primer inter pares* Trout fails in *every* sense, not just in one or two" (Morse 104). Men may buy

copies of Trout's work, but do not read them, and those who read them, like Dwayne or Milo, either misread them or become overly obsessed, to the point of madness or at least disillusion. Though Trout is not thrown in jail for his differences, like Molina and Valentín, the way in which his publishers and readers treat his fiction imprison him all the same, condemning him to his outcast nature.

Unlike Molina or Valentín, however, who react to their confinement by luring each other into the false safety of a utopian dream that cannot last, Trout makes a conscious choice to live a dystopian nightmare, flaunting his eccentricity and Otherness for the whole world to see. Kilgore decides to go to the Midland City Arts Festival because he *wants* to flaunt his differences. As Trout travels cross-country toward his destined meeting with Dwayne Hoover, he contemplates how he can flummox the men and women who have invited him to come. We are told, "He also began to assemble in his mind a system of beliefs which would be appropriate to his narrow mission in Midland City, which was to show provincials, who were bent on exalting creativity, a would-be creator who had failed and failed" (Vonnegut 197). Trout wants to revel in his failure and specifically makes up his mind to commit his mind, body, and soul to this purpose. This flagrant flaunting of difference, an embracing of Otherness, speaks to the touch of madness that resides within Kilgore Trout. As a compulsive science fiction author – he even makes up several short stories on his trip to Midland City – Trout ought to live in a fantasy world, yet because of his need to be recognized as an individual, as not a failure, but the *consummate* failure, he cannot commit to total fantasy. As our narrator tells us, "I had given him a life not worth living, but I had also given him an iron will to live" (71-72). Trout therefore lives in a sort of limbo, where wild and crazy things

happen to him all the time, but never truly affect him. He wants to shock people, but cannot. At one point in the novel, at the beginning of his journey, Kilgore even, "played at being the eyes and ears and conscience of the Creator of the Universe" and in another scene, creates a scare in New York City by innocently joking that he had been attacked by "an intelligent gas from Pluto" (67, 76). Therefore, although Trout may not be run by the bad chemicals that plague Dwayne Hoover, the confusion he faces everyday and the confusion he sows lend Trout the lunacy needed to interact with the other madmen in the novel.

Our narrator, on the other hand, has a clear and open history of depression and mental illness in both his family and in his own personal past. We can see what he says about his past in the Preface – his mother was addicted to drugs, which addled her mind, and he himself uses chemicals to control mood swings. Toward the end of the novel he also hints at a deeper underlying problem – his own schizophrenia. He tells his readers, "I did not and do not know for certain that I have that disease. This much I knew and know: I was making myself hideously uncomfortable by not narrowing my attention to details of life which were immediately important, and by refusing to believe what my neighbors believed" (Vonnegut 194). Directly after the statement quoted above, the narrator chooses to start a new thought, indicated by a bold arrow leading to a new section in the novel. Here he states, "I am better now" and on the next, separate line "Word of honor: I am better now" (194). The repetition of the phrase "I am better now" indicates his doubts on the subject and the inclusion of "word of honor" connotes his need for us to believe when he does not. This author is not calm or collected, but is instead desperate – he not only wants *us* to believe that he is not mad, but also wants to

believe himself. This statement clues us in on how the narrator would define madness for himself: madness is not knowing, uncertainty. It is not limiting one's scope to the immediate, to the instantaneous present time. It is not going with what others believe, with what the rest of society thinks and feels. In essence, to be mad is to be an Other, a forward thinker, a risk taker, a writer of science fiction. To be mad is to be several things at once, a schizophrenic. To be mad is to be individual and multitudinous at the same time.[98]

Our narrator's vocation as a writer only complicates matters, especially if we consider his work science fiction. Many critics debate whether or not *Breakfast* is a science fiction novel or a novel about science fiction. Though most defend the latter position, Tamas states, "The narrator is obviously talking to 'extraterrestrials' – where extraterrestrial is a science fiction-inspired trope for the absolute unpredictability of the narratees" (Tamas 433). I agree with the implications inherent in Tamas' reading of the text. Though a seemingly realistic fiction, *Breakfast* is in fact a science fiction novel, narrated for an audience not familiar with America, the Earth, or human beings, or at least how they appear in the twentieth century. The narrator's need to explain items like the American flag or the dollar bill at the beginning of the book and his tendency to call humans 'Earthlings' points to the hallmarks of science fiction. By using the jargon inherent in an sf text, the narrator reveals his target audience: he writes for those who do not know Earth, for those who live above it or beyond it, either in space or time.[99] Because the narrator writes science fiction, like Trout, his sanity must be called into question as well. The narrator even lives in his own science fiction universe. We are told at the end of the novel, "I somersaulted lazily and pleasantly through the void, which is

my hiding place when I dematerialize" (Vonnegut 294). The narrator, by writing his

novel as science fiction, has to be a part of a science fiction universe when he appears

inside of it. Leaving it, he takes on the characteristics of an alien: living in a void, able to

dematerialize. His novel thus has the potential to create the same confusion *Now It Can*

Be Told generates, for it presents readers with a reality that calls our own perceptions of

truth into question. The narrator therefore lives not only with a legacy of mental illness,

but also with a touch of madness, for no man can write what he writes, imply the

fantastical nature of his own existence, and still remain perfectly sane.

We can see the novel's sf qualities and the narrator's own position as an Other

and a schizophrenic (by his own definition) if we look at how he reacts to Dwayne's

rampage. He writes,

> As for myself: I kept a respectful distance between myself and all the
> violence, even though I had created Dwayne and his violence and the city,
> and the sky above and the Earth below. Even so, I came out of the riot
> with a broken watch crystal and what turned out later to be a broken toe.
> […] He broke my watch crystal, even though I had created him, and he
> broke my toe" (Vonnegut 274).

Here the narrator refers to the Earth as his own creation. Though we could take him

literally and read this as an author's proprietary claim on the world he has created in his

text, we could also read it as a historian's claim to retell a story long after it has come to

pass. Our narrator is thus writing his narrative standing outside of time (though he is also

physically present in the text), whether he resides in the far future, or on a distant planet,

or in a world eerily similar to the one he has (re)created. The destruction of his watch

emphasizes this reading. Though the narrator stands in the present time of the narrative –

watching the violence unfold, physically broken by his own creations – he is also beyond

the confines of time, for it has ceased to exist for him. Yet time cannot move forward

because the watch has broken. The constant present is therefore deified, but because the paragraph contains a timeline, actions that move the plot forward, we are also presented with the *necessity* of having a past, present, and future. The immediate and the timeless intertwine within this instant. And this in itself constitutes one of the narrator's definitions of madness: that one does not narrow one's vision to immediate details only. Even though recognizing the immediate present is an essential part of living in society's world, the madman sees beyond the present time. Even the narrator's distance from the violence he has sparked with and within his creations hints at his own madness, for by standing apart he fulfills the other condition for lunacy: refusing to be a part of a society of neighbors. Our narrator, then, as creator and Creator (a part he plays at the end of the novel), and as madman, must interact and does interact with his audience and his creations, yet also stands apart from them, his interactions and aloof nature revealing him to be mad not only by our definition of postmodern madness, but also by his own.

Taking all of this into consideration, we can see that the narrator literally becomes a paradox in and of himself, as both Creator and character in his own fiction. Throughout the text the narrator has mentioned that he has created these characters and can make them do anything he wants them to do. Yet by the end of the novel, even as he reveals his status as Creator to Kilgore Trout, his omnipotence slips. He is attacked by a dog, must chase his own character down in his car, and cannot even turn on the overhead light in his vehicle. Morse condemns the narrator, writing, "Vonnegut's bungling and inept author loses control of his fiction, not only 'performing childishly,' but also foolishly and often ineptly" and goes on to state, "Both as narrator and as character this 'Vonnegut' simply fails to accomplish much, if anything" (Morse 101, 103). Mustazza tends to agree

with this assertion, claiming, "[The narrator] is ambivalent, regarding himself at times as the lord and master of his fictional creatures, at times as a creaky machine superior to them only by degrees" (Mustazza 117). The narrator's multiplicity, then, his creative tendencies and his powerlessness, leaves his supremacy in question. How can he be a Creator if he cannot maintain supreme control of his own environment and his own creations? This question brings us back around again to a contemplation of science fiction. The narrator cannot simply write what he wants to write – he must *also* give way to the impositions of the genre, creating within boundaries set by mass culture.

We can come to the conclusion, then, that our narrator, like Molina and Valentín, wants to live in the world he has created, his own little utopia where he is the Creator of the Universe, instead of having to deal with his own reality. And his world must be bounded by some outside force, a normative set of rules or guidelines. Unlike the Argentines, however, he has no one with which to share this dreams, personally, except his own characters, for he himself is a character in his own narrative. This complicates the relationships that spark up between Dwayne, Trout, and the narrator. Trout and the narrator, and even Dwayne, are both authors and participants in the event, mediating how we as readers experience what happens. The narrator orchestrates everything; Trout wrote the novel that fuels Dwayne's rampage; Dwayne grabs hold of his elusive (and illusive) free will and authors a divergent narrative of his own. We therefore get a chain reaction: Trout's novel sparks Dwayne's mental illness to change over into full-blown madness, Dwayne's reaction to the novel influences Trout's relationship with society, and Trout's reaction to Dwayne in turn affects our narrator's own relationship with his

creations. The relationships between narrator, author, and character thus become

extremely blurred.

We need to look more closely at the scenes at the Holiday Inn, then, in order to

understand how each madman reacts and interacts with the others. There will be no

utopia here, like the tiny society formed by Molina and Valentín, because the

relationships minted by the vernacular of pulp fiction are not the same as those created by

the cinema. The written word limits how each madman can relate to the others. We can

see the relationship between Dwayne, Trout, and the narrator clearly when the narrator

describes how he views the scene in the cocktail lounge. He writes,

> So there the three of us where. Dwayne and Trout and I could
> have been included in an equilateral triangle about twelve feet on a side.
> As three unwavering bands of light, we were simple and separate
> and beautiful. As machines, we were flabby bags of ancient plumbing and
> wiring, of rusty hinges and feeble springs. And our interrelationships
> were Byzantine.
> After all, I had created both Dwayne and Trout, and now Trout was
> about to drive Dwayne into full-blown insanity, and Dwayne would soon
> bit off the tip of Trout's finger (Vonnegut 236-237).

These few short paragraphs reveal much about how mediators work in this text. The

three men form the sides of a triangle, each taking an equal part in the construction of

such a shape. Unlike the triad formed by madman-mediator-society, however, this

triangle does not confine these men to a specific position – the triangle is equilateral and

therefore the angles occupied by Trout, Dwayne, and the narrator are all the same. No

one character holds a position that trumps any other. Each man is plagued by varying

degrees of lunacy, yet their significance in the shape of things has no difference. The

triangle also keeps each man a uniform distance apart – to come closer or to back off

would ruin the equilibrium of the equation. By setting these men up within this triangle,

Vonnegut recognizes the importance of the interaction between the three, but by introducing angles into the diagram, instead of creating a circle or a straight line, he also emphasizes the importance of perspective and distance. Though they interact, they do not know or fully understand each other. Though they communicate, they share no intimacy and therefore misunderstand much of what they read, hear, or infer. These men are connected in a very precise and codified way, yet this precision obscures the humanity of their relationships.

The two philosophies presented in the next part of this section therefore have great importance on how we can read Trout, Dwayne, and the narrator, not only as individuals, but also as participants in a larger, interrelated community. If we view the three through Rabo Karabekian's philosophy, as is suggested by the text and which is later adopted by both the narrator and Trout, then the world is headed to a much better place and each man has a sliver of free will with which to make his own destiny. If we view the three through the science fiction theory that all things are machines, as is also suggested and which is the theory that Trout's novel promotes and which Dwayne uses as the basis of his rampage, then the world is rubbish and always will be and each man will be forever held together by interactions marked by complex scheming and deviousness. Both these views are possibilities because all of these men are authors, readers, *and* participants in the text. Though the narrator, in the last paragraph of this section, insists on trying to categorize Trout and Dwayne through a summation of the plot to come, this description only helps to reassert the importance of narration in the text. As Todd Davis comments, "Vonnegut's hope, paradoxically, rests solely in the nature of writing and the power of narratives. Because we may create our own narratives, the possibilities for

personal as well as societal change are endless" (T. Davis 160). The narrator tries to

control his characters by way of a narrative ploy, yet we know that as the novel

progresses this control is simply a claim, not strictly a reality – once the narrator sets his

characters free, as he does at the very end of the novel, then he cannot have any more

control over them. Though certain events in their lives may be fated to occur, not

everything they do has been plotted out beforehand.

We can come to the conclusion, then, that the narrator, Trout, and Dwayne, as

fixed points in an equilateral triangle, exist as paradoxes, as men who occupy exact

locations and live precise lives, yet who also defy expectations and participate in more

than one philosophical perspective. Their madness stems from this existence, the

necessity of communion with others, of reliance on the story as it is written and the need

to be separate, apart, the masters of their own fates. And because each of our madmen

can only rely on other madmen to relay their stories to the rest of the world, we have to

acknowledge that within this text the only liaisons available are those touched by lunacy.

This lunacy will always be dictated by the language of popular culture because the

narratives created by each mediator can be read by anyone, yet follow the strictures set

down by the genre of science fiction – fiction that promotes both elite and pulp

approaches to narrative and which engages with utopic and dystopic versions of our

world. Not everyone can understand what these narratives mean or have a grasp on the

vernacular needed to appreciate the nuances of the texts, but that cannot stop anyone *from*

reading them – which confuses the situation further and makes the mediator that much

more important. This constitutes the essential difference between liaisons in *El beso de*

la mujer araña and *Breakfast of Champions*. In *El beso* mediation works between

Molina and Valentín, at least for a short while, because they understand each other, share a common language, and have, for a moment, become one being within the confines of their own private utopia. In *Breakfast*, though these men share the common language of science fiction and are bound together by the dual acts of reading and writing, they do not understand each other and remain separate.

We can see, then, why the paradoxes inherent in all of this, the dualities of elite and pulp, utopia and dystopia, lead to a more neutral (if a touch nihilistic) outlook. It is not the personal relationships between madmen that matter here, as they do in *El beso*. Instead, what matters is what does or does not result from that interaction between mediators, whether it sparks some kind of change in the outside world. Though harmony between lunatic and society will never be reached in Vonnegut's United States, there can be a middle ground. Richard Ohmann in his article "The Shaping of a Canon: U.S. Fiction, 1960-1975," though he is commenting on Vonnegut's work as a whole, realizes the problems inherent in such situations. He notes, "If these novels thematize social contradictions as personal neurosis, one would expect any recovery to be a problem, for individual cures cannot address the causes of the illness. At best, they can produce a kind of adjustment" (Ohmann 218). Molina and Valentín suffer death and a final descent into true madness because their own small utopia, their consortium of spectator/creators, could not go beyond the walls of their prison, could not be reproduced a second time. Dwayne, Trout, and the narrator, however, because they are working with a written form of popular culture, can find some sort of middle ground, since their triangle, neither utopic nor dystopic, exists regardless of disparities in time or space. In this sense, it does not matter who a madman is or how he interacts with others – what matters is the

outcome of that interaction: how it re-forms the future and how others react to it.

Madness, here, is thus a catalyst for social change, if only in small, limited quantities.

CHAPTER IV

MADNESS IN THE METROPOLIS: THE FAILURE OF MASS METAPHORS AND
POPULAR CULTURE PLAGIARISM

To round out a contemplation of madness in a postmodern context, we must, of

course, turn our attention to the 1980s, a decade which for many represents the height of

capitalistic tension throughout the Americas and the saturation of popular culture into all

levels and forms of cultural capital and production, flowing across borders in both

directions. We can sum up much of what happened in the 80s by looking at how popular

mass culture became. Steve Barnett and JoAnn Magdoff, in their article "Beyond

Narcissism in American Culture of the 1980s," consider the 1980s to be a time period in

which patterns of consumption changed. In their eyes, demographic shifts in the Untied

States, where there were now more singles, fewer children, and more money, changed the

nature of culture, popular or otherwise. New developments in technology, continuous

changes in fashions, and new developments in the world economy all led to what Barnett

and Magdoff call 'serial substitution,' where consumers became fixated on the

interchangeability of one thing for any other. These cultural anthropologists point to this

new trend in consumption as an important turning point in the way one can view how

society interacts with and commodifies popular culture. If everything is interchangeable,

then anything can be a commodity and reality itself comes into question. As Barnett and

Magdoff write, "Reality is perceived as malleable by Americans living lives of serial

substitution, with the culturally acceptable premise that consciously manipulating or

altering 'reality' is a reasonable, if not desirable, option" (Barnett 416). American

211

popular culture in the 1980s practically promoted immersion into fantasy worlds, luring

consumers into craving not only products, but also what the products, and their

interchangeability, represented. We need to understand such immersion in our analysis

of the last two novels in this dissertation: Caio Fernando Abreu's *Onde andará Dulce*

Veiga? [*Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?*] and Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*.

In these texts, the triptych of madman-mediator-society undergoes further transformation

– both narratives present madmen who cannot truly escape the cause of their madness.

They cannot come any closer to finding healthy interactions with normal society and

therefore call into question the role of the intermediary and the viability of Foucault's

structure at the height of the postmodern period.

Though Barnett and Magdoff's article, written in 1986, speaks specifically to the

United States, we can use their words to consider any culture influenced by such trends.

The affects of serial substitution, according to Barnett and Magdoff, were caused by,

among other things, an expansion of advertising hype, a proliferation of alternative

images of reality, the legitimization of fantasy enactments, the changing of boundaries

between the public and the private, and a perceived lack of relevance and the malleability

of history. These criteria were not only found in the United States during the 1980s –

they were also exported to other countries along with North American popular culture

products and could be found in the culture industries of other nations who were also

experiencing similar levels of achievement within their own national culture industries.

North American film, music, popular literature, and fashion brought such commodities to

the developing world, influencing most specifically the urban city dweller, who had the

most chance to confront such influences. National pressures to compete with the spread

of North American influences also helped to create the right breeding grounds for such postmodern consumerism.

This proliferation of the North American culture of consumption, especially in certain metropolises, is an important theme in the interpretations of the novels in this dissertation. The narratives we shall encounter in this chapter were published just on the other side of the decade, *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?* in 1990 and *American Psycho* in 1991, yet both were conceived and written in the second half of the 1980s and specifically reference and communicate with the important issues, figures, politics, and cultures of the time. Both novels present paradoxical representations of life in the metropolis, surrounded by the chaotic and often unfathomable rhythms of urban living. Philip Cooke, in his article "Modern Urban Theory in Question," regards the postmodern metropolis as a setting distinctly different from the modern concept of urban living. He writes,

> Recent commentators upon the changes in Western urban culture […] have placed some emphasis on the challenge posed to modern concepts of urbanity by the advent of a post-modern perspective. This perspective visibly influences the urban process, the forms taken by urban investment, the social relations found in cities, the urban economy, and the very appearance as well as the reality of cities (Cooke 331).

Cooke considers the 1980s as the height of such postmodern change, when formalist corporate high rises, abstract residential tower blocks, and suburban utopias were displaced by what he calls " pop vernacular" or "road-side eclecticism" (339). This new urban environment was defined by comparatively gigantic commercial advertising, strip malls, and other commercial buildings. Chaos is the key here, for the protagonists of these texts, products of the decade, live in worlds saturated with popular culture. This saturation, though different depending on the milieu, informs the way each

protagonist/narrator interacts with and reacts to the society contained within each city. As Linda Hutcheon reminds us, postmodernism, though based upon the output of the culture industry, which upholds the importance of sameness and conformity, "does seek to assert difference, not homogeneous identity. Of course, the very concept of 'difference,' unlike 'otherness,' has no exact opposite against which to define itself" (Hutcheon 6). It is difference, not similarity, which defines postmodernism: divergence, diversity and variation, not compliance, conventionality, and submission. Our protagonists are Others, yet they gain their divergence and their individuality through this postmodern difference.

Drawing on Hutcheon's definition, we can also claim that by emphasizing definition through creation and not through negative association, postmodernism embraces the chaos of the metropolis, with all its sounds, smells, tastes, textures, and sights. This chaos is what allows madness such an important foothold, not only in the realm of the postmodern, but also in the cityscape itself. It is also what makes the city such an important aspect of postmodernism in the 1980s. This emphasis on totality, on all five senses, allows postmodern narrative to use more than just one or two aspects of popular culture in its critique/embrace of contemporary life. Now, every aspect of living, from popular music, to film, to popular religions, to cultural theory, to academic discourses and medical epidemics, come to play within the confines of the novel. While these aspects have most certainly been incorporated into narrative before the 1980s (it would be ludicrous to claim otherwise), the way in which authors of this decade approach these topics and combine them into their text speaks to how important such everyday popular objects have become.

In Latin American, the 1980s brought both political and social changes. Many

former military dictatorships started the long and often painful process of

democratization. This process, captured in Ariel Dorfman's play *Death and the Maiden*,

caused upheaval and political unrest in many areas of the continent and affected the

people of multiple nations, including Argentina and Brazil, in profound ways. The

insurrection in Nicaragua in 1984, which occurred with the aid of intervention from the

United States, only helped to make matters more unstable in the region and sparked

another wave of anti-American sentiment. As Neil Larsen states in *Reading North by*

South, "it is important to consider what was, during the 1980s, the role of the Nicaraguan

Revolution, and especially the theory and practice of *sandinismo* in supplying to radical,

or 'anti-imperialist,' postmodernism a species of historical warrant" (Larsen, *North by*

South 181). The 1980s served as a decade that brought North and South America closer

together and yet further apart, as more Latin American countries sought democratic

solutions to their political problems, imported more and more technological and

economic innovations that could allow them to (perhaps) compete with First World

markets, and started to produce their own popular culture industries that could not only

emulate and incorporate North American mass culture products, but could (at times)

influence the North American culture industry as well (instead of only reaching

academics).

Brazil stands as a perfect example of how Latin America, in the 1980s, began to

engage more closely with the rest of the world. As John Markoff and Silvio R. Duncan

Baretta write in their study "Economic Crisis and Regime Change in Brazil: The 1960s

and the 1980s," the beginning of the 1980s in Brazil saw the reigning military regime,

"the longest-lived in the history of Brazil," moving towards "liberalization," which would hand off much of the government's power to civilians (Markoff 423).[100] The decade was fraught with economic and political strife, yet the *abertura* [opening] eventually led to the quasi-democracy that exists today in Brazil. The opening up of Brazil's borders, not only to democracy, but also to foreign trade and a more active international involvement, allowed the country to become more involved in the inter-American discussion that was taking place between the United States and Latin America. As Fernando Arenas states in the footnotes to his article "Writing after Paradise and Before a Possible Dream," "As of the eighties, Brazil has become a new world exporter of television programs and advertising (ranked seventh world-wide), and popular music (ranked sixth)" (Arenas, *Writing After Paradise* 21). By the 1980s, it was not just academics who interacted with Latin American culture via highbrow texts and approved cultural liaisons – now, Latin America's popular culture had started to invade world sensibilities.

To begin our look at the 1980s, then, we will start with Abreu's *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?*. The novel tells the story of an unnamed freelance reporter who has just been given the chance to work as a features writer at a slightly seedy daily paper, the *Diário da Cidade*, "talvez o pior jornal do mundo" ["possibly the worst paper in the world"] (Abreu, *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?* 16, *Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?* 7). For his first assignment, the reporter, who is also the narrator, is told to write an interview with a new up-and-coming punk rock band. The band's first hit reminds the nameless man of his first job as a journalist, twenty years earlier, when he interviewed Dulce Veiga, another up-and-coming singing sensation. On the eve of her most important show, soon after her interview, Dulce vanished without a trace. Once he has conducted

his present day interview, the narrator realizes that the lead singer of the punk band is also Dulce Veiga's daughter and this revelation starts the reporter off on a perilous and often surreal journey to find the whereabouts of the missing Dulce. His search leads him through the musical and drug-laden underworld of São Paulo, where he meets the reincarnations of British literary figures, post-apocalyptic rockers, countless specters of Dulce (both real and imaginary), and an endless array of quasi-religious figures, sensual temptations, burnt-out musicians, and movie stars. The narrator's encounters with these denizens of the metropolis and their counter-culture forces him to reflect on his own marginal life and his relationship with Pedro, the enigmatic young man with whom he has had a torrid affair, who may or may not have given him AIDS. Lost in a search for both Dulce Veiga and his own missing lover, the reporter fumbles through his days, desperately trying to conjure up leads and following the thinnest of hunches.

The book itself is divided into chapters, each relating to a day of the week, revealing the marked progression of time in the novel. As the week comes to a close and the narrator grows more desperate, he must finally come to terms with his own past and his last real life encounter with Dulce. In the eleventh hour, the narrator locates the last clue he needs to triangulate Dulce's whereabouts from her former lover, Saul, who has descended into madness, thinking himself to *be* Dulce. With the information he receives from Saul, the journalist heads off into the backcountry to find the long lost singer. In the heart of Brazil, in the town of Estrela do Norte, he finally uncovers Dulce Veiga, now an aged hippy who sings at the local barbeque joint. Dulce returns the nameless narrator his name, gives him a kitten, and then sends him back to the city, now able to sing.

Critical reactions to this novel have been favorable, though most critics focus their discussion of the text around either the queer and homosexual aspects of the text and author or its links with popular culture, not the literary merits of the text. Many critics look to Abreu's life as the inspiration for the narrator's misfortunes. Abreu was an advocate of AIDS education and a victim of AIDS himself, and incorporated his own homosexuality into his works. Abreu wanted not only to lift the stigma from AIDS, "to desacralize the virus" as Adria Frizzi states in the *Afterword* to the English translation of *Dulce Veiga*, but also to give voice to those who live on the margins, either the margins of society at large or the economic margins of the First World (Frizzi 188). Frizzi's reading of the text touches on its homosexual aspects as part of a larger search for identity that will always be confounded by the labels society chooses to force upon marginal people.

Yet, the novel is not just a study of marginality – it is also a reaction to the confining aspects of proscribed normality. Karl Posso, his book *Artful Seduction*, believes that we need to understand the implications the book's homosexual narrator has on Law and the State as set out by Deleuze and Guattari. Posso feels that the narrator's need to be both a conformist and a homosexual (in act but not in name) inverts the way in which the reader must view the narrator's subjectivity. Posso explains, "He desires both conformity and men, and as a result soon finds that although incapable of identifying as homosexual, he is also unable to continue imitating heterosexuality. […] He becomes a vector of transformation between molar coordinates" (Posso 173). The reporter is thus not an individual, but a subject in transition. As Posso goes on to state, "Abreu shows that as a result of [the desire for the excluding heterosexist domus], the homosexual in

218

exile formulates an ostensibly marginal identity which is always that of masochistic

transience, in which oppression, rather than being relationally abolished, is reread as the

source of textual and existential pleasure" (167). In this reading of the text, the narrator

and his oscillation between homosexuality and conformity to the norm, which puts him

always at the margins, reveals the importance of restrictive law in shaping both text and

identity. The narrator's relationship with Pedro, then, and his subsequent transitional

state, serves as the center of not only the narrator's own sense of identity, but also as the

center of the formation of societal identity and textual production. This reading therefore

focuses on the paradox of self-definition in the postmodern world, especially in relation

to marginal or queer spaces set specifically apart by the State.

Fernando Arenas, in his book *Utopias of Otherness*, also reads *Dulce Veiga* as an

important queer text and links the narrator's liminal state with that of his nation. He

writes,

> the liminal position that Abreu claimed for Brazil within the spectrum of
> nations of contemporary globalized culture is analogous to the liminal
> position that the individual subject […] occupies as part of an international
> 'gay' culture that cuts across national borders through a variety of mass-
> media and massive population movements via tourism and immigration
> and that has been informing and transforming, at an accelerated pace,
> identity categories and lifestyles, particularly among the middle and upper
> classes (Arenas, *Otherness* 45-46).

According to Arenas, Abreu's work links the liminal status of Brazil in a global market

with the liminal status of the individual within 'gay' culture. Brazilians are able to move

across linguistic and cultural boundaries easily because of their liminal position in a

global society, a position that encourages the mingling of national and international

influences. The creation of contemporary Brazilian culture, in this sense, appears similar

to the way in which the individual forms his or her own sense of self within the

international 'gay' community, by way of certain popular culture and mass media phenomenon that appear universal. Arenas therefore implies that Brazilian culture is able to influence modes of living beyond its own small sphere because it gains its power through the incorporation *and* dissemination of cultural products and codes.

This important link between 'gay' culture, marginality, Brazil, and popular culture is an observation that many critics include in their readings of *Dulce Veiga*. For most critics, the novel's importance lies in how Abreu deals with the marginality of both individual and nation. As Piers Armstrong notes in his study *Third World Literary Fortunes: Brazilian Culture and its International Reception*, most narrative texts coming out of Brazil are considered only via academic canonicity or the "powerful extraliterary imagery of another Brazil," the idealized picture formed by social scientists, international tourism, and a tendency to see Brazil only as a fount of folk wisdom (Armstrong 11). Brazilian writers like Machado de Assis or Clarice Lispector are embraced by the academy but not by the larger reading public because they do not specifically deal with the folk or carnivalesque cultures of Brazil. A writer like Jorge Amado, however, is accepted by the masses because he consciously embraces folklore and is "compatible with international curiosity about Brazil," even though the academy considers most of his text of little literary value (134). For Armstrong, Brazil and its literary output is thus marked by "cultural schizophrenia," caused by the huge gap between material poverty and a "Western-type" intellectual community (12).

Extrapolating from Armstrong's theory, I would argue that Abreu tries to sidestep this disparity between folklore and literary merit by proposing a new type of cultural schizophrenia, one based not solely on Brazilian popular culture, but on the hybrid

220

culture found in the urban Brazilian megalopolis of the 1980s. As Frizzi notes, "His

writings deal with a contemporary, urban Brazil stripped of folklore and postcard

images" (Frizzi 187). Arenas agrees with this reading, noting, "Abreu's narratives also

speak powerfully of defiant yet fragile subjectivities on the margins of a semiperipheral

nation at its own historical and civilizational crossroads, striving to become in a

globalized environment where hardly any nation's destiny is within its own hands"

(Arenas, *Otherness* 43). Brazil is not alone in her struggle to balance independence and a

forced globalization. The individuals within Brazil's borders stand at the same

crossroads, affected by the same hybrid culture, especially those trapped within the

confines of São Paulo, Abreu's city of choice, which, according to Arenas, "functions in

the narrative as a microcosm of the nation" (Arenas, *Otherness* 50). Abreu's Brazil, like

the United States in Barnett and Magdoff's article, is experiencing a change in its patterns

of consumption, a change that reveals and promotes the chaotic underbelly of the nation.

Here, madness is hybridity, the muddled and messy commingling of differing ways of

life. National cultural fantasies and public proprieties mix with imported mass culture

illusions and societal dictates, causing an inevitable schizophrenic reaction.

In order to understand how Abreu plays upon Brazil's hybrid, and therefore

schizophrenic, nature and its interaction with popular culture and how this relates to

madness in a postmodern sense, we must first understand our protagonist and where he

fits into contemporary Brazilian society. From the very beginning of the book, we know

that the narrator has been depressed for some time. The opening chapter is the first day

of a new week, the first day of the reporter's new job. Reflecting on his new start, the

journalist tells us, "Afinal, aquele podia ser o primeiro passo para emergir do pântano de

depressão e autopiedade onde refocilava há quase um ano" ["After all, that day might be the first step toward emerging from the morass of depression and self-pity in which I had been wallowing for nearly a year"] (Abreu, *OADV* 16-17, *WHDV* 7). The depression he mentions stems from the loss of his lover, Pedro, an enigmatic man he met on the subway. The two had a torrid love affair that ended when Pedro left Abreu's protagonist a note, indicating that he might have a disease and wanted to end the affair so that this disease could not spread. The note, however, does not go into very much detail and the narrator does not know where Pedro has gone – he only knows that the city has swallowed his lover and left him with the threat of AIDS. His reaction to Pedro's disappearance has kept him inside, insular, beyond of the reach of other influences. Before his encounter with Pedro, the narrator was lost and alone, caught up in the chaos of the city. Meeting Pedro, however, allowed him to emerge from his squalid existence and participate in the sublime aspect of the everyday. As García Canclini insists in *Hybrid Cultures*, "living in a city does not imply becoming dissolved in the massive and the anonymous. The violence and public insecurity, the incomprehensibility of the city […] lead us to search for selective forms of sociability in domestic intimacy and trusting encounters" (García Canclini 208). Before the narrator found Pedro, São Paulo – the city itself – was an asylum, a structure that housed the world's madness. Yet, living in such a place does not condemn the individual to madness; instead, it inspires a search for companionship and intimacy, a search that could provide stability and order. Finding Pedro should have been the narrator's salvation – Pedro should have been the cipher the narrator was searching for, a way to make the world make sense.

Pedro's relationship with Abreu's protagonist, however, is taboo, unacceptable by

society's standards. He cannot provide the safety the narrator needs because he does not

adhere to the standards of normality. From the beginning of their affair, the narrator

knows that his relationship with Pedro is dangerous and frets over the repercussions of

his actions. He mentions "*Todos os medos de todos os riscos e desregramentos*" ["*All

the fears of all the risks and transgressions*"] and repeats that he is *"aterrorizado pela

idéia de gostar de outro homem*" ["*terrified of liking another man*"] even after he

consents to the relationship (Abreu, *OADV* 128-129, *WHDV* 97).[101] His association with

Pedro would make him an outcast, an Other. Yet he is lured into a connection by the pull

of stability, by a need to live a heightened reality, a golden moment that seems never-

ending.[102] He allows Pedro to whisper reassurances into his ear and states, "*Eu deixava

que repetisse todas essas coisas de fotonovela, de melodrama, de latinoamérica, que

continuasse a me beijar*" ["*I let him repeat all those things that sounded like a soap

opera, a melodrama, like Latin America, I let him go on kissing me*"] (128, 97). Here, the

narrator cites the allure promised by popular fiction and the illusions inherent in the Latin

American cityscape as the motivations behind his affair with Pedro. By referencing soap

operas and melodrama, he equates love and happiness with the most over-the-top of

illusions, with genres defined by their overtly emotional content and exaggerated human

interactions. Thus, when the journalist chooses to remain with Pedro, he allows himself

to ignore his fear, hiding inside the melodrama itself, inside the Latin American

experience set out by the soap operas. The allure of popular culture illusions overrides

the fear of societal retribution. With Pedro, he can actually immerse himself in the

popular culture fantasy, be a part of what he sees, live the illusion Molina and Valentín so

desperately wanted, a utopia where two men can live together without fear of

repercussions or social stigmas. He intentionally ignores the outside world, which would condemn him for his perversion, the mass culture desire for the kind of love and affection found in the soap opera.

But by losing Pedro, the narrator loses that connection, not only sacrificing his comfortable place within the illusion created by their union, but also forfeiting his name, his way, and his life. He thinks to himself, "*Mas Pedro não voltou, eu não voltei*" ["*But when Pedro didn't come back, I didn't come back*"] (Abreu, *OADV* 131, *WHDV* 99). Pedro, the answer to all of his troubles, is no longer able to stand between the reporter and the outside world, the world that would condemn his actions. Pedro had wanted to save the narrator, "*[ele] precisava de mim para não morrer de solidão e abandono e tristeza*" ["*he needed me not to die of loneliness and neglect and sadness*"], but the salvation he promised could not live forever (128, 97). The narrator is an Other because of his union with Pedro, even if his Otherness only manifests in his own mind, for he is the only one who knows of his transgression. Yet without Pedro, without the actual physical representation of his indiscretion, he loses his way and descends into madness. He is neither an outcast nor a conformist; he has lost his Utopia and yearns to regain it. This loss thus sets the narrator on a quest to find happiness again, to regain the intimacy he once had, the fiction he once lived.

Searching therefore defines his new life, his life post-Pedro, because Pedro taints all that he sees and hears. Though he rarely mentions his lover in the novel, the narrator finds him everywhere. The music in a cab reminds him. A poem left by a former girlfriend sparks thoughts of Pedro and he recalls their affair "sem poder evitar, inesperadamente, sem querer evitar" ["without being able to avoid it, unexpectedly,

without wanting to avoid it"] (Abreu, *OADV* 89, *WHDV* 65). This pursuit is inevitable and wanted, yet taboo and suppressed. The narrator's fears, fears he expressed even in the beginning of the affair, get the better of him because he cannot avoid reminders of what he once had. His fear of illicit love, of Pedro's disappearance, of the disease that may or may not have driven Pedro away, all mix together. Yet the narrator still yearns for Pedro, for the security and comfort he embodied. A combination of love and hate, fact and fiction, thus create the gap into which the narrator falls, the gap into madness.

Setting, in this instance, is key to our understanding of the reporter's madness. São Paulo, the asylum in which the protagonist has become trapped, is his jailor and instigator, the source of and the succor to his madness. Posso defines Abreu's city as a space in which "Capitalism and technology transform the world into a space of homogeneity" (Posso 170). He calls São Paulo, "the industrial heart of Brazil, where even the urban and the rural have become indistinguishable, conflated under the term 'city' by the network of capitalism" (170). Extrapolating from Posso's comments, I would argue that hybridity, and therefore madness, can thrive in such a place because everything within its (infinite) limits appears to be homogeneous, interchangeable, yet at the same time foreign and impossible. São Paulo, because of its position at the center of Brazil's social *and* industrial scene and its function as an exporter of Brazilian goods *and* an importer of outside technology and culture, is able to expand the boundaries of society to include even the marginal or exotic. Yet by doing so, the city curtails reactions to such phenomena, limiting personal eccentricities to a specific event horizon. As a contemporary city, then, and as the setting for Abreu's novel, São Paulo provides the perfect locus for the narrator's descent into madness.

In her reading of Abreu's novel, Frizzi notices the narrator's dilemma and agrees that he cannot find himself because he is lost within the contemporary cityscape and its cultural imperatives. She notes,

> The novel's protagonist, lost, disillusioned, and appropriately nameless, is an empty shell, a signifier to be filled and given meaning. He is confused and longs for some sort of identity, yet terrified by the stigma attached to most society-imposed labels […]; at the same time, he rejects totalizing definitions aimed at constricting the whole individual into a known category (Frizzi 189).

The narrator is afraid of being alone and yearns to be part of something larger, of some fixed, prefabricated identity, yet is even more terrified of living out that cookie cutter lifestyle. Frizzi considers him lost, never able to find meaning within himself. Posso, in a similar reading of the text, believes the narrator to be schizophrenic and points to his inability to find his own identity as one aspect of this illness. Posso writes, "The narrator-protagonist ceases to have a fixed identity […]. Not a crystallized hybrid, but a process of change, he becomes a socially uncodable libidinal trajectory, and thus schizophrenic" (Posso 173). These two readings of the text focus on the narrator's search for self. Lost in a chaotic, contemporary cityscape, the narrator tries to form some sort of identity, encompassing all he sees and all he has seen into some sort of reasonable whole. Posso's reading of the text centers on the outcome of this search, which leaves the narrator permanently in flux, always going through the motions of change without really changing. Frizzi focuses on how this split happened to begin with, citing the confrontation between a fear of conformity and a need to conform as the narrator's chief problem. Both these readings hold important insights into how madness works in our text, but to fully understand his madness we need to consider not only the outcome of his quest and the reasons behind this pursuit of identity, but also the search itself and the

226

mediators he uses to reconcile his madness and the city (and society) that nurtures it.

This is why we need to approach *Dulce Veiga* by way of the postmodern and popular culture.[103] The narrator is a receptacle of popular culture facts, trivia, and hearsay – he is, after all, the new Entertainment reporter at the *Diario da cidade*. This is what makes the narrator's quest to find Pedro (and Dulce) so hauntingly familiar, yet foreign. He is part of the popular culture phenomenon, yet apart from it, a reporter looking at it from afar. Denilson Lopes, in his book *O homem que amava rapazes* [*The Man Who Loved Young Men*], notices the narrator's predicament and links it to the importance of popular culture within Abreu's works, especially in a postmodern context. He notes that Abreu's texts echo "the repetitive incantation of the old 1980s: everything has already been done, we can only speak of cinema or of literature. But the past will never return as it was, what remains is the ruins of scenery already used in A films, citations that had other significances" (Lopes 224, my translation).[104] Here, Lopes remarks on the quasi-nostalgic nature of the postmodern text. Everything has already been written, has already been done, so the postmodern author must look to what has come before, either on the page or on the screen, for his inspiration – today cannot yield innovation, only innovative repetition. This nostalgia is not pure, however, but instead comes tainted with the knowledge that what has come before cannot actually be repeated and that what postmodernism reuses was meant for something else. Any novel written today must be a B-novel, like Abreu's, because we can now only work with reused sets, pre-owned plots, and hodge-podge, pieced together imagery, symbolism, and allusion. But by reusing these old pieces, the postmodern text in general, and Abreu's novel in particular, are able to re-invest old words and situations with new meaning.

Lopes' reading of the novel, though couched in overly dramatic prose, can give us the tools necessary to approach frameworks for viewing madness in *Dulce Veiga*, especially its emphasis on remaking iconic narratives. The narrator's madness, his paradoxical disillusionment *and* need for illusion, stems from his need for Pedro and his interactions with the cultural chaos that the contemporary city engenders.[105] The narrator ought to be grounded in reality. Besides his affair with Pedro, he is nothing more than an ordinary man. As he stands next of Marcia, Dulce Veiga's punk rock daughter, he admits, "Eu não tinha nada especial. Um jeans [...] mas sem rasgões, camiseta branca [...]. Nenhum brinco, nenhuma mecha verde no cabelo. Uniforme de guerra, ou de quem quer ficar invisível. E eu queria, há tanto" ["There was nothing special about me. Jeans […] but without tears, white t-shirt […]. No earrings, no green streaks in my hair. A war uniform, that of someone who wants to remain invisible. And I had wanted to, for a long time"] (Abreu, *OADV* 28, *WHDV* 17). In this scene, we can see the conflict inherent in the reporter – he has been a conformist for a very long time, but does not want to continue such an existence. He notices the individuality others try to add to their appearance – ripped jeans, earrings, green hair – thus acknowledging others' urges to be different, contrasting them with his own conformity. He calls his own wardrobe a war uniform, something that makes him blend in with those around him, a cog in a larger machine. His clothing casts him as part of a larger army, as a soldier who must follow orders and remain in step. Yet by calling his clothing a war uniform, he also acknowledges the fight inherent in trying to conform. Conformity is not easy, is not peaceful; instead, every day is a constant battle against one's own individualistic nature. To be part of the crowd, to remain unnoticed, one must continually struggle against one's

need for excellence, acknowledgement, and distinction. His war uniform is thus a paradox, a badge of his need to be unnoticed and a symbol of the price such conformity costs him. The fact that the narrator has wanted to remain unseen for so long, yet now, perhaps, does not, emphasizes the split in his personality. The narrator's daily routine, his clothes, his appearance, mark him as one among many, yet his journalistic, inquisitive nature, combined with the counterexamples São Paulo provides him, Pedro among them, urge him to be something more.

São Paulo itself, then, is very important in how we approach Abreu's narrator. His reactions to its chaos reflect how he views not only his world, but also his place within it. Just as he turned to popular culture to define his relationship with Pedro, so to does he turn to the culture industry to define life without Pedro. Toward the beginning of the novel, the narrator describes what he sees as he sets out to find a cab: "passei por dois anões, um corcunda, três cegos, quatro mancos, um homem-tronco, outro maneta, mais um enrolado em trapos como um leproso [...]. A cenografia eram sacos de lixo com cheiro doce, moscas esvoaçando, crianças em volta" ["I passed two dwarves, a hunchback, three blind men, four cripples, a human torso, a man with only one arm, another wrapped in rags like a leper […]. The set consisted of trashbags giving off a sweet stench, flies buzzing, and children hovering around"] (Abreu, *OADV* 26, *WHDV* 15). This list of degenerates and beggars, reenactments of Bahktin's carinvalesque grotesqueries, reads like a child's nursery rhyme. The scene the narrator sets is vulgar, but by phrasing it in such an innocent way, without judgment yet filled with irony, he embraces it and ignores it at the same time. It is nothing more to him that a film set, the beggar children no more important than the trashbags that give the street its ambiance.

Yet, by calling the scene a set, the narrator also idealizes what he sees, making it part of some illusory, detached, fictional world, for all for its realism. These references to popular culture and the culture industry thus allow the narrator to come to terms with the horrific nature of the contemporary city, even if only on an ironic level. He is no longer living within the soap opera with Pedro, but he is still on a set of some kind.

Lopes recognizes this uneasy alliance between daily life and the illusions created by the culture industry. When considering the subject, he writes,

> For some time pop culture has composed our affections and experiences. This is not scandalous, nor is it simply the colonization of the imaginary; it's only the quotidian, the crossing of the frontiers between the erudite, pop and popular. What really matters, perhaps, is the happiness imperative, […] the factual world of the journalist, without affection, without memory, images substituting one for the other, resembling others, and the world of illusion (Lopes 229, my translation).[106]

Lopes does not equate mass culture with the ruination and cooptation of the common man's imagination. Instead, he cites the conglomeration of high, low, and popular culture as being part of daily life. Abreu's text, then, can be a personal search for happiness and identity, a journalistic investigation *and* a fairytale hero quest because it is equipped to look at *all* aspects of everyday life. Abreu does not limit his narrative to one feature of contemporary living, but instead includes myriad perspectives and multiple reactions. The everyday thus becomes all of these things, from the fictional and fantastical to the objective and factual.

While I agree with Lopes that Abreu is concerned with an everyday that reveals both fact and fiction, there are wider implications to this observation, especially in relation to how Abreu's narrator interacts with São Paulo and his fellow paulistas. The journalist is able to view the city as both reality *and* illusion and thus becomes intimate

with its inner workings, yet because of his inquisitive nature he cannot simply accept what he sees. He must codify it and therefore cannot participate in the city's chaos, even as it eddies and swirls around him. This is the difference between how the narrator uses popular culture to interact with Pedro and how he uses it to interact with society at large once Pedro is gone. With Pedro, the narrator can immerse himself in melodrama, in the appeal of a mass illusion (even if it is a transgressive one). Without Pedro, however, he becomes entangled in the blurred line between fantasy and reality because he uses mass culture to codify what he sees, not to enhance it.

We can see this clearly when the reporter goes to a punk rock club to see Marcia perform. He calls the club-goers *replicants*, a term that references characters from Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (1982), which was based on Phillip K. Dick's science fiction novella *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). Taking his comparison between the film and real life further, he adds, "eu era o mais estranho entre eles. Um caçador de andróides, disfarçado de anjo" ["I was the weirdest of them all. An android hunter disguised as an angel"] (Abreu, *OADV* 181, *WHDV* 140). Here, the reporter can only relate to other marginal figures by casting them (and himself) as part of an already created cinematic reality. The crowds who greet him at the club are replicants, robotic automatons manufactured by society to do their dirty or dangerous work. The reporter is the Blade Runner, the protagonist of the film who hunts rogue androids for a living (but who may be an android himself, as we learn in the climax of Scott's film). The narrator thus uses the preconceived relationships of *Blade Runner* to define how he will interact with others. He can travel through the crowd with confidence because he is a part of their world (for they all inhabit the same film), yet also stands apart from them, the protagonist

231

of the plot and not some faceless extra. He is the weirdest of them because he is one of them, yet not, disguised as an angel, which is but a mask for a mask. Because he is able to use a popular culture vehicle for the basis of his metaphor, rooted in his 'actual' reality, the reporter can adapt to foreign situations. He becomes less of an outcast and less confused because he can define what he sees around him through fictitious storylines and character studies.

Yet, this lack of confusion is but a ruse. The narrator's own literary ploy cannot actually work in reality. The journalist does not cast himself as just another replicant, but separates himself from the rest of the crowd. He uses popular culture to delineate and classify – this does not mean he uses it specifically to join. As he watches a co-worker work his way through the crowd at the club, he describes his distance from the rest of the men and women at the show. He tells us, "Filemon enfiava-se pelo meio dos andróides, pós e pres – o único *durante* era eu –, tentando aproximar-se do palco" ["Filemon was weaving his way through the androids, pre- and post- the only *during* was me – trying to get close to the stage"] (Abreu, *OADV* 185, *WHDV* 143). The narrator sees himself as the only one living in the moment, caught between the past and the present. The rest either live too much in the past or look too far forward into the future. Balanced on the edge of both, the reporter can only watch others move through the crowd.

This use of mass culture metaphors is central to our understanding of Abreu's postmodernism and his narrator's madness. The narrator is not an obsessed fan, like Mito, or an aspiring actor, like Binx. Nor does he fall victim to the trickeries of science fiction, like Dwayne Hoover. He cannot even dream of living a fantasy, cinematic life, like Molina and Valentín, for this illusion was stolen from him when Pedro was forced to

leave. In short, after Pedro's disappearance the narrator cannot use popular culture to build an alternate reality or an alternate personality. Instead, he uses popular culture as a metaphor, as an uneasy equivalent to reality that allows him to define his chaotic and often mysterious life through known quantities. This allows the reporter to mix fact and fiction until the lines between the two become blurred, overlaying one with the other as if he were building a blue print with several transparencies. He lives on the liminal edge of both worlds, comfortable in neither.

We can see this same kind of distancing if we look at other points in the text where the reporter references film. At one point the narrator muses on what he sees around him as he wanders through São Paulo. He compares construction workers to the film *Metropolis* and notes that "A cidade ia explodir um dia, e eu não tinha nada com isso" ["The city was going to blow up someday, but that had nothing to do with me"] (Abreu *OADV* 92, *WHDV* 67). In this scene, the workers and the city have the potential to mirror the plot of Fritz Lang's 1927 masterpiece, yet the narrator knows that he has no place within their narrative. Though he recognizes their struggle by way of Lang's film, he sees no part for himself – cannot place himself in the role of the hero – and therefore has no connection with what will happen when the city finally falls, as it does in the film. In this instance the narrator has no compelling reason to want to see himself as part of the workers' world and so does not include himself in their metaphor. He thus reveals an important sentience when it comes to the use of popular culture references and intertextuality. Though he is driven to utilize these allusions, he has at least some control over how they manifest.

Control, of course, can only come by way of knowledge and the narrator *does* know

that popular culture has a hold over him. He realizes that it has shaped the way in which he sees the world. Toward the middle of the novel, when the narrator must decide if he will open a door and perhaps find the missing Dulce Veiga or if he will run away so as not to disturb whatever lurks behind the entryway, he specifically links his sense of manliness and duty to what he has read and seen. He thinks, "Por todos os filmes que eu vira, e eram milhares, por todos os livros que eu lera, por tudo que tinham me ensinado sobre como um homem deve comportar-se nessa situações e essas coisas todas – por muitas coisas mais, enfim, eu não podia simplesmente dar as costas e sair correndo, deixando as duas ali paradas, sozinhas, fêmeas, indefesas" ["Because of all the movies I'd seen, and they were thousands, all the books I'd read, all I'd been taught about the way a man should act in these situations and all that – and, in short, because of many other things, I couldn't simply turn my back and run, leaving the two of them standing there, alone, female, defenseless"] (Abreu, *OADV* 168, *WHDV* 129). This reporter has been taught by film, by fiction, by the stereotypes promoted by the culture industry, that he should not and cannot turn away from ladies in distress. He is able to derive his courage from the part he must play; as the protagonist in his own detective story, he must act accordingly.

Fiction, then, specifically popular fiction, serves as the rationale for his actions. This implies that without a popular model to emulate, the narrator would not know what to do, would be stuck always at the threshold, indecisive about whether to go in or go away. The narrator does note that there are many other issues involved in his decision to enter the apartment, but he gives precedence to his popular culture exemplars, whose number are beyond count. Taking this into account, we could argue that the narrator's

use of popular culture is a descent into communal illusions, an embrace of mass culture as the foundation for all decisions. Yet, by acknowledging the influence the culture industry has over his actions, the reporter separates himself from the rest of society, the common audience. He thinks himself objective because he has taken a step back from pure consumption and entered the realm of reflection and, perhaps, criticism, of both himself and the cultural artifacts that influence him so greatly. Whether he can truly be objective is irrelevant here – what matters is the fact that he *sees* the cultural manipulation at work. Mass culture metaphors, therefore, cannot provide the atmosphere he needs because he sees through their illusions, even as he yearns for the solace such illusions could provide.

We can therefore agree that it is narrative that drives the journalist: filmic narrative, literary narrative, heroic narrative, his own narrative. He has to go forward because that is what happens in all the stories he sees or reads or remembers. And within his narratives – the newspaper articles he writes, the multiple timelines he imagines, the memories that plague him, and even the novel we read – we can begin to see how the narrator comprehends his own search for meaning and subjectivity. He wants to find something *more* within the cityscape that surrounds him and will use any means necessary to find it. Yet, because he feels obligated to use popular culture metaphors in order to relate to his environment, he cannot use his own creative impulses to define his place in society or interact with others. The narrator therefore becomes lost in someone else's vision, compelled to see the world only through communal, pre-written narratives. He wants to write his own story, find a way to define himself through his own terms, yet cannot do this as long as he continues to rely on mass culture metaphors.

We can see this most clearly in the narrator's pursuit of Dulce Veiga, a quest that serves as a double for his hunt for Pedro. Dulce Veiga is a mass culture icon, another fiction that needs to be understood, a story that needs an ending. The very beginning of the novel presents us with the narrator's need for narration. The first page of the text starts the reporter's first day at a new job. This new job, as a reporter for a city daily newspaper, may hold some sort of release. It certainly jolts the narrator from his usual daily routine – he even mentions that he wants to write down the phrase he uses to explain his predicament because he likes the expression. Instead of wallowing in his own self-pity, the journalist is once again able to perform his job, to create the written word. The word, then, could possibly represent an important mediator in his life, a way to cope with what has happened to him.[107]

Yet this thought of salvation reveals his clichéd, fictitious reactions to life. He tells us, "Perdera o vicio paranóico de imaginar estar sendo sempre filmado [...] mas não o de estar sendo escrito" ["I had lost the paranoid vice of imagining I was always being filmed… but not that of being written about"] and then comments, "Era engraçado. E bastante esquizofrênico. Mas de repente o real tinha-se tornado bem menos retórico" ["It was funny. And pretty schizophrenic. But suddenly reality had become much less rhetorical"] (Abreu, *OADV* 17, *WHDV* 7). The narrator has, in the past, believed himself to be a part of some wider plot, some filmic storyline that has cast him as the lead, or at least in a supporting role. And though he has finally left part of those fantasies behind him, just as he has tried to leave Pedro behind him (yet has failed to do so), he is still haunted by narration, by an unknown writer who commits his every act and thought to paper. The narrator knows such a thing could not actually happen, but by thinking it

236

could he is able to make his reality a bit less ordinary, a little less circular. His life is now open to answers and will be less about style and effect and more about substance.   His daydream, this combination of illusion and fact, opens him up to madness *and* meaning, the two integrally linked by the narrator's search for narrative. As Frizzi notes in her reading of the text, "Things look one way and turn out to be the opposite, without the second hypothesis necessarily invalidating the first" (Frizzi 191). Madness and meaning can both have a place in this text because the narrator is able to hold fantasy and reality in his head at the same time.

The narrator's search for Dulce Veiga thus begins a new way of life, a schizophrenic, less rhetorical, semi-fictional narrative. Posso recognizes this new way of being and connects the narrator's need for Pedro with his search for Dulce. He compares Abreu's protagonist to fables of the grail knights, who are so blinded by their quest that they do not notice the dangers in front of them. He writes, "The narrator-protagonist is the knight in a catatonic state: he awaits Pedro's return while paradoxically finding Pedro everywhere, and consequently fails to notice that most of the characters around him seem to know the whereabouts of Dulce Veiga" (Posso 210). By becoming blinded by what he wants to see, by what he wants to find, the narrator misses what he ought to be looking for. Illusions screen him from the reality that actually faces him; he would rather live in an illusory world and continue his quest than actually find Dulce Veiga.

Using this reading of the narrator as a touchstone, we can go one step further and say that because the narrator has not been able to regain his life with Pedro and knows he cannot use mass culture metaphors as mediators between himself and society, he feels he must instead try to latch onto certain other figures, figures living on the edge just like

him, in order to find some kind of meditation. He therefore tries to find meaning through

his search for Dulce, tries to find guides along his pathway to supposed redemption.

Each guide, however, proves fruitless, even those who were closest to Dulce.

   Marcia, Dulce's daughter, and Patricia, Marcia's manager, provide no help, though

the narrator tries to use *their* popular culture metaphors to structure his life. Patricia feels

herself to be the reincarnation of Virginia Woolf and calls Marcia Katherine Mansfield.

The narrator, to fit in, styles himself E.M. Forster. After Patricia mentions her fantasy,

the narrator comments, "*Well*, agora a tarde ficará cada vez mais fria [...]. ficaremos

lendo em voz alta, encantados, os novos poemas de Eliot. Ou falando mal de Joyce,

aquele grosseirão [...]. mas quem seria Vanessa? [...] – e eu? Quem sabe E.M. Forster, de

volta de Índia para encontrar Alec Scudder" ["Well, now the afternoon will get colder

and colder […]. We'll read aloud Eliot's new poems, enraptured. Or badmouth Joyce,

that boor […]. But who would be Vanessa? […] – and me? Maybe E.M. Forster, back

from India to meet Alec Scudder"] (Abreu, *OADV* 99-100, *WHDV* 74). Here, the

narrator tries to fit into a society, tries to interact with Patricia in her own fantasy world in

order to be a part of something related to Dulce. He mimics Forster's writing style,

includes himself into the group with a collective 'we,' and tries to complete the

Bloomsbury group with others from Patricia's life. He makes the right references and

disparages the right people, showing off his own erudite fount of knowledge; by doing so,

he consciously tries to join his own writing with that of the elite society Patricia yearns to

embody. After this passage, the narrator also provides us a third person account of

Forster's motorcycle ride with Woolf, a ride that parallels exactly Patricia and the

reporter's own ride across São Paulo. Yet, the narrator cannot live within this fantasy,

238

however much he wants to. Forster's third person narration precedes the journalist's

recollection of how he met Pedro. Pedro is not Alec Scudder and never could be – thus,

the narrator cannot be Forster. Thoughts of Pedro and what he lost force the narrator to

see his role as a British, repressed, homosexual author as nothing more than just another

lie, as a metaphor that cannot actually connect him to anything. Patricia, then, cannot

provide the narrator with the mediator he needs, since her fantasies cannot encompass

him comfortably.

  The narrator also tries to use Dulce's former lover, Saul, as a mediator. Saul,

whom the narrator met previously during his last encounter with Dulce Veiga, back when

he was a young journalist, has survived Dulce, but just barely. When the narrator left

Dulce's apartment so many years ago, the authorities came to arrest Saul, who was

involved in leftist political complications. Saul, who is Marcia's biological father, was

put in jail and tortured. When he was released, Dulce had vanished and Marcia had been

sent to boarding school. Abandoned, Saul went mad and lived for many years in an

insane asylum. Marcia, however, when she found out about her father's fate, extracted

him from the asylum and set him up in an apartment in São Paulo, surrounded by Dulce's

things: her dresses, her pictures, her furniture, and her drugs. Eventually Saul began to

think of himself *as* Dulce. When the narrator finally encounters him, Saul is a

transvestite version of the singer, who refuses to answer to any name but hers and who

thrives only on the drugs and music Dulce once ingested. Though repulsed by the image

Saul presents to the outside world (he is, after all, the most overtly mad character in the

text), the narrator is also fascinated by him.

  At first, the narrator feels regret when he sees Saul, regret that he gave the police

Dulce's apartment number so many years ago, thus aiding in Saul's imprisonment. He

tells us, "queria me jogar aos pés de Saul, gritar feito um louco, mais louco que ele [...]

que eu era muito jovem, que eu não sabia o que fizera" ["I wanted to throw myself at

Saul's feet, scream like a madman, crazier than him […] that I was so young, I didn't

know what I was doing"] (Abreu, *OADV* 174, *WHDV* 134). The journalist feels that his

actions specifically led to another man's madness, a madness that is not so unlike his

own. Both men have lost someone they hold dear to the wilderness of the city and the

culture it creates. And though both men have reacted to their loss differently, mostly due

to exigent circumstances, the core of their madness remains the same. This is why the

narrator wishes so desperately to confess to his supposed crime, to reflect Saul's level of

insanity through his own ranting: he recognizes himself in Saul's situation. This allows

him to contemplate screaming, throwing himself at Saul's feet, something he would not

do in 'normal' circumstances. Saul could, perhaps, be someone who could witness his

madness, his confession (which is not only a confession of what he thinks he has done in

the past, but also a confession of his love for Pedro and his transgressive acts) and give

the narrator some sort of forgiveness, or at least a measure of acceptance.

We can understand, then, how many critics react to Saul. Arenas comments on this

section of the text, noting, "When the reporter encounters this grotesque impersonation of

Dulce, he sees his own self reflected in the absolute other. It is the reflection of his own

solitude and fears, his unfulfilled dreams – emotional, ecological, professional – and

those of his whole generation" (Arenas, *Otherness* 51). In this reading, Saul is the perfect

abject, the Other's Other. The reporter sees himself in Saul as a reflection and a

rejection, for Saul represents many things, not just loneliness, and is not simply a

personal revenant, but a communal one. For Arenas, then, Saul is the quintessential postmodern madman, mixing his own dreams with those of his generation. Posso agrees with some of Arenas' argument, stating, "Saul, though, is not just marginal, or a coherent other; he is the undesirable abject, problematically neither self nor other" (Posso 203). For Posso, Saul is liminal not just because he lives outside of society's bounds – he is also on the margins of the margins, caught without true subjectivity. If we take these critical reactions to Saul into account, we can thus argue that Saul is neither one thing nor the other, neither Dulce Veiga nor the Saul that once was. He is a hybrid, born directly from the bowels of the city. We can see that Saul wants to be Dulce, to have what Dulce had when she was a cult icon. He wants to live her myth, be adored and admired, wear her face and her name. The way the narrator describes his first encounter with the transvestite Saul mirrors exactly an encounter with Dulce, down to the tilt of their heads.[108]

Yet, Saul cannot live out Dulce's fantasy, the way her fans saw her, just as Dulce could not bear to live the life they wanted her to lead. He can only live out her *reality*, her addiction to drugs, her mood swings, and her reliance on others for essential needs. Thus, while Saul is a postmodern madman, because he will always remain trapped in his version of Dulce's stardom, he is an exaggerated version of this kind of madness, one taken to a campy extreme. Like Mito, Saul tries to live someone else's life, tries on her clothes and face. Unlike Mito, however, Saul does not witness the grotesquerie he has made of himself and remains caught in Dulce's form. Mito is able to take control of his life by transforming into a dog – Saul does not have the ability to see his follies and continues to try and realize his masquerade.

This is why Saul cannot provide the narrator with the liaison he needs – the two

cannot share a symbiotic relationship as Molina and Valentín do because Saul does not

see potential reciprocity in the narrator. The recognition of similarity only goes one way.

Posso comments, "In his mad production of uninhibited or unrepressed desire, Saul

cannot offer the narrator-protagonist a chance to identify with the other" and continues,

"he shows him that there is no binary in desire, no consistent self/other dialectic, only a

rhizome, a libidinal multiplicity" (Posso 203). Posso believes that Saul offers no chance

at identification, no way to see himself in someone else. The only thing Saul *can* offer is

reassurance, the knowledge that desire really is multiple, that the fight between the center

and the margins, which so plagues the narrator, is not a set necessity. In my view this

multiplicity, which both intrigues and disturbs the narrator, is the reason that Saul cannot

return the narrator's attentions.

We can see this if we look at how the narrator constructs images of Saul within his

narrative – there is connection between the two and the narrator presents him in two very

different lights in his visits to Saul's sanctum. During his first encounter with Dulce's

old flame, the journalist seems almost to idolize him. When the narrator thinks of what

he could give to the newspaper after his visit with Saul, all he can think is: "Mas não

haveria nada de novo para imprimir. A não ser talvez uma foto de Saul travestido de

Dulce Veiga. E eu aos pés dele, cabeça enfiada em seus joelhos, numa Pietá bissexual"

["But there would be nothing new to print. Other than perhaps a picture of Saul dressed

as Dulce. And me at his feet, my head on his knees, like a bisexual pieta"] (Abreu,

OADV 177, *WHDV* 136). This picture, which the narrator wishes to present as a

representation of his guilt, sets the two up in a very transgressive and disturbing

relationship. The two are represented as lovers, mother and son, Mary and Jesus. Their

relationship is dictated by religious, familial, or moral bounds and yet they both stand

outside of any specific stricture or code. By placing Saul as Mary in the image, as the

one who mourns the loss of his/her only son, who just happens to be the savior of the

world, the narrator venerates the man without deifying him. Saul becomes on intercessor,

a conduit between the narrator and his god (in this case, Dulce), while the narrator sets

himself up as Dulce's savior, a Christ who is willing to die for her sins.[109]

If the narrator's understanding of Saul stopped here, then we could certainly claim

that he could be a mediator and that madness in *Dulce Veiga* works much the same as it

does in *El beso de la mujer araña*. The reporter, however, sees Saul a second time,

specifically wanting to use Saul as a resource, as a way to get to Dulce. This time, Saul

does not dress as Dulce, does not wear his yellow wig. Instead, he appears "como a de

um presidiário, um louco, um judeu em campo de concentração, um doente terminal

submetido à quimioterapia" ["like a convict, a madman, a Jew in a concentrations camp,

a terminal patient undergoing chemotherapy"] (Abreu, *OADV* 209, *WHDV* 162). This

man is not idolized, but depicted as a prisoner, a marginal figure, a man on the verge of

death. He is someone to be pitied, not worshipped. This man, though he does, in the end,

provide the journalist with the information he needs to find Dulce Veiga, is not the

mediator or the savior for whom he has searched. As the narrator goes on to state, "Eu

não sabia que linguagem usar com ele, eu não conhecia aquilo, nunca estivera daquele

lado das coisas" ["I did not know what language to use with him, I wasn't familiar with

that kind of stuff, I'd never been on that side of things"] (Abreu, *OADV* 211, *WHDV*

163). The link of popular culture that gave Molina and Valentín a common language

cannot provide a measure of understanding between Saul and the narrator here. Saul has

sunk too far, has crossed the border into uncontrolled madness, is living too much in dual

fantasy worlds – the communal fantasies that create his madness and the personal

fantasies that have sprung up in their wake. His balance is off. The reporter, who is still

trying to maintain the equilibrium between his need for individuality and his descent into

communal fantasy, cannot cope with such a view of his potential fate. Though the

narrator has empathy for Saul, he cannot bear to face that empathy directly.[110] The

chance the narrator had to find a mediator in Saul has come and gone and will not be

available again. And the narrator takes no responsibility for this change in fortune; he

has what he came for, a map to Dulce, and does not need the community a man like Saul

could provide. Saul, as a madman and an Other, could potentially be the perfect

reflection and companion for the narrator, yet because he is a madman to the extreme he

cannot provide the services he offers. He is, "como um vampiro de filme de terror

barato" ["like a vampire out of some cheap horror flick"], fictional on many levels, too

lost in fantasy to be of any use, too multiple and varied (214, 166).

The narrator, therefore, continues his search for Dulce Veiga, who *could* potentially

be the perfect mediator. Throughout the text Dulce has appeared to the narrator as an

ideal, a goal. She is the object of his search. He constantly sees Dulce in the streets of

São Paulo and even once on the rocks of Arpoador, in Rio de Janeiro. She is always

raising her right hand to the sky, standing with the same demeanor and using the same

gesture every time the reporter sees her. The narrator believes she stands "Como si

depois de todos aqueles anos, esperasse por mim" ["As if she were waiting for me after

all those years"] (Abreu, *OADV* 37, *WHDV* 24). Dulce is the narrator's holy grail, a

representative of everything the narrator wants and yearns for, a parallel to Pedro and a cure for his own loneliness and confusion. She haunts his every movement and he fixates on her, believing her to be part of his destiny. She is an idol in the mythic sense, but also in the postmodern sense – as Lopes writes, "The camp apparitions of Dulce oscillate between a banal return to detective films and the sublime within the quotidian, the sublime in the artificial" (Lopes 233, my translation).[111] Though I would not condemn popular culture references, as Lopes seems to do, his insistence on oscillations speaks to our own reading of the text. The narrator has recreated Dulce as more than just a cult singer; now she is a femme fatale and a goddess, a movie star and a person glimpsed on the street. She is high and low, grand and down-to-earth, fictional and real.

Yet at times the narrator doubts her existence. Her specter always leaves, "Como se fugisse de mim, sem saber que eu era seu salvador, seu cantor, seu criador" ["As if she were running from me, without knowing I was her savior, the singer of her praise, her creator"] (153, 116). This phrase, poetic in its repetition of *seu* [her] and in its evocation of the creative impulses of the artist, romanticizes not only Dulce, but also the narrator's role in her life.[112] He believes he is meant not only to find her, but also to sing her, to create her anew with his own voice (though we know that the narrator does not and cannot sing). The Dulce for which the narrator searches is thus a construct of his own mind, a figure he has made up around the stories of Dulce others have told him, combined with his own experiences twenty years earlier. José Geraldo Couto, in his introduction to a reissue of *Dulce Veiga*, entitled "O cinema moderno de Caio F.," agrees with this reading of Dulce. He claims, "the Dulce Veiga in the novel is, in the largest sense, an apparition, a phantasm, a projection – as much in the psychoanalytical sense as

in the cinematographic" (Couto 7).[113] The real Dulce, if there really ever was a real Dulce, has long been lost in the image her public, and the narrator, have given her.

This is why, when the narrator actually finds Dulce, he is enamored by what he encounters. The Dulce that fueled his search was a concept, a theory: his own creation. What he finds, however, is something completely different, a Dulce who has created her own world, recreated herself outside the limits of the city. She has done what he wants to do, has found her way out of the chaos and into a life of solace and happiness. Or at least, this is how it appears to the reporter. To find Dulce, he journeys to the center of Brazil, to the Amazon region, where Dulce hid herself so many years ago in a New Age commune. At first the narrator cannot find her, does not know how to find her, and gives up his search. Yet, just as he is about to leave the region he hears a song and follows it to a restaurant, where he finds Dulce singing cabaret. Her retreat seems to have been what she needed: "Não era mais bela, tornara-se outra coisa, mais que isso – talvez real" ["She was no longer beautiful, she'd become something else, more than that – maybe real"] (Abreu, *OADV* 222, *WHDV* 173). Perhaps the narrator has finally found what he has been searching for, a way to live reality, to find one's own self outside of the madness the city inflicts.

Many critics read the narrator's encounter with Dulce in this way, as a sort of salvation, an anti-postmodern ending to a postmodern novel. As Arenas states, "The Amazon encompasses here, as it has for many others in the past, an ultimate frontier, a repository of ever-so-elusive utopias, a possible new paradigm of development of being of self and of nation. In the Amazon Dulce Veiga is happy, removed from the world, close to her song, perhaps in search of still one more thing" (Arenas, *Otherness* 52). In

this reading there is potential, outside the city, for salvation, for meditation. After all,

after the narrator speaks with Dulce and undergoes a mystical/spiritual awakening at her

hands, he returns to the city, but now armed with gifts: a song, a name, and a companion

(a little white cat called Cazzuza). We could, if we were inclined, point to the new Dulce

as the narrator's perfect mediator, as the woman who can help him come to terms with

his reality.

I believe, however, that this reading of the text simplifies matters. I agree with

several other critics who state that Dulce's paradise is deceptive. As Posso claims, "The

retreat from the city is no escape: Dulce Veiga's oppressive urban fame and drug

addiction have only been reconfigured into quasi-rural modes of celebrity and narcotic

dependency" (Posso 212). Posso reminds us that the Dulce we find in the Amazon has

been indoctrinated by a New Age religion and though she seems free, is actually living a

life dictated by new laws and strictures. She has not even strayed very far from her

former path, for she still sings and is adored by her community. Frizzi also points out the

flaws in the narrator's epiphany, though her reading of the ending is not as dire as

Posso's. She reminds her readers that the kitten Dulce gifts the narrator carries the name

of a singer who died of AIDS and writes,

> This is not, however, a happy ending new-age style with a born-again hero
> riding into the sunrise after a night of communion with a higher power.
> […] The kitten functions as a reminder of what's to come: the new life
> will still be fraught with difficulties and pain: the important difference is
> the protagonist's newfound strength and self-awareness, his determination
> to go on and face what lies ahead, even though he entertains no false
> hopes about his future (Frizzi 195).

Here Frizzi notes that the ending of the novel brings with it many qualifications that

render a fairytale happy-ending questionable. The narrator will still have to face his fears

and his problems – he cannot hide out in the jungle, but must return to the city, where he will still live without Pedro and where he will still be infected with AIDS. Yet, for Frizzi, the narrator *has* found something of importance in the jungle, a will to go forward, the strength to face his problems. This could point to the possibility of mediation, to Dulce being a conditional liaison, one who cannot cure, but who can point in the right direction.

Yet, I have my doubts about this reading of the text and its implications. I tend to agree with Posso, who claims, "If the desire to sing draws the narrator-protagonist into the future […] it only does so by returning him to the disordered past […]. The image of the cat and song emerge onto the libidinal plane of immanence suspending time and sense: a schizoid image" (Posso 213). For Posso, the last lines of the text reveal another image of madness, where too many things try to create meaning without structure, without sense. I, too, think that the narrator cannot escape the madness he has brought with him, nor will he ever be able to find a true mediator for his lunacy. Dulce, like the rest, is simply giving him a new metaphor, a new way of reading the world. In time, he will find that her metaphors are not his, cannot be his, and will not allow him to rejoin society.

In order to see how this works, we need to look at the final chapter in the novel. It is very short and reads:

> Toda de branco, Dulce Veiga estava parada na porta da casa, ao lado do cachorro. Uma arara pousou na arvore perto dela. Os primeiros raios do sol faziam brilhar aquela estranha coroa – tiara, diadema – que tinha entre os cabelos louro.
> Pisquei, ofuscado. Ela ergueu o braço direito para o céu, a mão fechada, apenas o indicador apontado para o alto, feito seta. Depois gritou qualquer coisa que se esfiapou no ar da manhã.
> Parecia meu nome.

Bonito, era meu nome.
E eu comecei a cantar (Abreu, *OADV* 238).

[All in white, Dulce Veiga was standing in the door of her house, next
to the dog. A macaw alighted on the tree next to her. The first rays of the
sun made that strange crown – tiara, diadem – she wore in her blond hair
shine.
I blinked, dazzled. She raised her right arm toward the sky, her hand
closed, just her forefinger pointed up, like an arrow.
Then she cried something that unraveled in the morning air.
It sounded like my name.
It was nice, my name.
And I began to sing (Abreu, *WHDV* 183).]

In this section of the text, Dulce appears once again as an idol, a goddess, a fictional

creation. She is one with nature, at peace with dogs and birds, and the narrator sets the

scene as if she has been appointed by God to hold such a position. The crown in her hair

shines with the rays of the sun as if she has a halo and the entire scene reads as if the

narrator is describing a painting, perfectly framed and with just the right proportions and

objects. The narrator is left stunned, yet again cast as someone who worships at the feet

of Dulce's celebrity. She even reprises the pose her apparitions took when the reporter

chased them in the street – she raises her right hand to the sky, pointing the way, offering

guidance that will only lead back to hero worship, to deifying and fictionalizing. Lopes

recognizes this reprisal, stating, "She acts like a recalled diva, a long way from her

public, yet a diva even so. The film continues, too, aside from the desire for a simple life,

simple stories, for concrete experience" (Lopes 221-222, my translation).[114] Lopes

recognizes the fictional qualities of the last scene, notices that the narrator is buying into

Dulce's dream, yet still couches his descriptions with popular culture images. The

reporter may be trying to see life through Dulce's metaphors, but his own mass culture

background still colors how he represents the world through his words. Lopes goes

further in his reading, however, proclaiming, "He transformed into her. Now, he was a star. I drop to my knees" (242, my translation).[115] Here, Lopes sees the narrator taking on Dulce's celebrity – instead of worshipping Dulce's former glory, the reader is now supposed to worship the narrator, dropping to his or her knees in front of the beloved star. This puts the reader in a new position: we are now fans. We, too, are now a part of the schizoid cycle (as Posso calls it), part of the text's madness. If we extrapolate from Lopes' reading, Dulce is thus not a mediator, but a facilitator, someone who spreads the narrator's lunacy to new audiences. She is a Typhoid Mary, who infects all she touches without getting sick herself.

For though many critics point to the narrator's renaming as an epiphany, a moment that sets the narrator on the right path and portrays Dulce as his redeemer, we, as readers, do not get to know his name. We are not blessed by Dulce's supposed gift, but are instead cursed with the need to know. As Lopes points out, "the protagonist sings his name at the end, but does not say it. The writer does not say it" (Lopes 242, my translation).[116] We are left with an enigma, our own detective story that can have no real ending, since we have no way to ferret out the narrator's true name.[117] And though the narrator can now sing, can now express himself as he could not at the beginning of the narrative, what will that do for him? Singing does not always connote happiness or fulfillment throughout the rest of the text – in fact, most of the lyrics sung are about loneliness, or illusion, or abandonment and most of the singers get no respite through their songs. As Posso remarks, "But the narrative prevents singing from simply denoting lulled progress toward the achievement of identity, for through Dulce Veiga, it has previously stripped song of usefulness and placebo effect, making it a vehicle of

disenchantment" (Posso 213). Singing is Dulce's tool, a way for her to recount her

sadness to the world, and because she has used it thus in the past, it must take such

connotations with it into the future. Thus, though singing is a step forward for the

narrator, it is Dulce's step forward – he uses her voice to try and find his own and by

doing so becomes lost once again in attempting to define himself by others' means.

We can therefore come to a conclusion about how postmodern madness works

within Abreu's novel. The narrator wants to live an illusion, an illusion of normality, yet

also wants to give into *his* desires and be the protagonist of his own detective story. He

first tries to define his life, which is meaningless now that he has lost Pedro, through

popular culture metaphors. When these metaphors do not help him, do not allow him to

join society at large, he tries to use society as his mediator, pulling individuals out of the

crowd as exemplars, in order to relate his own madness to society's chaos. This random

selection of idols does not work, however, for everyone else is mad as well, or at least

lost in the confusion. The metaphors they use, in their own madness, cannot translate

into the narrator's own idiom. Mediation, in this context, becomes a moot point. By

trying to find normality through the deification of other outcasts, caught up in their own

battles with communal illusions, the narrator blurs the boundaries between fantasy and

reality, society and the individual's place within it. This erasure of borders allows us, as

readers, to question the importance of the mediator in such a world. Can one really find a

liaison through transformation or through community? Or, instead, are we meant to

reach the center by ourselves, without breaking into a million pieces?[118]

****

The next, and last, novel we are going to consider is Bret Easton Ellis's *American*

Psycho. Though at first glance *American Psycho* and *Dulce Veiga* have nothing in common, their locus – the postmodern metropolis in the 1980s – allows us to compare them within the context of our study. Ellis's novel, like Abreu's, takes place in a bustling, oversized city, rampant with the problems and issue inherent in such over-populated, over-stimulating urban centers. Ellis's New York, like Abreu's São Paulo, is a place of chaos, an entity in and of itself, an actual character in the novel. And though Ellis's protagonist/narrator does not visit as many diverse sides of New York as Abreu's narrator does in São Paulo, the way the city influences the novel's and the narrator's forward motion allows us to set the two madmen side by side.

The 1980s was a pivotal time in the United States as well as in Brazil and the rest of Latin America. The decade was defined by the presidency of Ronald Reagan, the former actor whose economic and foreign policies both reacted to and shaped popular opinion. C. Fred Alford, in his essay "Mastery and Retreat: Psychological Sources of the Appeal of Ronald Reagan," regards Reagan and his policies as symptoms of a larger disease in the American psyche. He states, "The anxiety that Reagan addresses is a feeling of helplessness: that America's economy and society are out of control. More precisely, the anxiety is that out of a combination of complacency and fear, Americans have abandoned the quest for mastery and control over their collective lives" (Alford 572). For Alford, the years leading up to Reagan's presidency set the stage for a very specific political reaction. He cites ungovernable cities, a lack of good service within a service economy, the poor quality of American goods, a vulnerable economy, the prevalence of drugs and crime in schools, professional sports and business offices, and the narrow focus of Wall Street as social facts that led to the kind of governance Reagan promoted. Though these

details were "the result of Americans' own greed, shortsighted- ness, and complacency,"

Americans did not try to solve such problems (573). Instead, they turned to Reagan, who

promoted individual achievement over the collective good. Alford states, "Not only does

Reagan soothe narcissistic injury, but his policies and ideology give Americans

permission to retreat from attempts at collective mastery into the private world of

individual survival. His policies and ideology do so by labeling such a retreat a return to

the old verities. In a word, Reagan transforms desperate strategies into nostalgia" (582).

Though Reagan's presidential terms were wrought with hardship – the 1980s saw the last

vestiges of the Cold War, several economic recessions, and a rise in crime rates, among

other issues – he continued to appeal to the public because he allowed them the illusion

of prosperity, an illusion, according to Alford, founded on the principles of narcissism

and group psychology.

David Gartman, in his article "Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Post-

Fordism?," also views the 1980s as a breeding ground for narcissism and the lauding of

individuality over collective prosperity. He argues that the tactics corporate America

used to try to alleviate the burden recession placed on the nation only helped to intensify

the devastation. Corporations began to leave the United States,

> abandoning industrial cities and millions of unionized blue-collar workers.
> The professional-managerial class that engineered the restructuring
> experienced a rapid enrichment, leading to a growing income inequality.
> This in turn encouraged a further fragmentation of the marketplace, as
> more and more manufacturers began to court the upscale market of newly
> enriched yuppies who craved distinctive goods to testify to their fortune
> (Gartman 134).

Combined with the scandal created by the Iran-Contra affair and the aid the US

government sent in their attempt to overthrow the Nicaraguan government, these

economic issues led to a change in the way the rest of the world viewed the United States government. It also brought about a change in the way the rest of the country viewed those who lived in the cities, who where able to get rich in spite of – or perhaps because of – economic hardship.[119]

The North American culture industry, however, did not experience such a recession. The 1980s in the United States was a decade that encapsulated the importance of culture industry and capitalism to the North American way of life. The 1980s, as Chris Lehmann mentions in *Revolt of the Masscult*, brought about the advent of the modern cultural studies movement. He writes, "Beginning in the 1980s, as tenured American culture critics began experimenting with the Birmingham School's fledgling theories of subcultural revolt as class politics by other means, a stunning valorization of all American mass cultural expression was underway. The modern cultural studies movement was born" (Lehmann 39). This valorization of mass culture was an important turning point in the way in which academics not only viewed mass culture products, but also how they criticized and embraced postmodern narratives, artwork, etc., that incorporated popular culture into their content and frameworks. As Larsen suggests, "By the early 1980s the question of postmodernity has begun to take the theoretical wing of the humanities by storm, sparking 'debate' – and a veritable culture industry of its own – that is still under way" (Larsen, *North by South* 7). Not only was postmodernism important for authors and critics, it also infected theorists and policy makers with its often chaotic popular influences. By this time, academic and fictional appropriations of the culture industry became paradoxically part of the culture industry once again, completing the continually repetitive circle inherent in the postmodern vortex.

American Psycho is very much a product of Reagan's America. Like Abreu's *Dulce Veiga*, it is a product of its time and place, reflecting the cultural and economic atmosphere of its country of origin. Beyond this similarity, however, the two novels appear to share nothing in common– though both are written in first person and are set in the chaos created by the metropolis, *Dulce Veiga* is a novel about searching, about trying to find an exit. *American Psycho* has no escape, as evidenced by its last line: "THIS IS NOT AN EXIT" (Ellis 399). And although the narrator of Ellis's novel does want an exit from his troubles, his need and his search in no way parallel Abreu's narrator's desperate yearning and his quest for freedom from madness. Yet, what links these two novels is the importance of popular culture saturation, the way in which their cities have been overtaken by commodities. The level of saturation in each narrative acts as a catalyst for our madmen's lack of mediators – neither narrator can find release from madness because of the insidious, far-reaching influence popular culture casts on their societies. Of course, *Dulce Veiga* and *American Psycho* by no means come to the same conclusion about how the madman must deal with his abandonment. Nor do the two novels present similar madmen. Yet these disparate lunatics lure the reader into coming to similar conclusions about the role of the mediator in the madman's life and the role of the madman in society at large.

Before we can get into a comparison between the two texts, however, we need to have some background on Ellis's *American Psycho*. The novel is narrated by Patrick Bateman, who at first appears to be a normal New York yuppie, a Wall Street financier who spends most of his time buying the best, eating the best, drinking the best, and wearing the best, all in vast quantities. The first one hundred pages or so of the book

reveal the monotony of Patrick's life, as he runs through list after list of what his friends are wearing, what they eat, where they eat, and all the other details of what they consume in music, art, business, or pleasure. Though at times we do get disturbing glimpses into Patrick's rather demented psyche – several times he thinks about stabbing his friends, shouts death threats to his dates or mentions that he may be hallucinating – nothing he says seems too ominous. He is, as his girlfriend says, "the boy next door" (Ellis 20). By page 130, however, we begin to realize that Patrick is not the harmless, vapid yuppie he appears. Instead of the monotonous, sometimes boring narration that started Patrick's tale, we encounter a fast paced, violent episode in which the narrator blinds and stabs a homeless man, completing the brutal deed by stomping on the man's little dog. This act of violence begins a trend that will continue through the rest of the book. Most of Patrick's narration consists of the minutia of everyday life, set out in small chapters is titles like LUNCH or NELL'S or SUMMER. Yet interspersed throughout these seeming inanities and consumer orgies are Patrick's 'real' orgies, his violent rapes, murderous rampages, insane police chases, and cannibalistic blackouts. His mundane titles turn into descriptions of these actions, presented with the same calm demeanor as the others – KILLING DOG, KILLING CHILD AT ZOO, TRIES TO COOK AND EAT GIRL.

Though these psychotic aspects in the novel take up very little space as compared to the rest of its content, this aspect of the text shapes how the reader views Patrick and how he or she reacts to the world in which he lives. By the end of the novel, the horrific chapters and the quotidian ones become interchangeable, as Patrick seems to become madder than he was. He cannot narrate a normal day any longer without mentioning a violent undertaking or a blackout, or feeding a girl's brain to a dog. Yet, even though the

novel seems to move forward, no plot emerges from the text. There is no story to follow, no quest or search, no coming of age or descent into madness. Though we do not know it at the beginning, Patrick is mad from the onset and through it seems as if his madness grows throughout the text, this growth has no significance behind it. It does not stem from any psychological factor that we know of, nor can we guess at why or how such madness can progress, since we do not know what caused his madness in the first place.[120] He could be growing mad because of his cannibalism or because of a genetic flaw or suppressed trauma. This lack of plot and lack of psychological underpinning for Patrick's madness distances the novel from *Dulce Veiga*, which we defined by these specific things – the detective's search for meaning and Pedro's influence on the narrator's madness.

Most critical responses to *American Psycho* emphasize what the novel lacks, be it plot, psychology, artistry, or morality. Rosa Eberly, in her book *Citizen Critics: Literary Public Spheres*, considers over eighty articles and books written about Ellis's novel. She notices a trend of denouncing and decrying the novel when the book was first published. Simon and Schuster, the original publishers of the text, refused to publish it. When it was published, several woman's groups, bookstores, and activist groups boycotted the novel. One group boycotted everything Knopf, the publisher, published that year. Several articles were published in popular magazines, including *Spy* and *Time*, which included short excerpts from the text (from the more graphic rape and murder scenes) and condemned the novel on moral grounds. Eberly notes, "Many writers in the literary public sphere feared the potential of *American Psycho* to reproduce society's values, that is, to cause more violence toward women and more conspicuous consumption – of things

and people" (Eberly 126). These critics considered the book to be a how-to manual on rape and murder, one that not only debased women wholesale, but that, in its monotonous tone, also encouraged such behavior.[121]

Other critics of the novel have noticed this trend in criticism. Marco Abel, in *Violent Affect*, looks at how Mary Harron's film version of the novel evokes a very different response to the violence inherent in the text and how this new version renewed interest in rethinking how to read the original. When reviewing how others treat the text, Abel states, "From the beginning, critics have concentrated on three related questions about Ellis's novel: whether the text's violence is immoral or not, whether *American Psycho* is a successful satire or not, and whether the incessant repetitiveness and flatness of the book's prose indicates a satirical purpose or mere lack of authorial skill" (Abel 39). Abel's own reaction to the novel does not center on any of these questions. Instead, he urges readers and critics alike to focus on the affective quality of the text and insists that the novel and the film need to be read and watched together in order to fully understand the importance of Ellis's work. For Abel, though the book is partly satire, its point is not in condemning society, but in eliciting an affective response from the reader, aside from any judgment, moral, aesthetic, or otherwise.

Laura Tanner, in her book *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction*, also tries to save *American Psycho* from both censorship and aesthetic scorn. Tanner reads the text from a Marxist standpoint, comparing women's bodies in the text to commodities, without subjectivity. For her, Bateman's violence is a commodification process that turns human beings into "undifferentiated matter" (Tanner 101). According to Tanner, this commodification, as a central theme in the text, is a

combination of products of the culture industry and aesthetics, and recognition of this is central to understanding the novel. She writes, "Ellis's narrative, despite his claims to the contrary, is neither pure violence nor pure art; by responding to it as one or the other, we ignore the process and the consequences of his translation of cultural material into artistic form" (Tanner 114). In this way, Tanner encourages readers to look beyond the violence and supposed mediocrity of the text. She goes on to note that "we need not abdicate our access to particular texts; instead, we should reclaim our powers as readers from them" (114). For Tanner *American Psycho* is not something that should be thrown away – it is a challenge that should be tackled, not denied.

An important point to note in all of these readings of Ellis's novel, however, is the need to justify one's point of view. If the critic condemns the novel, then he or she tries to talk others into condemning it and feels the need to show readers exactly why it is so vile. If the critic tries to actually critique the novel, then they feel the need to defend it first and to match their critiques with their defense. The value of the novel is always suspect, just like its narrator. I am not, however, going to defend or condemn *American Psycho*. Its merits have been discussed far more seriously and with better clarity elsewhere. In this study, we are not looking at how well a novel is written or whether or not it is morally right or wrong to read it in the first place. *American Psycho*'s very controversial status qualifies it for our consideration – its depiction of madness in the 1980s, at the height of postmodern culture industry consumption, is valid *because* of the extreme reactions to the novel. It is a work that forces a reaction, whether one believes the novel is satire or not. And the polemic created by its publication only furthers the need to look at the novel not through its violence or its aesthetics (though these aspects of

259

the text should not be ignored), but by way of its commentary on madness, on the psychotic aspects of American society. Patrick Bateman is, after all, an *American psycho*.

First, therefore, we must consider a very important question: though Patrick Bateman is a psycho, is he mad by our definition of postmodern madness? Does he fit our criteria? Several critics consider *American Psycho* a postmodern novel, though not all actually define what they mean when they name it as such. Tanner believes the novel to be postmodern because of its lack of psychological underpinnings, which sets the novel beyond the postmodern frustration of plot and character. She writes, "this novel's refusal to answer our demand for psychological narrative not only frustrates but disturbs us. Ultimately, the relentless force of a text that promises but never delivers, that posits as verity what we have no way of verifying or rejecting, pushes the reader into a narrative world with very few stable points of reference" (Tanner 110). The novel is thus a world unto itself, a signifier without a fixed referent or signified. It is the extreme of a certain kind of postmodernism: as Tanner goes on to state, "The novel's lack of closure, characterization, and plot make it archetypally postmodern; its subject matter, however, strips away our theoretical interest in play even as it entraps us in a game not of our own making" (112). The violence of the text, mixed with its tone and intended audience, according to Tanner, strips the novel of its impact. The novel itself is a game, but a game none of us would really want to play. This, then, for Tanner, is Ellis's commentary not only on the consumerist society in which Patrick Bateman lives, but also on the society that produced such a text.

Patrick W. Shaw, in his book *The Modern American Novel of Violence*, also comments on Ellis's postmodernism, though Shaw does not view Ellis's machinations with the same eye as Tanner. While Tanner sees the novel as worthy of criticism, even taking into account its violent scenes, Shaw claims that "to analyze such scenes would in itself be a bit psychotic" and goes on to state that these violent outbursts "defy intellectual discourse. If Ellis has put his fiction beyond art, he certainly has put it beyond textual criticism" (Shaw 194). Though I would disagree with Shaw on this point, some of his criticism of the text is enlightening. Shaw believes that Ellis's characters, "depict the absolute worst consequence of a post-industrial urban life made grotesque by the new technology" and mentions "postmodern excess" when describing the lives these idlers lead (188). Shaw also notes that Ellis reveals his postmodern aesthetics when he borrows his title and his narrator's name from Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho*. As Shaw notes, "The 'bate' pun and the baiting motif, therefore, should warn us that Ellis intends that we see something more than clever word play and disgusting sexual images in his narrative" (195). Here, Shaw does not state that Ellis's postmodern tendencies make for a successful narrative – he only points to the fact that Ellis *intends* such tactics to lead to something more. This reading of the text, with its inherent aesthetic and value judgments, label the text postmodern but do not allow it to be successfully postmodern.

We are not here, however, to prove the novel's postmodernist tendencies – it is enough to note that others have done this already and move on with our own investigation. We must now ask whether Patrick Bateman is mad, which seems to be a foregone conclusion. Of course he is mad – he is the American psycho, after all. But how can we label his madness, how can we make it logical? If there is no psychology

261

behind his madness, then how are we to understand his psyche? I would argue that we do not need to label him at all. Instead, we need to look at the clues Patrick offer us, albeit unintentionally. First, we need to notice his status in society. He presents himself as one of many, as part of a faceless multitude of other yuppies, who all share the same tastes, the same ideas, and the same agendas. From the very beginning of the novel the people Patrick meets and mingles with all appear interchangeable, without true form, and everyone in his circle, not just Patrick, see life this way. In a conversation Patrick has with his girlfriend Evelyn, he wonders why Evelyn has decided to date him, instead of someone else. He mentions another friend of his, Tim Price, as a suitable candidate:

> "He's rich," I say.
> "*Everybody's* rich," she says, concentrating on the TV screen.
> "He's good-looking," I tell her.
> "*Everybody's* good-looking, Patrick," she says remotely.
> "He has a great body," I say.
> "*Everybody* has a great body now," she says (Ellis 23).

In Evelyn's view, all men are the same – not because they share all share some common inherent maleness, but because they are all rich, good-looking, and have great bodies. Both Evelyn and Patrick consider only the surface features of a man in their contemplation of what matters to a woman. And neither can come up with an attribute that this particular man does not share with any other. *Everybody* is the same, Patrick no less than Price. Judging by the way Evelyn answers Patrick's questions, she does not even care about the conversation, though her boyfriend is suggesting passing her off to some other man. The television is more important than whom she dates. For her, the two men are equal, the same, interchangeable, and could be switched with any other man in their social bracket. Details, for Evelyn, are boring and what makes a man individual does not matter. The subject is not worth her time.

This interchangeability and reliance on surface to discover identity is not just a singular occurrence in the text. Every time Patrick goes out to dinner with colleagues they inevitably recognize one another, or others in the restaurant or bar or club, by the wrong name. Patrick is "surprised by Price's inability to recognize co-workers" and even has arguments with his friends as to who is actually sitting at the next table (Ellis 50). Patrick acknowledges this tendency as being inevitable and at one point ponders what might lurk behind such interchangeable surface features. Towards the end of the novel he notes, "As [Price] leaves I'm wondering and not wondering what happens in the world of Tim Price, which is really the world of most of us: big ideas, guy stuff, boy meets the world, boy gets it" (384). Patrick, for a moment, thinks about trying to peer past Price's sameness. Yet beyond the familiar name-brand clothes and three hundred dollar hair cut, so similar to Patrick's own, Bateman imagines nothing more than what he sees in his own life, and in the lives of so many others: big ideas, guy stuff. Vague, ambiguous terminology that has no real depth. The obtaining and keeping of money, influence, and power. Price, underneath it all, is no different from Patrick or from any other yuppie. And contemplating what lies beneath Price's façade may not be worth pondering. Patrick thinks about it casually, wondering and not wondering. He muses. He is not actually concerned about what makes Price tick, and since Price lives in the world most of them share, he cannot be bothered with his own motives. Perhaps this is why *American Psycho* contains no references to psychology or to what makes the psycho the way he is: Patrick really does not care either way.

Many critics have noted the importance of interchangeability in Ellis's novel. John W. Aldridge, in his book *Talents and Technicians: Literary Chic and the New*

Assembly-line Fiction, recognizes the significance of such characterization and writes,

"People in [Bateman's] view are things that have no identity – as he has none – beyond

the kind of clothes they wear and the food they eat. Style, indeed, is the man and that is

all he is. Therefore, people can be used, consumed, and discarded just as easily as any

product" (Aldridge 143). The identical nature of so many of the characters in *American*

Psycho allows Patrick to see them as commodities, as things that can be consumed

because they are all surface and no depth. They are not individuals, but assembly-line

products. Of course, interchangeability is not reserved solely for Patrick's male

acquaintances. Women are not immune to this mutability either. The women Patrick

seduces (and murders) are ambiguous, without definition. When musing over which girl

he should end up with, Patrick answers his own question by stating, "everyone is

interchangeable anyway. […] It doesn't really matter" (Ellis 379). Patrick has no

preference, sees no need in having to make a choice. One is as good as another, really.

Even critics like Shaw fall victim to the facelessness of Bateman's ambiguous friends. In

his criticism of the novel Shaw claims that Patrick kills and dissects Luis Carruthers, who

then later appears alive and well. Shaw is, in fact, referring to Paul Owen, the only

yuppie Patrick murders – Bateman beats and degrades Luis (a closet homosexual yuppie

who tries to proposition him) but never actually kills him. By confusing the names of the

two characters, Shaw perpetuates Ellis's point: excessive commodification leads to the

uniformity of character, at least on the surface. And because the late capitalistic world

only notices surface, we cannot escape the interchangeability of human forms, devoid of

any real humanity.

This confusion of character (and characters) seems to place Patrick at the center of the universe, as a perfect representative of normal society. He is one among many who share the same goals, dreams, and desires and could therefore be an archetype, the poster child for conservative America. He seems to have achieved what Abreu's narrator wants – the anonymity of conformity, the illusion of normality. Yet, there are complications to this theory. First, we need to note that the information we receive from the novel is filtered through Patrick. As Tanner states, "The American psycho has no psyche; in refusing to lend him one, Ellis also refuses to lend his readers a category through which to differentiate themselves from this killer" (Tanner 104). The narrator's lack of a psyche is a literary ploy, a way to trap the reader into sharing the psycho's own vision of the world. James R. Giles, in his book *The Space of Violence*, posits this abnormality of narration as part of the novel's psychotic nature. He writes, "There is nothing between the reader and a first-person narrator, who is on some level clearly mad. There is thus no external 'normal' vision in the text, almost no recognition that such a rational and controlled norm exits" (Giles 161). Giles is quick to note that we cannot believe everything Patrick tells us – though he may believe everything he experiences, we cannot. Yet, he also notes that we have no other set of references, no concrete norm by which to steer. This makes for a deceptively complicated narration. Tanner agrees with this reading, stating, "The reader finds him- or herself forced to negotiate a text that asserts narrative omnipotence and seems to deny the reader even the power of resistance. Ellis's narrator wields his power unchecked so that he acts on the reader in much the same way that the psycho acts on his victims" (Tanner 111). For Tanner, resistance is futile. The reader, like Patrick's other victims, has no choice but to undergo his

machinations and savagery – as narrator, Patrick has ultimate control over the information provided to his audience.

Though we could say the same thing about *Dulce Veiga*, that we must accept each narrator's worldview because of the first person narration of each text, Patrick is not a reporter, like Abreu's protagonist. Though the two are both obsessed with popular culture icons, they do not narrate their obsessions in the same way. We believe Abreu's narrator presents facts because of his profession – as a journalist he is supposed to gain distance from his subject. Patrick, however, does not want distance, cannot see both sides of an issue. We cannot take him at his word and therefore cannot believe the New York Patrick narrates is the only one that exists. We are implicitly informed of this from the very beginning of the novel, as Patrick and Tim Price drive through the streets of Manhattan in a taxi. Outside the taxi the streets are littered with bums and graffiti – "ABANDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTER HERE" (the first line of the novel) and "FEAR," written in "blood red lettering," distract Bateman from his conversation with Price (Ellis 3). Price counts the bums he sees, complains about "the trash, the garbage, the disease, about how filthy this city really is," and mentions "the joke is, the punch line is, it's all in this city – nowhere else, just here, it sucks" (4). The lifestyle the two men covet has nothing to do with the city through which they ride. The apartment buildings they inhabit, the office buildings in which they work, their own lifestyles, try to mirror a modernist aesthetic, one focused around abstract thought and formalist tastes. Yet, the city that surrounds them, the chaotic, mass culture influenced, eclectic streets, are the actual reality of the place. The life outside the cab, which distracts both Bateman and Price from their conversations, clashes with their own vision of what the city should be.

As Price mentions to the taxi driver, "I could stay living in this city if they just installed Blaupunkts in the cabs" (4). If Price could ride around town with a high priced stereo system in every cab, he would be able to drown out reality and live happily ever after. These yuppies want to ignore the rest of society, separated in their own little microcosm, a New York City relevant only to those in the know.

Patrick, because he is part of this subset, has no way to connect to those who do not share the lifestyle he covets. When Patrick tries to talk to his doorman he notes, "I'm greeted by the expressionless mask of the doorman's heavy, stupid face. I am a ghost to this man, I'm thinking. I am something unreal, something not quite tangible, yet still an obstacle of sorts" (Ellis 71). The doorman is not in Patrick's social class and Bateman therefore sees him as stupid and without emotion, a stereotype of the working class. Yet it is the doorman who ignores Patrick, who forces the narcissist to rethink his place in society, at least for a moment. In the doorman's world, Patrick is a ghost, an obstacle that needs to be ignored, set aside as something too far beyond normality. This hints that there is a much larger society existing beyond the boundaries of the insular realm Patrick and his friends inhabit – and this society shuns or ignores what it sees as different.

We can see this clearly when Patrick stays too late at a club and encounters "punk rockers, blacks, fewer Wall Street guys, more bored rich girls" (Ellis 198). Patrick tries to fit in, tries to be a part of this new scene, yet the girls he propositions tell him, "Go back to Wall Street" and call him a "Fucking yuppie" (199). His own response to their hostility is confusion: "And they say this even though my suit looks black in the darkness of the club and my tie – paisley, Armani, silk – is loosened" (199). Patrick is not used to interacting with other people, people who are not interchangeable, who do not wear the

267

same clothes he does and know the same people. Because of this, he tries to fit in the best way he knows how, by loosening his tie and appearing to wear black. Yet to these people, who represent of a much larger part of the population of New York, yuppies are things to be despised. They know a yuppie by his tie and his suit and mark Patrick as something to be ridiculed. Their responses to him are to shake their heads and walk away – they reject his appearance and his need to be a part of the crowd.

We can say, then, that though Patrick is part of a faceless mass, the group to which he belongs is actually outcast. The rest of society wants to do what so horrifies Patrick when he sees it written on a bathroom wall: "Kill… All… Yuppies" (Ellis 374). Society's animosity places Patrick, and the rest of his colleagues, in a unique position. Though they lack identities and think that they represent all that is cultured and good about New York society, they are actually Others. This is what makes *American Psycho* such a violent work, aside from the actual violence perpetrated by Bateman. Shaw considers Bateman the perfect representative of the 'normal' 1980s consumer. In his estimation, "Bateman is no monster at all. He is quite typical of a society obsessed with 'stuff' and media status. […] His fascination with serial killers proves only that he shares interests with millions of other celebrity-obsessed Americans […]. In other words, Bateman is disturbingly normal, if 'normal' is defined by the democratic process of the majority rule" (Shaw 196). While I would agree that the novel does speak to the incarceration of the individual and the problems inherent in extreme consumerism, I do not believe that Patrick is supposed to be a representative of the 'normal' American citizen. Patrick only thinks he is normal. He assumes his crowd is the majority. And because the narrator assumes he is in the majority, we are led to assume this as well. Yet

in reality, normal for Patrick is abnormal to us, just as our lives would be abnormal to him. The question of normality is thus a moot point, for normal is an ambiguous word in this text, as ambiguous as Patrick's own identity. Normal is faceless consumerism, but it is also the punk rocker who condemns the yuppie and the man who wrote on the bathroom wall – it all depends upon perspective. Are we to subsume ourselves in Bateman's narrative and accept his definition of normal or are we better served to fight against his insistence on sameness and try to hold our own opinions in the face of his domination?

This questioning of normality allows us to look not only at Bateman in a different light, but also allows us to see his city for what it really is. The New York presented in the text, the implicit New York that lives just beyond Patrick's line of sight, is not the consumer play-land Patrick thinks it is, though this is an important aspect of the city's many façades. It is also "the crying bum, the black kids on crack rapping along to the blaring beatbox, the clouds of pigeons flying overhead looking for space to roost, the ambulance sirens, the honking taxis, the decent looking babe in the Betsey Johnson dress," the details that fade as Patrick, hopped up on Valium, drools over a red Lamborghini (Ellis 114). This New York, a metropolis that, like São Paulo, contains a hybrid of cultures, is the New York that subtly underlies Bateman's personal world. He may try to drown out this version city with loud stereos, drugs, or other high tech items, yet it will always remain the setting of his drama, an influence in his life. This is why, when his madness seems to become too much, he must leave the city in order to spend the summer at the beach and why he must "consider that maybe a life connected to this city, to Manhattan, to my job, is *not* a good idea" (Ellis 292). Ellis's New York nurtures

Patrick's madness because it allows the yuppies and the bums, the blacks and the punk rockers, the doormen and the condo owners, to exist side-by-side, just as it allows Patrick's psychotic nature and his 'boy-next-door' appearance to inhabit the same body, yet never overlap. The setting of the text, then, just as in *Dulce Veiga*, allows madness to take hold because of the hybridity of the place, because of its own mad nature.

But if we are not supposed to see New York as only a consumer playground and should therefore not view Patrick as the archetypal consumer, then what conclusions should we make? The violence of Patrick's inner life suggests that we should see him not as an archetype, but as someone who wants to be one. He is a man who has lost himself in the pursuit of equilibrium. He tries with all his might to fit in. In a conversation with an old college friend, Patrick reveals just how much he yearns to be like everyone else. She asks Patrick, "If you are so uptight about work, why don't you just quit?" (Ellis 237). Patrick's reply is telling: "'Because,' I say, staring directly at her, 'I… want… to… fit… in'" (237). The message Patrick has for this woman is important to him. Instead of ignoring her, as he usually ignores all women, or idly toying with his own thoughts, Patrick looks directly at her. His words are carefully spoken and spaced, and though tinged with anger, are very clear. Patrick truly wants to be one of the crowd. He does not want to be set apart, due to money, or fame, or power. He wants to be like everyone else. He may try to have the best business card, or the best suit, or the best girlfriend, but that is because everyone does the same thing. Competition is promoted, as long as no one gets too far ahead. In this way, Patrick's life is the life of a man who wants to live the communal dream, the dream every yuppie shares, of consuming as much as one can as

fast as one can, assuming what is consumed is always the very best of whatever is available.

Yet, *American Psycho* is more complicated than simple consumerism and conformity. Though Bateman wants to fit in, the way in which he interacts with popular culture belies his facelessness even as it reinforces his lack of individuality. We must recognize that Patrick is more than just a man trying to fit in – he is a man trying to be the best *yuppie* he can be, the term *yuppie* implying more than just conservatism and a vapid adherence to Reaganomics. Patrick Bateman, besides being a violent psycho, is also a businessman; although we rarely ever see him work, we know that his work is a large part of what defines him. Berthold Schoene, in his article "Serial Masculinity: Psychopathology and Oedipal Violence in Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho," comments on Patrick's character. He writes, "it is important to see it not as the portrayal of an individual person *in extremis*, but as a case study of the predicament of a particular type of man within a specific socio-historical context. Patrick is a specimen of the Young Urban Professional, or "yuppie," the soon-to-be-extinct scion of modernity in an increasingly postmodern world" (Schoene 381). Though I do not agree that we need to define Patrick only by these terms, as a case study and not an individual, it is important to see him as a typical yuppie as well as a psycho.[122] Businessmen, for all their conservatism and capitalistic ways, are purveyors of culture. García Canclini mentions the importance of the businessman in *Hybrid Cultures*. He writes, "artists do not know the public, nor can they directly receive its appraisals of their works; businesspeople acquire a more decisive role than any other aesthetically specialized mediator […] and make key decisions on what should or should not be produced and communicated"

(García Canclini 37). For García Canclini it is not the artist who makes his or her work popular – instead, mediators, especially businessmen, act as brokers of culture, allowing their own tastes to trickle down to the masses. Their taste then starts to take on a gold standard, so that the businessman suddenly holds the deciding vote as to whether an aspect of art should or should not become a part of the culture industry. Though García Canclini refers to the inclusion of high art into everyday consumption and not specifically to anything already produced by the culture industry, his words can help to shed light on why Ellis chooses to make Patrick a Wall Street mogul.

Patrick occupies the position he does because of the unique place the businessman has in the culture of the 1980s. As a man of business, the yuppie has a specific purpose – he is a devotee of capitalism and all it signifies. He thinks himself to be at the center of all things, since he handles large amounts of money everyday, commands an astronomical salary, lives in one of the biggest and most well-known cities in the world, and sits on the cutting edge art, culture, and technological advances. And, as García Canclini states, "Massively spreading what some understand to be 'culture' is not always the best way to encourage democratic participation and artistic sensitization; because at the same time that mass distribution of 'select' art is a socializing action, it also is a procedure for securing the distinction of those who are familiar with it" (García Canclini 104). By placing cultural decisions into the hands of businessmen, we elevate the yuppie to an inflated level of importance. He is better than us not only because he sets trends and establishes taste, but also because he has the money and knowledge to facilitate an acquisition of such things. And if his taste in high culture is sound, his taste in all things cultural, high or low, must be sound as well. Thus, the businessman's relationship with

popular culture places him in a different realm than everyone else. He has all the right

answers to all the right questions, has the best video recorders, the best stereos, the best

paintings hanging on his walls, so therefore he must have wonderful taste. And vice

versa – his taste *must* connote the best. Conversations must thus invariably revolve

around culture and taste, a mixture of high and low. Ellis recreates this mixture in his

novel, where talk always turns toward judgments on the next new thing. Describing a

typical night, Patrick tells us, "Tonight the talk centers around Elmore Leonard's new

book – which I haven't read; certain restaurant critics – who I have; the British sound

track from *Les Misérables* versus the American cast recording; that new Salvadorian

bistro on Second and Eighty-third; and which gossip columns are better written – the

Post's or the *News*'s" (Ellis 94). These men and their girlfriends are setting the standard

for what the rest of the country *should* think (emphasis on should, since, being yuppies,

they do not really care if everyone else follows their lead or not).

Patrick, therefore, is caught in a paradox. He sets out to be an arbiter of taste, like

all his other friends. He is a businessman – but he is also a psycho, someone who rebels

wildly against the constraints society places on him. Bateman is therefore caught

between a need to create and a need to recreate. Like Mito, or Molina, or Binx, or any of

our other madmen, Bateman uses popular culture to fashion the way he sees and interacts

with his surroundings. Yet Patrick, unlike those others, appears to be nothing more than

a plagiarist, someone who cannot come up with his own ideas.   His words mimic what

he has read – we catch him "trying to remember a line from a review I saw in *New York*

magazine" (Ellis 99). In many instances throughout the novel Patrick envisions life as

directing a film (reminiscent of Mito's own directorial urges). He will "pan down to the

Post," or use a "slow dissolve," or leave a room through a "smash cut" (5, 8, 11). And

Patrick's use of moviemaking does not follow the same patterns as our other narrators'.

At one point in the novel Patrick tells us, "I am so used to imagining everything

happening the way it occurs in movies, visualizing things falling somehow into the shape

of events on a screen, that I almost hear the swelling of the orchestra, can almost

hallucinate the camera panning low around us" (265). Here, Patrick is conscious of his

co-opting of filmic techniques in his personal narration of his life. He recognizes that life

does not actually work as a film, that he has placed his own guidelines on how he will

perceive his surroundings. In this way he is like Abreu's narrator, knowing that his

actions stem from reflexes gained through exposure to the culture industry. Yet, Patrick

does not know the reasons behind these techniques. Things will fall into shape

"somehow." Patrick does not know how films actually work, nor does he recognize the

studied craftsmanship behind classical Hollywood film machinations. Instead, he

consumes films, assumes they all work in a certain way, and then repeats them in his own

life.[123] Patrick does not know how to use the terms he knows – he only knows how to

regurgitate them. He repeats not out of any urgent need, but by rote.

Thus, through Patrick and Abreu's narrator both have close, personal relationships

with popular culture, Patrick does not use the journalist's metaphors. Patrick's

relationship with popular culture is not one of comparison, but one of aggressive re-

creation. He does not *compare* his circumstances with a film, nor does he refer to

specific films in his descriptions. Instead, he simply lives a movie, plagiarizes a genre to

describe what happens *in real life*. The film is reality, reality film. Thus, Patrick's life

has no place for metaphors. Although he relies on popular culture to dictate his

worldview, he is not trying to live in a popular culture world; he *is* living in one. He is

not trying to fit in; he *is* fitting in. The distinction is temporal. Abreu's narrator looks to

the future, is searching for something more – he needs metaphors to give his life

meaning. He uses popular culture to fill in the gap left when Pedro disappeared. Patrick

lives in the present progressive tense, content to be in the moment, not looking for

anything beyond tonight's dinner reservation or the next person he will kill – his life does

not need meaning. His use of popular culture *is* a gap, re-creation without meaning.

David Eldridge, in his article "The Generic American Psycho," notices Patrick's

trend toward imitation. He notes Patrick's reliance on popular culture texts, including

fashion magazines and conservative music journalism, and claims that Patrick's murders

are actually reenactments of other serial killers or of slasher films.[124] Based on this

assumption, Eldridge then asks "whether Bateman's violence re-creates what he sees and

reads, just as he repeats everything else he reads, or whether it is another identity he is

trying on in his mind" (Eldridge 28). In this reading of the text, Patrick consumes film

and popular culture not only by watching it, but also by absorbing it and repeating it. Yet

we cannot know the intentionality behind Patrick's choices. Unlike the films he tries to

copy, his own life (not the life he tries to live, but the one depicted through his narration)

is without logic, causality, or motivation. Eldridge therefore wonders if Patrick's

recreation of popular violence is simple repetition, or if it is Bateman's way of trying to

forge a new, singular identity.[125]

Extrapolating from Eldridge's comments, we can come to understand how Patrick

Bateman works as a postmodern madman. The plagiarism of popular culture sources in

his narration, in the way he presents his life to us, speaks to Patrick's confusion between

'real' life, the life of the individual, and what the culture industry has fed him. This confusion can be compared to the bewilderment he experiences whenever his version of New York overlaps with the 'real' New York. His plagiarism is therefore a cause of his madness and a symptom – he cannot tell the difference between his individual reality and communal illusions and therefore tries to coerce the two to become one through forced integration. His madness is thus the repetition of what he sees *and* an identity he is trying out – it combines passive conformity and individualistic empowerment. For Giles, Patrick's lack of real relationships and focus on the outer man and not the inner individual creates "a surface existence completely without meaningful ties to the world outside the individual ego" (Giles 174). Giles believes that Patrick is utterly incapable of living beyond his own urges and needs. He is narcissistic to an extreme. If we consider Bateman as an *egocentric* maniac, then, as well as plagiarist, we need to rethink how he fits into society. His narcissism, combined with his need to fit in and his manipulation of popular cultural capital, creates his particular form of madness.

This madness manifests through Patrick's irregularities, which spread beyond his violence. He uses his flaws *and* conformities to his own advantage, thus confusing the urges behind his impulses. At times, Patrick is happy to be confused with someone else. Paul Owen thinks Patrick is Marcus Halberstam, "but for some reason it really doesn't matter […] it seems understandable; it doesn't irk me" (Ellis 89). Patrick knows this confusion should annoy him, that he should insist on his own name and individuality, but instead of correcting Paul, he uses this new (false) identity to his own advantage. Later in the novel he tortures girls using Marcus's name and finally kills Paul Owen still sporting Halberstam's identity. This kind of identity theft is a game to Patrick; in his conversation

with Paul, before Owen's demise, he tells himself, "Oh Halberstam you *are* an asshole" (215). Stealing someone else's name allows him to play a new part, to be sardonic asshole instead of the usual boy next door. And by taking charge of this new name he also separates himself from the masses – he sets himself up as a predator confronting prey.[126] Apart from society, both society at large and the society he finds in the yuppie community, Patrick sees himself as the only one who can manipulate reality. He is an individual here – the only individual – but this individuality comes at the cost of his own name.

Yet, at other times Patrick is perplexed at the confusion created by interchangeability, especially when it does not work to his advantage. Throughout the novel, he tries to confess to his crimes, tries to get others to see his 'real' self (which is in actuality just another mask). He tells Evelyn about a poster he saw in the subway "before I killed those two black kids" (Ellis 121). He adds, "I say all of this staring straight at Evelyn, enunciating precisely, trying to explain myself […] and I finally expect her to acknowledge my character" (121). Yet Evelyn does not recognize Patrick violent tendencies – she does not even listen to him. Instead, she is focused on another mistaken identity, staring at a woman whom she thinks is Ivana Trump. As Giles notes, "Bateman recalls Roderick Usher and other Poe protagonists who desperately and unsuccessfully try, through confession, to stop themselves from perpetrating horrific acts. The primary reason why Bateman's confession attempts repeatedly fail is that all his associates are too self-centered to listen to what he is saying" (Giles 173). Patrick may wish to stop his acts through confession, but Evelyn is caught up in her own version of reality, in which Patrick's nature does not actually matter. Here, Patrick's confession, as vital as it is to

him, is not as important as the sighting of a celebrity, however dubious the sighting. The possibility of Ivana not only trumps his words in Evelyn's eyes, but also distracts Patrick from what he was saying. He makes no more attempts to reveal himself, but instead swings around in his chair to get a look too. In this instance, Patrick's desires are thwarted by the very sameness he uses to his own advantage.

Thus, though he attempts to be the psycho he thinks he is in front of his friends, they never acknowledge his personal view of himself. He tells Evelyn about guns, but she does not listen. As Patrick notes, "my essence is eluding her" (Ellis 124). There is something about him that no one can grasp or that everyone simply wants to ignore. Even Patrick's telephone confession to his lawyer turns out wrong, for the lawyer not only thinks the message a joke left by a man called Davis, but also cannot believe that Patrick Bateman could do such things. The joke is not as funny as it could be because "Bateman's such a bloody ass-kisser, such a brown-nosing goody-goody, that I couldn't fully appreciate it" (387). Facelessness and interchangeability foil Patrick's plans to uncover himself because no one will listen to him. And if they do listen, they either mistake him for someone else or mistake his nature. As a businessman, as a yuppie, Patrick is therefore trapped – though he can manipulate others by way of their shortsighted, conformist consumption (of both goods and identities), he cannot truly win the game he has set out for himself because he is also subject to a lack of differentiation and an addiction to commodities.

Patrick's continued confessions point to his need to be different, his need for someone to notice what he has done. Though sameness has advantages, Bateman is too much of a narcissist to want to remain faceless. Even the book we read, his first person

account of his life and crimes, is a confession – in it he is able to control how we view him, how we see his world. Storytelling allows him to confess everything, in detail, to a captive audience. Yet, this, too, is a faulty declaration of guilt. Patrick knows he is nothing more than surface. He admits, "though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and […] maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable: *I simply am not there*" (Ellis 376-377). Patrick's masks have become so much a part of him that they are all he is, or at least all he sees of himself. His mask of madness and individuality is as real as his mask of conformity and interchangeability; the two cancel each other out. Tanner notes, "The narrative carefully denies the reader a clear sense of both the literal and the psychological space that Patrick Bateman occupies. […] His own position in the narrative is marked not by an empowered subjectivity but by his refusal to be contained in a single subject-position" (Tanner 103-104). Patrick is not meant to be singular, to be a subject that can be contained within a definition. Instead, as Tanner suggests, he is multiple – he does not have multiple personalities, but instead wears multiple masks.

Therefore, the real Patrick Bateman does not exist because he has become caught between communal illusions and personal needs. Because of this, his ultimate confession, the novel we read, can have no real meaning. Patrick tells us, "I gain no deeper knowledge about myself, no new understanding can be extracted from my telling. There has been no reason for me to tell you any of this. This confession has meant *nothing…*" (Ellis 377). *American Psycho* is without psychology because Patrick feels he can have no understanding of his own actions. His confusion is absolute, a madness that hovers between complete submission to the pressures of society and total dominance over

those who submit.[127] Yet, the fact that he tries to reason his way through his madness, that he acknowledges his madness at all, hints at a need for understanding. Though his tone may be overdramatic and his words indulgent, his dilemma is palpable – he needs to understand why he does what he does, but cannot find that understanding if no one will listen.

The most drastic aspects of Patrick's madness therefore stem from his need to find someone to listen. In order to understand how madness works in Ellis's text, we need to thus question what role liaisons plays in Patrick's life. Eldridge argues that if we are to believe that everything Bateman tells us is true (which he doubts), then Patrick's friends would have to be abnormally callous. Eldridge writes, "For Bateman to actually get away with murders that are so grotesque as to be absurd it requires the people around him to be so cold and self-absorbed as not to care or not to notice. Indeed, society would actually have to clean up the mess after him " (Eldridge 23-24). According to this reading of the text, society actually embraces Patrick in order to perpetuate the status quo. By covering up or overlooking an abnormality, society erases its effects. This would mean that society has no need for mediators – they accept Patrick for who he is on an abstract level, even if they do not individually acknowledge his monstrous nature. If this is the case, however, why does Patrick feel the need to confess? How can he come to terms with his need for acknowledgement? I would argue that Patrick Bateman wants a mediator, wants a connection to society that would allow him to come to terms with his madness, but society will not allow him this luxury.

In order to understand this claim, we need to look at how Patrick interacts with the men and women he admires (as opposed to his peers or those he considers beneath

280

him). For Giles, his "determined superficiality inevitably leads to a cult of celebrity" (Giles 166). Patrick always mentions Donald Trump as his main idol and has an interaction with Tom Cruise in the elevator of his building, where Cruise lives on the top floor. Giles believes that Patrick yearns for the fame these men have and reacts to his own lack of celebrity by acting out his violent urges. Yet, in at least one of the instances in which Patrick comes face to face with a popular culture icon, he reverses this process: instead of trying to make himself like the star, Bateman tries to make the star like him.

Patrick's first aborted epiphany occurs at a U2 concert, a live music event that Bateman dreads. He *hates* live music (a mantra he repeats frequently) and has been dragged to the concert by his girlfriend – Patrick agreed to come because Paul Owen would be there and he wanted to speak to Paul about an account. Once at the venue, Bateman tries to come in contact with his quarry – and as he sits down next to Paul, something untoward happens. He tells us, "when I sit down something strange on the stage catches my eye. Bono has now moved across the stage, following me to my seat, and he's staring into my eyes, kneeling at the edge of the stage" (Ellis 146). At this point in the text we have obviously entered into one of Patrick's fantasies – there is no way that what he narrates next could actually occur. Yet, the hallucination give us insight into how Patrick wants to gain acceptance, how he wants to interact with the rest of society. Here, Patrick does not stalk or mimic a celebrity, as he does with Trump or Cruise. Instead, Patrick is the center of attention – the star follows him, not the other way around. Bono, in Patrick's imagination (for we know this cannot actually be happening), recognizes Patrick, looks him in the eye, picks him out of the crowd and sees him as an individual. He even kneels at the edge of the stage, getting as close as he can, stooping to

Patrick's level. There is a connection here between two men who should have no connection. Patrick does not like this band, does not like live music, and Bono, a known political activist and liberal, should have no reason to be drawn to a man like Patrick. Yet, in Patrick's mind, the two are drawn to each other. Patrick has no real knowledge of Bono or U2, knows nothing about the band's history or music, and is therefore attracted not to Bono's individual nature or his personal message, but to his celebrity status. Patrick has formed a new version of Bono out a composite of what he believes celebrity ought to be and has overlaid this new version on top of the real singer. Here, Bono is not a man, not *a* celebrity, but is instead celebrity itself, a representative of the primal forces that compel the masses into fanatical worship.

Thus, the link between the singer and Bateman is more than simple interest. Patrick continues:

> Suddenly I get this tremendous surge of feeling, this rush of knowledge, and I can see into Bono's heart and my own beats faster because of this and I realize that I'm receiving a message of some kind from the singer. It hits me that we have something in common, that we share a bond, and it's not impossible to believe that an invisible cord attached to Bono has now encircled me and now the audience disappears and the music slows down, gets softer, and it's just Bono on stage – the stadium's deserted, the band fades away – and the message, *his* message, once vague, now gets more powerful […] and I hear it, can actually *feel*, can even make out the letters of the message hovering above Bono's head in orange wavy letters: 'I… am… the… devil… and I am … just… like… *you*…' (Ellis 146).

Here, Patrick believes he is receiving a message from U2's lead singer, a message that does not tell him what to do or how to dress or what to say. Instead, this message professes kinship, similarity through shared experience, not through forced conformity. This is not a celebrity Patrick needs to impress (like Tom Cruise) or needs to imitate (like Donald Trump) – their bond is a matter of shared communion, not hierarchy. The fact

282

that this bond resides only in Patrick's mind does not matter – the feelings the bond evokes are real even if the bond is not. The two men communicate through a connection that relegates everyone else elsewhere, outside the confines of the moment – the act of sharing places Bono and Patrick beyond the influences of the rest of the world, beyond disturbances or other worries. And their union is something Patrick never thought to find – a kindred soul, another devil. With this man he can be himself, reveal his inner demons and be believed. In this instant in time, Patrick sits beyond judgment and can simply *be*.

What matters here is that Patrick does not appear to be the one who initiates contact, nor is he the one who originates the invisible cord that draws the two together. Bono, the celebrity, is the man with the message, the one who admits his sympathy for the devil.[128] And though this whole passage is just a waking dream, part of Patrick's delusion, its fantastic qualities do not belie its importance. Here, Patrick tries to remake Bono in his own image. Patrick is at the center of the encounter, where he sets himself up as the object of the action, Bono as the subject. By doing so, he creates the perfect situation, where the celebrity bows down to the man. This should create the perfect mediator: a man who shares a bond of similarity with himself, but who also has the power and alacrity to be the devil on a world stage. Patrick's version of Bono is what Patrick wants to be. He sets trends, is the center of attention, can look like anything he wants to and get away with it. And by remaking Bono as the devil, Patrick sets the singer up as a surrogate personality, a fraternal twin who can do all the things Patrick cannot. It is a form of reverse plagiarism, with Patrick projecting himself onto another. In this way, Patrick can share his problems without having to relive them or retell them – the invisible cord that encircles the two of them negates a need for awkward, meaningless

communication. There is no need for confession here, only understanding. Through his

reworking of Bono, Patrick "can actually *feel*," can actually find what he has been

looking for through his violent and chaotic ways. This imaginary Bono could thus be a

mediator not because he can act as a perfect liaison between Patrick's madness and the

rest of the world, but because he can understand Patrick's madness by way of Bateman's

own terms. He is someone who can actually comprehend Patrick's predicament without

a need for psychology.

U2's lead singer, however, is not the perfect mediator for Patrick's madness

because he is a product of that madness, an imaginary figure cobbled together from bits

of celebrity fascination, narcissistic self-worth, and loneliness. Bono the devil cannot be

the mediator Patrick desires because Patrick is not willing to take an active role in the

relationship (however real it actually is). He watches the show, watches Bono's

performance, but only reacts through feeling, not through action. The two recognize each

other, but do nothing about their bond. The relief that Patrick feels therefore cannot last.

Patrick tells us,

> And then everyone, the audience, the band, reappears and the music
> slowly swells up and Bono, sensing that I've received the message […] is
> satisfied and turns away and I'm left tingling, my face flushed […]. But
> suddenly everything stops, as if a switch has been turned off, the backdrop
> flashes back to white. Bono – the devil – is on the other side of the stage
> now and everything, the feeling in my heart, the sensation combing my
> brain, vanishes and now more than ever I need to know about the Fisher
> account that Owen is handling and this information seems vital, more
> pertinent than the bond of similarity I have with Bono, who is now
> dissolving and remote (Ellis 147).

Though the connection between Bono and Patrick remains, as soon as Bono is no longer

kneeling to meet Patrick its potency diminishes. The rest of society returns, filling the

stadium once again with people, people who cannot understand Patrick's madness or his

relationship with the devil. Patrick's imagined version of Bono – Bono the devil – cannot remain mapped on top of the 'real' Bono when distance allows distraction. The singer may have triggered the same feelings Bateman looks for when he murders a girl – the flushed face, the feeling in his heart and mind – but such an influence cannot last. For Patrick, out of sight is out of mind. Only the immediate is pertinent, only that which is close by is pressing. By moving back across the stage, Bono moves out of Patrick's world, out of his limited, narcissistic center of the universe. Thus, though Patrick is able to create a potential mediator (at least in his imagination), similarity and celebrity cannot trump his own need to be the most important thing in his world. The mediator's role (real or perceived) cannot be completed because Patrick wants to be watched, wants to be the only thing Bono cares about, the only thing he notices. If an opportunity for commonality arises (real commonality, not the interchangeability he sees in his friends) it will only last as long as everything remains focused on Patrick. As soon as attention is turned in another direction, Patrick must find a new way to be the center of attention.

Patrick's other potential mediator meets a similar fate. Much later in the novel, toward the end of the narrative, Patrick is again confronted with a potential mediator, this time in the form of Jean, his secretary, "who is in love with me and who I will probably end up marrying" (Ellis 64). Though Jean is not Patrick's girlfriend, and never will be, she is the only girl he treats with any respect, or at least with any real attention. At first Patrick tries to get to know Jean, tries to understand her, as he does not try to understand other women. He is fascinated by her difference, for she is unlike the other women who have attracted him thus far. He even tries to warn her about his madness when she confesses her love to him, telling her, "Appearances *can* be deceiving" (378). And

285

during an intimate conversation with Jean at the appropriately titled restaurant Nowheres, Patrick thinks he has come to a startling new conclusion. In the middle of their conversation he thinks, "I'm startled by the suddenness of what I guess passes for an epiphany. There is nothing of value I can offer her. For the first time I see Jean as uninhibited; she seems stronger, less controllable, wanting to take me into a new and unfamiliar land – the dreaded uncertainty of a totally different world" (378). At this moment Jean takes on the characteristics of a potential mediator. She's now the stronger of the two, someone who could offer Patrick something more, something beyond the life he has led thus far. She could offer him uncertainty, an emotion that attracts and repulses him at the same time.

In this way, Jean, as a potential liaison, is very different from Bono. Unlike Bono the devil, whose power comes from his celebrity and whose bond with Patrick is mere illusion, Jean is real. The singer's allure is illusory and narcissistic – his has been created by his fans *and* by Patrick, the perfect combination of public and private, another madman. Jean, on the other hand, is Bono's opposite – she can offer Patrick a new world, not the same devilry repeated over and over. Patrick did not create her and she is not part of the yuppie scene. Jean is therefore the opposite of madness, an alluring, centered rationalism. With Jean Patrick could perhaps give up his madness, his lifestyle, and allow someone else to dictate his actions.

Yet Patrick is not convinced that Jean could actually be the mediator he thinks she could be. He muses, "I also know that one day, sometime very soon, she too will be locked in the rhythm of my insanity. All I have to do is keep silent about this and not bring it up" (Ellis 378). Patrick is once again drawn to inaction. If he remains quiet,

does not move, does not act, then Jean's potential will go unnoticed, wasted. All he has

to do is be himself and she will soon be just another woman trapped within the repetitions

of his madness. And, ironically, it is inaction itself that draws Patrick to her. As soon as

he thinks that his madness will simply subsume Jean, he adds, "yet she weakens me, it's

almost as if *she's* making the decision about who I am, and in my own stubborn, willful

way I can admit to feeling a pang, something tightening inside […]. I wonder if even

now […] she can see the darkening clouds behind my eyes lifting" (378-379). Patrick

knows why Jean is such a draw to him. She believes what she thinks she sees and her

belief is so strong that Patrick feels the urge to give in, to be the man she wants him to be.

Giving in is just another form of inaction, a way for Patrick to not have to deal with his

problems. Jean, at this moment, represents the potential change that Patrick desires, a

back way out of his madness. She could lighten his burden, lift the darkness from his

life, offer not a descent into hell but an ascent to a different plane.

But Jean's potential as a mediator does not even last as long as Bono's. Here,

Patrick is simply falling for the lure of a romantic finale, 'the love of a good woman.'

The scene is another plagiarism, drawn from any film or harlequin novel. And, for once,

Patrick knows that this plagiarism cannot actually help him. As soon as Patrick thinks

about his salvation, he also notes, "And though the coldness I have always felt leaves me,

the numbness doesn't and probably never will. This relationship will probably lead to

nothing… this didn't change anything" (Ellis 379). Using Jean as a mediator, as a way to

relate to the rest of the world, would only solve half of Patrick's problem. He would be

able to accept the world as it is, but would not be able to change his lack of feeling

toward it. Rationality, reality, acceptance – all the things Jean represents – would not

allow Patrick to remain outside himself, beyond his emotions. He could no longer be part of the audience, watching the scenes unfold.[129] Jean could relieve Patrick's narcissism, remake his worldview, but she would not be able to deal with his need for illusions. And imagination, hallucination, is key to Patrick's madness. Shaw recognizes this when he writes, "Bateman, like all of us, is free to imagine any horror that he chooses. Such imagining is one of the last sanctuaries against a society that has become impersonal and brutal beyond reason – but not beyond our wildest imagining" (Shaw 196). If Patrick embraced Jean as a mediator, he would have to leave behind this freedom and become what she wants him to be, a "shy" man, a "sweet" man (Ellis 378). And Patrick cannot leave his passion for hallucination behind him, just as he could not step out from behind his narcissism when Bono the devil offered relief. *American Psycho* cannot produce a mediator because Patrick is not willing to change, is not actually looking for a real escape.

We can therefore come to a conclusion about how postmodern madness works within *American Psycho*. Patrick Bateman lives in a world proscribed by his Otherness, by his need to be the best yuppie he can be. Patrick wants to live as everyone else does, be as normal as he can – at least by yuppie definitions – but cannot seem to balance his need for sameness and his need to be an individual, a predator among prey. Thus, though Patrick tries to define his life through an obsession with popular culture, with everything everyone else covets, he cannot seem to regulate his own selfishness within this context. Everything becomes confusion as he tries to walk the line between communal illusions and personal needs, between his need to fit in and his own narcissism. Patrick therefore turns to popular culture as a way to find, if not an intermediary, then at least someone

who will accept him. He tries to remake a popular culture icon in his own image. But this imaginary acceptance only lasts as long as Patrick's own fickle attention span and cannot lead to a true mediator. By creating an imaginary devil who appears just like him, Patrick only treats one aspect of his madness, his need for illusion. All too soon the other half of Patrick's insanity gets the better of him and rejects any solace this intermediary might provide. And the converse of this dilemma does not work either. By trying to use his secretary as a potential mediator, Patrick treats the other half of his madness, his narcissistic need for acceptance as an individual. Yet by giving into rationality, Patrick would negate his illusions, something he cannot bring himself to do. Thus Patrick condemns the mediators he desires, for by re-creating and re-imagining both popular culture icon and everyday woman, he destroys any potential arbitrator. Bateman becomes trapped by his own plagiarism.

The mediator, therefore, becomes inconsequential. By trying to remake others into potential confessors through his imagination, Patrick blurs the lines between reality and fantasy, between true mediators and false promises. By latching onto another's vision of himself, by trying to create a new mediator through a narcissistic need for approval, he also blurs the line between hallucination and rationality, between personal reality and false liaisons. By ignoring Patrick's need to be caught, by not providing a potential exit, society only encourages such confusion. In Ellis's world, the chance to find any real bond between ourselves and anyone else is minimal at best. We are all lost, each in our own narcissistic realms. Madness in this context, then, is perhaps not such an important matter. We are all mad in our own ways because we cannot find connections, cannot find a middle ground between conformity and narcissism. Ellis's madman is

therefore similar to Abreu's in one all-important aspect – neither Patrick Bateman nor Abreu's journalist will ever truly find a permanent escape from their afflictions. Liaisons do not exist in the contemporary metropolis of the 1980s; everyone else is mad, lost, or simply does not care. The mediator, and perhaps even madness, has become just one more object caught up in the chaotic postmodern city, overlooked, adrift, misplaced – vanquished by plurality and the all-consuming needs of the culture industry.

CHAPTER V

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

I have written this dissertation in the hope of understanding the complex and often chaotic trope of madness and the intricate associations it creates between madman and society in the postmodern world. The advent of postmodernism and its relationship with popular culture changed the way the madman interacts with society. Foucault, in *Madness and Civilization*, implies that though civilization's interactions with madness have always been in flux, certain distinct structures, upon which these interactions are based, have constantly remained intact. Throughout his history of madness, Foucault reiterates the importance of the relationship between society, the madman, and the mediator that allows the two oppositional forces to relate to one another – this structure provides the backbone for much of his analysis. We could even define Foucault's study as an examination of mediation over time, an analysis of the different forces that occupied the role of the mediator throughout history. This position, whether filled by the church, the doctor, or the asylum, creates a buffer between society and the madman, allowing society to embrace or reject the lunatic as it sees fit. In Foucault's history, each age is defined by its mediators and how society uses these intermediaries to manipulate, ignore, or cure madness. Seen in this sense, mediation is an outgrowth of society, a tool by which civilization tries to control not only madness itself, but also perceptions of and interactions with madness.

Beyond the age of Enlightenment, however, beyond even the age of Freud, this

triptych breaks down, becomes contaminated. As we have seen, in the postmodern

world, where logic and reason no longer retain their pride of place, madness takes on new

characteristics and society's role in containing the mad becomes more complicated. This

rejection of all the Enlightenment revered, this embrace of Don Quixote's dilemma,

provides the right environment for a new definition of madness and a reconfiguration of

Foucault's implied structures. In the postmodern age, an age defined by its interactions

with popular culture, the madman is still the outcast, the Other, society's reject. Yet, he

is also a product of the culture industry, an entity who defines his world by mass-market

strictures and standards. Like the rest of the postmodern world, the postmodern madman

lives and dies by his relationship to popular culture illusions. I therefore argue that

postmodern madness is the confusion created when the euphoria of living in a mass-

produced fantasy world clashes with the need to retain one's individual nature within

such a realm. In this environment, the postmodern madman, caught in the struggle

between personal truths and mass illusions, becomes the source of any liaisons that may

be placed between society and madness. The mediator, in this case, is not an outgrowth

of society's need to confine, but is instead a result of the individual's need to conform,

not to society's rules, but to society's illusions. Postmodern depictions of madness thus

suggest an evolutionary progression of Foucault's structures, altering the form of the

mediator.

By defining our study chronologically, beginning with the 1960s, when

postmodernism first began to gain prominence, and ending with the 1980s, at the height

of its power, we have been able to see how this definition of postmodern madness, and its

affect on the triptych of madman-mediator-society, has evolved over the course of the

postmodern age. We can see, in both these novels, that postmodern society does not designate specific mediators between madness and society. Trapped between communal illusions and a need for personal identity, the postmodern madman must instead become his own liaison, a living incarnation of the connection for which he yearns. The two works chosen to represent the 1960s both present protagonists obsessed with filmic illusions, illusions based on the code of classical Hollywood cinema and the role of the celebrity within that code. Though Binx, the narrator of *The Moviegoer*, and Mito, the narrator of *Zona sagrada*, do not react to or interact with these illusions in the same way, the fact that they both try to use film and celebrity as liaisons links the two novels thematically. In the end, neither man can find meditation through classical Hollywood films and therefore both men remake themselves into representations of filmic symbols, ones that could potentially fill in the gap left vacant by false or broken mediators. Mito becomes the ultimate fan, transforming himself into his idol. Yet this transformation does not work and he reverts to the form of a dog, a form that, while grotesque and degrading, at least allows him to live outside the bounds of humanity and leave behind his obsessions. Mito therefore becomes his own mediator, recreating himself into a form that will allow him to interact with society. Binx, in a strangely similar fashion, also becomes his own mediator. Though his interactions with film differ from Mito's and his level of madness is vastly different, his end justifies a comparison. Binx, at the end of the novel, transforms himself into an Actor, the chimera-like archetype of the contemporary man. By doing so, he becomes his own mediator, the perfect liaison between society and his particular form of madness.

The works we have used to define the 1970s give us a slightly more complex

reading of how the madman can come to terms with his madness. The main characters in both *El beso de la mujer araña* and *Breakfast of Champions* are united by their use of specific forms of illusions to define their worlds. In these novels, the protagonists turn to mediators that conform to specific rules and codified laws, yet also allow the mind to expand through the use of fantasy and escapism. In *El beso*, Molina and Valentín, the protagonists of the novel, re-define their incarceration through the rules and cultural traditions of classical Hollywood cinema. In *Breakfast*, Dwayne Hoover, Kilgore Trout, and the narrator turn to science fiction as a way to interact with the rest of society. Though all these characters use classical Hollywood cinema and science fiction in different ways, their use of such genres define their roles as madmen. Both cinema and science fiction need a specific type of audience in order to function, an audience that is aware of the codes and rules imbedded in each work and is able to apply those codes in their understanding of and participation in the fantasy and escapism of each format.

Thus, the mediation classical Hollywood cinema and science fiction provide can only occur when these madman serve as mediators for one another, for only they can fully read the cultural codes, both personal and popular, used by the others. In this sense, then, mediation cannot be *only* an outgrowth of society, because while mass culture may provide the vocabulary with which to address these men, it cannot provide a way to understand them. Mediation in these novels, therefore, must come from a combination of madness and reason, order and chaos – and can only be provided by other madmen. This form of mediation, which disconnects the madman from society, has the potential to create new communities of madmen, utopias (or dystopias) wherein the lunatics run their own asylum, free from any outside taints. Such a rupture in Foucault's triptych could

imply a revolutionary new way of perceiving madness and its relationship with both civilization and reality. Yet, in both *El beso* and *Breakfast*, this potential implodes – none of the madmen can maintain a society separate from reality for very long. Eventually, the outcasts must come back into contact with the world and lose the potential mediators they once possessed.

In the 1980s, however, postmodern madness and its need for mediators once again evolve. In the works we have chosen to represent this decade we can see a negation of mediation. Both *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?* and *American Psycho* present a depiction of the postmodern metropolis, focusing on how the city and its culture proscribe the madman's reaction to his surroundings. The postmodern city – *Dulce Veiga*'s São Paulo and *American Psycho*'s New York – is the creator of culture in these contexts, the entity that feeds the madman his illusions. In *Dulce Veiga*, the protagonist lives by his use of popular culture metaphors, metaphors provided by the city in which he lives. In *American Psycho*, Patrick Bateman, the titular psycho, plagiarizes popular culture in order to re-write his own life, wanting so much to fit perfectly into the mold New York City presents him. Yet, these men are also repulsed by their cities, afraid of losing themselves in the conformity such places create. The narrator of *Dulce Veiga* tries to leave São Paulo in search of inspiration, only to find the city's consumerist and indulgent influences even in the Amazon. Patrick Bateman tries to distance himself from the conformity of living in New York by slaughtering its people, by reveling in his own narcissism even as he tries to conform. In the end, neither man can truly escape the cause of their madness, nor can they come any closer to finding healthy interactions with normal society. In these cases the mediator itself comes into question. Can mediators

295

even be found in a postmodern world?

And, to continue the work I have already started in this dissertation, does a negation of the need for mediators end the evolutionary progression of Foucault's triptych? Is there nowhere else to go once the 1980s, the height of the postmodern age, has come to an end? I believe that by investigating how madness works in the so-called decline of the postmodern age, we could come to a more nuanced reading of madness' evolutionary progression. If the 1980s presented madness as a moot point, them we need to see if the 1990s reversed or continued such a formulation. Has mediation simply vanished in contemporary literature? Or have new forms of mediation sprung into existence? Can we even use the same terminology in the 1990s as we have in the rest of this study? An investigation into works such as Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996), Mark Z. Daneilewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), or Alberto Fuguet's *Mala onda* [*Bad Vibes*] (1996) could complicate and complete our overview of representative inter-American works of 20th century, postmodern madness. An analysis of *Fight Club*, and its subsequent adaptation to the screen in 1999, would provide a perfect ending to this project, for Palahniuk's novel brought madness *into* the vernacular of popular culture in a way that *American Psycho* and its cinematic adaptation did not. Such a conclusion could, perhaps, tell us where madness, and its mediators, can go from here…

CHAPTER I

[1] In his introduction to the 1988 Vintage edition of the English translation of *Madness and Civilization*, José Barchilon explains how Foucault presents his history. Barchilon writes, "Rather than to review historically the concept of madness, the author has chosen to re-create, mostly from original documents, mental illness, folly, and unreason as they must have existed in their time, place, and proper social perspective. In a sense, he has tried to re-create the negative part of the concept, that which has disappeared under the retroactive influence of present-day ideas and the passage of time" (Barchilon V).

[2] Foucault on lepers: "Hieratic witnesses of evil, they accomplish their salvation in and by their very exclusion: in a strange reversibility that is opposite of good works and prayer, they are saved by the hand that is not stretched out" (Foucault, *Madness* 7).

[3] Foucault eloquently reiterates, "Navigation delivers man to the uncertainty of fate; on water, each of us is in the hands of his own destiny; every embarkation is, potentially, the last. It is for the other world that the madman sets sail in his fool's boat; it is from the other world that he comes when he disembarks. The madman's voyage is at once a rigorous division and an absolute Passage" (Foucault, *Madness* 11).

[4] These houses of confinement also had economic roles. As Foucault tells us, "The classical age used confinement in an equivocal manner, making it play a double role: to reabsorb unemployment, or at least eliminate its most visible social effects, and to control costs when they seemed likely to become too high" (Foucault, *Madness* 54). Here, the house serves as a socio-economic control, manipulating the outside world by hiding away the unemployable and the unwanted.

[5] Foucault notes, "The great reform movement that developed in the second half of the eighteenth century originated in the effort to reduce contamination by destroying impurities and vapors, abating fermentations, preventing evil and disease from tainting the air and spreading their contagion in the atmosphere of the cities" (Foucault, *Madness* 206).

[6] Foucault points to how society viewed the importance of air in the early eighteenth century. The healthful benefits of country air were opposed by "the corrupted air of hospitals, prisons, houses of confinement. By this atmosphere laden with maleficent vapors, entire cities were threatened, whose inhabitants would be slowly impregnated with rottenness and taint" (Foucault, *Madness* 204).

[7] Foucault writes, "The asylum no longer punished the madman's guilt, it is true; but it did more, it organized that guilt; it organized it for the madman as a consciousness of

himself, and as a non-reciprocal relation to the keeper; it organized it for the man of reason as an awareness of the Other, a therapeutic intervention in the madman's existence. In other words, by this guilt the madman became an object of punishment always vulnerable to himself and to the Other; and from the acknowledgment of his status as an object, from the awareness of his guilt, the madman was to return to his awareness of himself as a free and responsible subject, and consequently to reason" (Foucault, *Madness* 247).

[8] Foucault reminds us, "the doctor's intervention is not made by virtue of medical skill or power that he possesses in himself and that could be justified by a body of objective knowledge. It is not as a scientist that *homo medicus* has authority in the asylum, but as a wise man. If the medical profession is required, it is as a juridical and moral guarantee, not in the name of science" (Foucault, *Madness* 270).

[9] We are told, "Everything was organized so that the madman would recognize himself in a world of judgment that enveloped him on all sides; he must know that he is watched, judged, and condemned; from transgression to punishment, the connection must be evident, as a guilt recognized by all" (Foucault, *Madness* 267).

[10] Derrida, in his article "'To do Justice to Freud': The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis," insists that Freud must be considered in any contemplation of madness. He posits "Freud as the doorman of the today, the holder of the keys, of those that open as well as those that close the door… onto the today or onto madness. He, Freud, is the double figure of the door and the doorkeeper" (Derrida 235).

[11] Foucault clarifies this claim by stating, "To say that madness is dazzlement is to say that the madman sees the daylight, the same daylight as the man of reason (both live in the same brightness); but seeing the same daylight, and nothing but this daylight and nothing in it, he see it as void, as night, as nothing; for him the shadows are the way to perceive daylight" (Foucault, *Madness* 108).

[12] We are warned, "If the determinism of passion is transcended and released in the hallucination of the image, if the image, in return, has swept away the whole world of beliefs and desires, it is because the delirious language was already present – a discourse which liberated passion from all its limits and adhered with all the constraining weight of its affirmation to the image which was liberating itself" (Foucault, *Madness* 100).

[13] Derrida continues his contention with Foucault by opposing the positivist psychologist with the psychoanalyst, linking language and a conversation with madness to the inheritors of Freud. He writes, "positivist psychology would thus have masked the experience of unreason. […] Such violence would have consisted in disrupting a certain unity, that which corresponded precisely to the presumed unity of the classical age: from then on, there would be, on the one hand, illness of an organic nature and, on the other, unreason […] the *unreasonable*, whose discursive manifestations will become the object of a psychology. This psychology then loses all relation to a certain truth of madness,

that is, to a certain truth of unreason. Psychoanalysis, on the contrary, breaks with psychology *by speaking with the Unreason* that speaks within madness and, thus, by returning though this exchange of words not to the classical age itself […] but toward this eve of the classical age that still haunted it" (Derrida 237-238).

[14] Derrida also hones in on the verticality of Foucault's History. He writes, "This time of prefiguration and announcement, this delay between the anticipatory lightning flash and the event of what is foreseen, is explained by the very structure of an experience of unreason, if there is any, namely, an experience in which one cannot maintain oneself and out of which one cannot but fall after having approached it. All this thus forbids us from making this history into a properly successive and sequential history of events" (Derrida 243). The application of this type of History needs not follow sequence so much as fate – we, too, need to take an unreasonable approach in order to repeat, or at least mimic, Foucault's intentions.

[15] Foucault informs us, "He is no longer simply a ridiculous and familiar silhouette in the wings: he stands center stage as the guardian of truth – playing here a role which is the complement and converse of that taken by madness in the tales and the satires" (Foucault, *Madness* 14).

[16] Foucault writes, "Paradoxically, this liberation [of the image] derives from a proliferation of meaning […]. Things themselves become so burdened with attributes, signs, allusions that they finally lost their own form […] the figure no longer speaks for itself" (Foucault, *Madness* 19).

[17] Hutcheon consciously narrows her definition of the postmodern, specifically referring to "historiographic metafiction." For her, this is the only type of narrative that can truly be called postmodern. Thus, "History becomes a text, a discursive construct upon which fiction draws as easily as it does upon other texts of literature" (Hutcheon 142).

[18] Hutcheon counters this claim to the controlling forces of the popular or the masses with the idea of consensus. She writes, "What is important in all these internalized challenges to humanism is the interrogating of the notion of consensus. Whatever narratives or systems that once allowed us to think we could unproblematically and universally define public agreement have now been questioned by the acknowledgement of differences – in theory and in artistic practice. In its most extreme formulation, the result is that consensus becomes the illusion of consensus, whether it be defined in terms of minority (educated, sensitive, elitist) or mass (commercial, popular, conventional) culture, for *both* are manifestations of late capitalist, bourgeois, informational, postindustrial society, a society in which social reality is structured by discourses (in the plural) – or so postmodernism endeavors to teach" (Hutcheon 7).

[19] Jean Franco emphasizes the threat of mass culture toward the individuality and originality of texts in her study "Narrator, Author, Superstar: Latin American Narrative in the Age of Mass Culture." She writes, "Authorship, depending as it does on original

creation and the power of the individual to support it, was confronted by a quite different technology in the mid-sixties – that of a mass culture instrument integrating masses of people into a consumer-oriented culture. […] Because it is standardized, the author or authors are unimportant and originality of form is of little value. It is repetition which causes the mass culture product to be recognized and a slight variation in content is enough to make it appear that it is not merely a repetition" (Franco 150).

[20] This is not to say that any of these forms of narrative do not deserve to be considered as individualized (especially in relation to film), but for the purposes of this study we will consider film in its classical Hollywood definition.

[21] Huyssen remarks, "Adorno was one of a very few critics guided by the conviction that a theory of modern culture must address both mass culture and high art" (Huyssen 19).

[22] Huyssen writes, "Adorno, of course, was the theorist par excellence of the Great Divide, that presumably necessary and insurmountable barrier separating high art from popular culture in the modern capitalist societies" (Huyssen ix).

[23] Fiedler makes sure to note that popular culture is not always the root of all evil. He explains, "Coke has become as much symbol as beverage: the occasion for a secular ritual, a celebration of the human spirit, attuned to mass culture. […] It would repay us, therefore, to see in the context of such mythological soft drinks and fast foods other great American pop products, similarly vulgar yet refreshing to the spirit, like Tarzan […] the Wizard of Oz […] Batman; as well as certain characters like […] Marilyn Monroe and John Wayne, who began as actors but ended as full-fledged myths; and Natty Bumpo, Huckleberry Finn and Moby Dick, since the novel, which began at almost the same moment as the United States, is also (in origin) hopelessly pop and (by adoption) American" (Fiedler *Literature* 67).

[24] While Huyssen seems to have no patience for certain aspects of Adorno's writings, he does admit, "Adorno's view of the culture industry and modernism is not quite as binary and closed as it appears" (Huyssen 20).

[25] He writes, "literary practices are conditioned by questions about what it means to make literature in societies that lack a sufficiently developed market for an autonomous cultural field to exist" (García Canclini 47).

[26] García Canclini refers to this as "the postmodern […] revision of the separation between the cultured, the popular, and the mass-based, upon which modernity still attempts to base itself, and elaboration of a more open way of thinking that includes the interactions and integrations among levels, genres, and forms of collective sensibility" (García Canclini 9).

[27] They note, "Now any person signifies only those attributes by which he can replace everybody else: he is interchangeable, a copy. As an individual he is completely

expendable and utterly insignificant, and this is just what he finds out when time deprives him of this similarity" (Adorno 145-146).

[28] In the original Spanish, "Experiencia audiovisual y desorden cultural" and *Cultura, medios y sociedad*.

[29] In the original Spanish, "el papel de la radio en toda América Latina, y del cine en países como México, Argentina o Brasil, fue decisivo en la formación del *sentimiento nacional*" (Martín Barbero 35).

[30] In the original Spanish, "Hoy los medios de comunicación configuran, por lo contrario, el dispositivo más poderoso de disolución del horizonte cultural de la nación al constituirse en mediadores de la heterogénea trama de imaginarios que se configuran desde lo local y lo global. La globalización económica y tecnológica de los medios y las redes electrónicas vehiculan una multiculturalidad que hace estallar los referentes tradicionales de identidad" (Martín Barbero 36).

[31] In the original Spanish, "Hay en las transformaciones de sensibilidad que emergen en la experiencia audiovisual un fermento de cambios en el saber mismo, el reconocimiento de que por allí pasan cuestiones que atraviesan por entero el desordenamiento de la vida urbana, el desajuste entre comportamientos y creencias, la confusión entre realidad y simulacro" (Martín Barbero 43).

[32] García Canclini does not use the terms popular culture and mass culture interchangeably, as do Horkheimer and Adorno. In his view, the popular is folklore and artisans, anything with a base in the original populous of a place, the countryside, and the national identity it creates. The massive is that which stems from the city, from the culture industry and the megalopolis and its corporations.

[33] In *Reading North by South*, Neil Larsen offers, in opposition to García Canclini's cultural hybridity, Oswald de Andrade's "anthropophagous paradigm." He writes, "As a possible solution to this, the anthropophagous paradigm, first explicitly outlined in the "Manifesto antropofago" of Brazilian vanguardist Oswald de Andrade, advocates a practice of […] consumptive production, whereby the metropolitan cultural import, rather than being simply recoded and then abruptly reinserted into the same exclusive network of cultural distribution, undergoes an even more radical subversion by being directly appropriated as simply one motif of a dynamic, postcolonial *mass* culture that can consume without losing its national-cultural identity. But for this, of course, a postcolonial […] 'culture industry' is required" (Larsen, *North by South* 122). He also goes on to note that within the postcolonial atmosphere, the Global South will always be equated with the outsider. He writes, "Once drawn up against the dominant (non) culture of imperialism, postcolonial 'national' culture coincides with sub- and counterculture" (120).

[34] Horkheimer and Adorno write, "No independent thinking must be expected from the audience: the product prescribes every reaction: not by its natural structure (which collapses under reflection), but by signals. Any logical connection calling for mental effort is painstakingly avoided. As far as possible, developments must follow from the immediately preceding situation and never from the idea of the whole" (Adorno 137).

[35] Resistance is usually met with acceptance, or as least assimilation: "Anyone who resists can only survive by fitting in. Once his particular brand of deviation from the norm has been noted by the industry, he belongs to it as does the land-reformer to capitalism" (Adorno 132).

[36] In the original Spanish, "La desmitificación de las tradiciones y las costumbres desde las que, hasta hace bien poco, nuestras sociedades elaboraban sus 'contextos de confianza' desmorona la ética y desdibuja el hábitat cultural. Ahí arraigan algunas de nuestras más secretas y enconadas violencias. Pues las gentes pueden con cierta facilidad asimilar los instrumentos tecnológicos y las imágenes de modernización, pero sólo lenta y dolorosamente puede recomponer su sistema de valores, normas éticas y virtudes cívicas" (Martín Barbero 33).

[37] In the original Spanish, "La contemporaneidad que producen los medios remite, por un lado, al *debilitamiento del pasado*, a su reencuentro descontextualizado, deshistorizado, reducido a *cita* […] Y del otro remite a la *ausencia de futuro* que, de vuelta de las utopías, no instala en un *presente continuo*" (Martín Barbero 40-41).

[38] In the original Spanish, "el *no-lugar*" (Martín Barbero 55). Martín Barbero posits this 'nowhere' as part of the virtual city created by popular culture. He writes, "at the birth of this insecurity [of national identity], the virtual city responds by expanding the anonymity that facilitates the *non-place*; that space in which individuals are liberated from the weight of an interpolated identity and are demanded only by way of interaction with information or texts" (55). In the original Spanish: "al crecimiento de la inseguridad, la ciudad virtual responde expandiendo el anonimate que posibilita el *no-lugar*: ese espacio en que los individuos son liberados de toda carga de identidad interpeladota y son exigidos únicamente a través de la interacción con informaciones o textos" (55)

[39] As Larsen states, "beginning in roughly the mid-1970s, at least in the North American academy, the ironies of 'canonical decolonization' begin to weigh more and more heavily on the northern reader. This is a time during which, partly as a result of the increasing influence of literary theory (especially poststructuralism), the integrity and legitimacy not only of the high-modernist canon but of the principle of canonicity itself come into question" (Larsen *North by South* 7).

[40] A true Latin Americanist, Unruh cites both Spanish American *and* Brazilian texts, including the influence of Portuguese language works into her considerations of the continent as a whole.

[41] In the original Spanish, "Para los escritores mas radicales de la vanguardia […] una aceptación de las raíces populares del cine (el circo, el folletín) implica asimismo cierto rechazo del cine artístico […] y constituye, por lo tanto, una valorización del cine norteamericano, a pesar de las complicaciones políticas implicadas en privilegiar la cultura proveniente de un país que representa para la región […] una amenaza geopolítica" (Borge 18).

[42] Piers Armstrong, in his book *Third World Literary Fortunes*, notices this stereotyping in the reception of Brazilian texts well into the latter half of the twentieth century. He cites the "Powerful extraliterary imagery of another Brazil," the idealized picture formed by social scientists which hinders any critique of Brazilian literature (Armstrong 11). He also notes that international tourism and a tendency to see Brazil only as a fount of folk wisdom clouds how critics views Brazilian texts and how these texts are received by a wider audience.

[43] García Canclini goes on to note that in Borges's later years he also dealt with mass culture issues. The critic writes, "What becomes instructive in the case of Borges is that in his last decades he converted that obligatory interaction with mass communication into a source of critical elaboration, a place where the representative of elite literature tries out what can be done with the challenge of the media" (García Canclini 73).

[44] Nel writes, "Since imagination is, as we have seen, always implicated in the societal structures against which it may rebel, how can imaginative power ever provide an effective critique of the pervasive, insidious effects of late capitalist culture? After all, even when the historical avant-garde attempted to expose the paradoxical logic of the material world, it ultimately found itself being co-opted, marketed as exotic entertainment to the same world" (Nel 67).

[45] We need to note here that this opposition does not indicate the superiority of one side or the other. Huyssen states, "The opposition between modernism and mass culture has remained amazingly resilient over the decades. To argue that this simply has to do with the inherent 'quality' of the one and the depravations of the other – correct as it may be in the case of many specific works – is to perpetuate the time-worn strategy of exclusion; it is itself a sign of the anxiety of contamination" (Huyssen vii).

[46] The narratives I will analyze in this dissertation come from specific decades and represent white, male authors. I chose to limit the works I will use because specific factors, like race, gender, and historical and social history impact the history of madness to such a degree that a comprehensive study would require an enormous amount of background information and study. There are several other lines of inquiry that need to be made to finish an analysis of postmodern madness that cannot fit into this particular study. Because our study focuses on the Americas as a whole, including both North and South America, the inclusion of immigrant literature, especially Latino literature, would be an obvious next step. Does immigrant literature treat the trope of madness in the same was as national literatures? Do immigrants experience madness in the same way as

native citizens? Does exile, as opposed to immigration, affect how one views or reacts to madness? Though the immigrant and the outcast may have a similar relationship with 'normal' society and mass culture, the immigrant must come to terms with differing definitions of normal (normal for his or her homeland and normal for his or her new country) and competing cultural codes of conduct. Studying works like Reinaldo Arenas' *El portero* [*The Doorman*] (1987), Loida Maritza Perez's *Geographies of Home* (1999), or Oscar Hijuelos' *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* (1989) could allow us to expand our understanding of how the trope of madness crosses cultural lines and how popular culture and popular history affect manifestations and conceptualizations of postmodern madness. If the madman/immigrant does not know how to define him- or herself because of his or her confused relationship with a new country, how can he or she confront the chaos that comes from the clash of mass illusions and personal realities? How can one find some sort of mediator between madness and society if one does not know to which society he or she belongs? Can we even use terms like postmodern madness in relation to immigrant or exile narratives, or must we construct a different definition for the madness found therein?

And what about works written by female authors or about female protagonists? Does a feminine perspective change how we can view postmodern madness and its interaction with society? Historically, feminine madness has been considered and treated separately from male manifestations. Does the woman's link with hysteria and the cultural codes inherent in its definition change how we define postmodern madness? How does the woman's relationship with postmodern lunacy diverge from the homosexual's experience? Do the cultural constructs that allow women to become more actively involved in certain popular culture pursuits change how society interacts with the madwoman, as opposed to the madman? Analyzing novels such as Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977) or Clarice Lispector's *Água Viva* [*The Stream of Life*] (1973) could allow us to consider how gender changes or reconstructs a definition of postmodern madness and how such madness relates to society at large. In a postmodern context, do women experience the same symptoms of madness as men? Do specific cultural codes restrict how they can react to madness within literary confines? Do female authors approach the topic in a different way? Considering such questions would allow a more nuanced understanding of what the trope of madness truly means in a postmodern context and would encourage a further reconsideration of the relationship between society, mediator, and madman.

CHAPTER II

[47] According to Irene Rostagno, several important translated books of the time included *Broad and Alien is the World* by Ciro Alegría (1941), *Twelve Spanish American Poets* (1943), *Anthology of contemporary Latin American Poetry* (1941), and *The Violent Land* by Jorge Amado (1945).

[48] Williams writes, "Fuentes should be seen not as a Modernist unrelated to Postmodern culture, nor as the strictly Postmodern writer that he is not; rather, Fuentes and Vargas

Llosa should be read as authors of transitional texts that bridge the gap in the discussions of Modernist 'versus' Postmodern literature" (Williams 216).

[49] Williams tells us, "*Zona sagrada*, a work written under the influence of film, uses many of the same narrative strategies. For an authority on Modernist and Postmodern fictional practices in the West in general, Brian McHale, novels such as Fuentes's *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* and *Zona sagrada* represent variants of the Modernist interior-monologue novel that focuses on a grid that each mind imposes on the outside world, or through which it assimilates the outside world" (Williams 211).

[50] Steven Boldy comments on Helmuth's reading of *Zona sagrada* in his review of her book. He claims that Helmuth's need to present *Terra Nostra* as Fuentes' watershed novel *forces* her to look at the transformation of self in the novel as rationally explained. José Pablo Villalobos, in his review of Helmuth's book, agrees that her reading of *Zona sagrada* is flawed. Villalobos cites Mito's acknowledgement of his place as a narrator, a fictional construct, as sign of the postmodern nature of the text. Just because Mito decides to live his fantasies and ignore a more postmodern reaction to his situation does not mean that such a reaction has not occurred to him.

[51] The construction of this scene even foreshadows the insanity to come. Mito the narrator, as the man who lives in the present and tells his sorrows to an audience, is mad – thus the confusing jumble of images, pieced together by uncommon threads. Mito the child, however, though disturbed and disturbing, is not yet at that brink of madness; he still tries to revive the birds and gives them a funereal and is therefore at least aware in some way of societal norms. This division is important to note – the present day Mito and the Mito who talked to spiders at his grandmother's house and hid under the bed to imagine another world are not the same. They share similar traits, yet someone, some*thing*, has fundamentally changed how they interact with the rest of society.

[52] As David Giles notes in his book *Illusions of Immortality: A Psychology of Fame and Celebrity*, when fandom passes on into the realm of religion, "the celebrity involved is merely a conduit for some 'higher' entity" (Giles 135).

[53] In the original Spanish, "la novela presenta por una parte una estructura cinematográfica, mientras que por otra, también intenta ser una trascripción visual al igual que un guión técnico. Con esto el interlocutor y el lector experimentan el mismo proceso que Guillermo como espectadores" (Galindo 63).

[54] He writes, "Fuentes' novel presents a dramatic structure exactly linked with the screenwriter's. The division of the novel coincides with the cinematographic structure proposed by Syd Field for the construction of a screenplay" (Galindo 39, my translation). In the original Spanish: "la novela de Fuentes presenta una estructura dramática exactamente ligada al guión de cine. La división de la novela cumple con la estructura cinematográfica propuesta por Syd Field en la construcción de un guión" (Galindo 39).

[55] Galindo writes, "the cinematographic technique of the narration is a very important factor for the reader, such that it creates the illusion that one is watching the sequences of a film. We need to emphasize first of all the technical use of simultaneous actions and spaces without transitions. […] This effect is caused by the means of montage, that is to say the union of images and sequences. With this the spectator (in this case the reader) can see actions that occur at the same time in the same or different spaces" (Galindo 40, my translation). In the original Spanish: "la técnica cinematográfica en la narración es un factor muy importante para el lector, ya que crea la ilusión de estar viendo secuencias de una película. Hay que destacar principalmente la técnica de usos de acciones y espacios simultáneos sin hacer transiciones. […] Este efecto es causado por recursos de montaje, es decir la unión de imágenes y secuencias. Con esto el espectador (en este caso el lector) puede ver acciones que suceden al mismo tiempo en un mismo o diferente especio" (Galindo 40).

[56] In the original Spanish, "la novela enfatiza al cine como productor de mitos y utiliza la reacción de los personajes para recrear el proceso de mitificación dentro de un marco donde contenido y forma reflejan estos dos procesos" (Galindo 37).

[57] We could see this if we were to look at Mito's relationship with Bela, one of Claudia's groupies. When Mito first meets Bela, she is dressed up to imitate Claudia. Mito sees himself in her, as well as his mother. This imitation, which Bela created out of the zeal of a star-struck social climber, leads Mito to slap her and run for safety, back to his apartment, his holy place. He wants to be like Bela and be the person Bela imitates, yet cannot come to terms with this picture of himself. Though he eventually has a sexual relationship with Bela, Mito cannot fully commit himself to being with her, for by being with her he is masturbating and having an incestuous affair with his mother at the same time.

[58] In the original Spanish, "La mujer se vuelve el objeto de deseo, por lo tanto el espectador se identifica con lo que realiza el personaje masculino […] y toma la posición también masculina del que observa, es decir la cámara" (Galindo 61).

[59] Galindo also notices this mythologizing trend, though he cites Hollywood as an alternate writer of myth. He notes, "the novel does not only refer to Maria Félix [the actress upon whom Claudia's character was based] and her filmography, but also makes obvious the mythologizing mechanism that produced Maria Félix as a cultural phenomenon" (Galindo 37). In the original Spanish, "La novela no sólo se refiere a María Félix y su filmografía, sino que también hace patente el mecanismo mitificador que produce a María Félix como un fenómeno cultural" (Galindo 37).

[60] In the original Spanish, "el espectador confunda la personalidad del actor con lo que representa en la pantalla o viceversa" (Galindo 48).

[61] A closer reading of the role the dogs in this novel would reveal how this works. Though I do not have space to include such a study here, it is interesting to note that the

dogs are Mito's companions, given to him by his mother, yet he hates them and systematically kills them in order to get back at Claudia. Their ghosts then haunt Mito, just as the specters of kidnappers once did, forcing him to hide under the bed just as before. Yet, in the end, the rest of Mito's life will mirror the life of his last dog, Faraón – he will be faithful and loyal to his master (his mother), yet will be overlooked, forgotten, and pitied.

[62] Aida Elsa Ramírez Mattei, in her book *La narrativa de Carlos Fuentes*, along with several other critics, refers to Mito's transformation as Kafkan, referencing Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, wherein transformation occurs for no apparent reason, other than as a refuge from reality. By this account, Mito becomes a dog in order to escape a reality that constantly tries to confine him or kill him, the animal state representing an alternate reality provided by madness. This analysis of Mito's metamorphosis, however, does not take into consideration the full scale of Mito's life up to this point, or the true underpinnings of his madness. A Kafkan ending comments on a society that does not allow free will or individuality, in which the protagonist is just a pawn who does not actually represent anything. Mito's madness, however, because of its interaction with film and film culture, is more than a reaction to the banality of life or becoming a faceless drone among so many others. Though a loss of identity does occur in the text and the mapping of one individual's life onto another's is central to the narrative, writing off Mito's madness and subsequent transformation as Kafkan ignores important aspects of the text.

[63] Huyssen writes, "American analyses of mass culture did have a critical edge in the late 1940s and 1950s which went all but unacknowledged in the 1960s uncritical enthusiasm for camp, pop, and the media" (Huyssen 165).

[64] Simmons goes on to state, "Binx Bolling's coolness – his seeming easy acquiescence to change, his attempt to deny deep pathos in the face of the unmistakably pathetic – belongs more to postwar American existentialism than to postmodern schizophrenia or minimalist lack of affect" (Simmons 621).

[65] Many critics have gone to great length detailing the different philosophies and lifestyles Binx's relatives represent and how these roles do not suit him. Many focus specifically on his Aunt Emily, since she stands for the grand Southern traditions. John Desmond and Lewis Lawson are just two of the many critics who provide interesting and thorough inquiries into this aspect of the novel.

[66] Kate's madness could instigate a very interesting investigation into how mad*women*, emphasis on the gender, affect the postmodern conundrum. Does gender have anything to do with how one deals with postmodern issues? Do women react differently than men to gestalt illusions or the question of identity in the postmodern world? Are postmodern madwomen still equated with hysteria or have they evolved beyond such stereotypes?

67 Bordwell states, "The classical paradigm thus often lets the filmmaker choose how to be redundant, but seldom how redundant to be" (Bordwell 5).

68 We can compare the heightened reality Binx so longs for with the reassurance Lonnie has because of his religious faith.

69 Though one could argue that the heightened reality Binx seeks could just as easily be found through religion and that my argument could just as easily be rephrased to reflect this, I believe that Binx would turn to cinema before he would turn to the church. Though he loves his brother, Binx has never wholeheartedly embraced his views. He has, however, embraced the cinema, and I believe that is where he would turn if faced with the choice.

70 Moviegoing, when seen in this light, has an eerie relationship to liturgy, where we also join together as an audience to listen, watch, and participate in a search for meaning.

CHAPTER III

71 Franco states, "What Fuentes tries to do in *Holy Place* is to rescue the repetition which is the only form of immortality that mass culture offers" (Franco 162).

72 Huyssen continues the machinist metaphors when he states, "all modernist and avantgardist techniques, forms and images are now stored for instant recall in the computerized memory banks of our culture. But the same memory also stores all of per-modernist art as well as the genres, codes, and image worlds of popular cultures and modern mass culture" (Huyssen 196-197). This point goes back to the idea that the 1970s brought together elitist and popular culture in a way that the 1960s could not, especially in relation to its forms of resistance against stagnation.

73 Especially in light of the Padilla incident in Cuba. In 1971 a well-known Cuban poet, Heberto Padilla, was jailed for crimes against the Revolution. Many writers and other influential academics of the time wrote letters to Castro condemning his actions. The over sixty signatures included Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Octavio Paz, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Gabriel García Márquez. Padilla was later brought before a tribunal of his peers, where he confessed to his crimes and pointed fingers at other so-called conspirators against Castro's regime. Again, the intellectuals of the time wrote to Castro against this confession, claiming that it was coerced. This incident marked a split between the Revolution in Cuba and the literary revolution of the Boom, which was already beginning to come to an end.

74 The military government was forced to hold elections in March of 1973. The Peronist Party candidate, Héctor Cámpora, was elected, which lead to end of Juan Perón's exile in Spain. When Perón returned to Argentina, many right-wing members of the Peronist Party were outraged with the left-leaning policies of the new president and several bloody

encounters between paramilitary groups and Peronist factions lead to Cámpora resigning. A new election was held in July of 1973 and Juan Perón was elected president for the third time.

[75] One of the problematics Hutcheon points to is the nature of narrative itself, of the distance and relationship between speaker and listener. She writes, "Postmodern novels like Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* point to the problematic nature of […] designations of speaker and listener (I/you) as revealed through the dialogue format in which one of the male characters refers to himself in the third person and as female" (Hutcheon 168).

[76] The film version of the novel plays on this theme, implying that Molina did not commit the crime with which he has been charged. Within the novel we are faced with more of a conundrum, for while we know that Molina is in love with the his heterosexual waiter friend, usually tries to help his lovers, not harm them, and wants a 'real' man, not a boy or another homosexual, this does not preclude him from corrupting a youth. We do not know how the Argentine penal system defines this term and we do not know if Molina has left anything out of his discussions with Valentín.

[77] In the original Spanish, "parecería corresponder a una voz de la sociedad conservadora en la que Molina está inserto y que, en el fondo, lo vitupera" (Amícola 119).

[78] We can see the difference between the warden and Valentín clearly when we consider the different styles of interaction used to relate Molina's conversations with the two men. As one critic states, "The dialogue between Molina and the warden which appears in the latter half on the work sheds, then, a different light on the text read so far. The distance between the two new interlocutors – who occupy extreme positions in the social scale – determines the fact that their communication never reaches the diaphaneity of dialogue […] like the encounters between Valentín and Molina" (Amícola 119, my translation). In the original Spanish, "El diálogo entre Molina y el director de la cárcel que aparece al promediar la obra arroja, pues una luz diferente sobre el texto ya leído. La distancia entre los dos nuevos interlocutores – que ocupan posiciones extremas en la escala social – determina el hecho que la comunicación entre ellos no alcance nunca la diafanidad del diálogo […] de los encuentros entre Valentín y Molina" (Amícola 119).

[79] Lavers argues that the footnotes progress through a series of rejections until they reach the theories of Brown and Marcuse, which speak of man being, by nature, polymorphous-perverse. It is society, not nature, which forces man into a heterosexual role. Thus, "The love between Valentín and Molina […] is neither immoral nor unnatural; it is an expression of nature itself that the society is seeking to crush" (Lavers 42). Colás also considers the footnotes representatives of an exclusive society trying to cast out those who do not belong. Because of the way they are placed, however, these footnotes question the validity of such viewpoints. He writes, "The confrontation of footnote with textual reality challenges the practice of separating these discourses. We may not comfortably occupy the seemingly self-contained discourse of science and truth. And it

is not just the distance of science that is questioned. It is the repression involved in any kind of unselfconscious, exclusionary self-fashioning" (Colás 92).

[80] Kimberly Davis claims that the footnotes were included in order to educate people who would otherwise be unaware of such theoretical discourse. Puig himself, in both interviews and written statements, claims as much. Puig thus intends these footnotes to be taken seriously. For Davis, the fact that many readers and critics see these footnotes as ironic do not take into account the intended audience of the novel. Other critics, however, believe, like Rubén Gómez-Lara in his book *Intertextualidad generativa en El beso de la mujer araña, de Manuel Puig* [*Generative Intertextuality in Manuel Puig's Kiss of the Spider Woman*], that the "the almost suffocating pseudo-scientific character of such notes" negates much of its intended illumination of the subject (Gómez-Lara 95, my translation). In the original Spanish: "el carácter pseudo-científico casi sofocante de tales notas" (Gómez-Lara 95). Psychoanalysis is therefore a contentious topic in criticism concerning Puig's novel. Some critics go so far as to relate Molina's film narratives to Freud's dreamscapes, setting up Molina as a patient and Valentín as a psychoanalyst, the activist's questions concerning the details of Molina's story and his way of telling it paralleling psychoanalysis. Stephanie Merrim, in her article "Through the Film Darkly: Grade 'B' Movies and Dreamwork in 'Tres tristes tigres' and 'El beso de la mujer araña,'" provides an intriguing look at how film and dreams relate to each other in Puig's text. She writes, "the structuring situation of the novel simulates that of psychoanalysis" (Merrim 302). Yet, Molina's description of the psychologist in the first film says much about how we should regard such psychobabble. Molina states, "Pero a este tal por cual algo se le nota, no sé, de que está muy seguro de gustar a las mujeres, que ni bien aparece… choca, y también le choca a Irena, ella ahí en el diván empieza a hablar de sus problemas pero no se siente cómoda, no se siente al lado de un médico, sino al lado de un tipo, y se asusta" ["But with this little hotshot something shows, I don't know, how he's so positive women find him attractive. But the minute he comes on… you have to dislike him. And so does Irena, who's over on the couch beginning to talk about her problems, but she doesn't feel comfortable, doesn't feel like she's with a doctor, but with some guy, and she's afraid"] (*El beso* 26, *Kiss* 20). We are meant to dislike psychoanalysts, to not feel comfortable around them. Molina feels there is something wrong with the psychiatrist in the film, as does Irena, and by implication, so should any decentered figure. These men of science may not always have the best intentions – and we need to note that they *have* intentions and are not as unbiased as we would like to think.

[81] Puig based this first film on *Cat People* (in the Spanish version *El beso de la mujer pantera*), an actual Hollywood horror film produced in 1942, directed by Jacques Tourner and starring Simone Simon, Kent Smith, and Tom Conway. Though Molina changes several details of the film, the similarities in plot, the use of the name Irena for the main character, and the inclusion of the infamous pool scene speak to Molina's narrative as being based on this 'real' feature. The film tells the story of Irena, the 'strange' woman mentioned in the opening line of the novel. We first see her at the zoo, gazing at a caged panther, watching intently as it paces back and forth. We later learn that Irena fears that she is part of a tribe of women who can transform into panthers if confronted with

extremes of emotion, especially if kissed. Irena, who in the film is wooed and finally won by a straight-laced, rational man, tries to deal with her fears, first by speaking to her husband about it and then by visiting a psychiatrist. Yet, she is always drawn back to the caged panther at the zoo and when she thinks she has found her husband cheating on her with his secretary, she goes mad. She tries to turn to her psychiatrist for help, but to no avail – he seduces her, initiating her change from woman to panther, and she mauls him to death. The husband and secretary try to catch Irena, but she runs away, finally fleeing to the zoo where she frees the caged panther there. Yet this panther does not recognize her as one of his own kind and kills Irena, only to be hit by a police car in turn. The film ends with Irena's death and the husband and secretary walking off arm in arm.

[82] In the original Spanish, "en este caso, además de las inconveniencias físicas, existe el desequilibrio psicológico provocado por el maltrato y por el distanciamiento de los seres queridos […]. Y es debido a todas estas privaciones y sufrimientos que la imaginación se va adueñando de la percepción de la realidad" (Gómez-Lara 69).

[83] In the original Spanish, "Quizás el mismo Molina no perciba en qué medida al identificarse con la mujer-pantera de la película está declarando frente al incauto Valentín su condición de figura devoradaza y, por lo tanto, amenazante" (Amícola 56).

[84] Colás goes on to indicate that this layering of imprisonment goes far beyond this as well. He compares Irena's sketching to Molina's storytelling to Puig's own authorship. He writes, "For if the image of Irena sketching the panther echoes Molina's narration of the film, then it also models our own activity as readers, and Puig's as author. Though we are not aware of it yet, we too are engaged in the representation of imprisonment, and certainly Puig is engaged in precisely such a representation. This metafictional layering, in which the text contains miniature replicas of itself within itself, blurs boundaries between film and cell within the text, as well as between text and world" (Colás 79-80).

[85] The link that Valentín makes between himself and the psychiatrist in this first film plot is thus extremely important. At least at the beginning of Puig's novel, Valentín represents a conformist view of both homosexuality and popular culture. Therefore, when he lines himself up with the psychiatrist, his questions and his commentary signify a more 'centered' view of Molina *and* his films. Graciela Goldchluk notes this in her book *La literatura es una película* [*Literature is Film*], stating that, at least within the confines of the panther movie, Valentín stands on the side of 'normal' society.

[86] In the original Spanish, "Valentín, por estar involucrado en actividades políticas, representa un grave peligro al sistema, quien lo usa para tratar de adquirir información y, que al no lograrlo, lo usa otra vez para servir de advertencia a otros como él – a los que desde el exterior tratan de derrumbar o, por lo menos de debilitar, las columnas de la represión totalitaria" (Gómez-Lara 68).

[87] It is fitting, then, that the only residents of the prison we see in Puig's novel are two marginal figures, a homosexual and a political revolutionary. For Amícola, Puig's novel

opens up a new expansion in the expectations of the Argentine reading public, because the book turns characters once considered ignoble (a homosexual and a terrorist) into profound portraits of humanity. The fact that our main protagonists both live on the edges of society is of utmost importance, especially since we, as readers, are not expected to chastise them, but instead commiserate and identify with them. This is why the creation of an illusion is so important – not only do Molina's film narratives create an escape for someone who is already immersed in the dogma of the culture industry, but they also provide distractions for both the outer extremes of political activism and the centered, 'normal' reading public, the two viewpoints most readily found in Valentín's character.

[88] The only footnote we encounter that is not psychoanalytical or based on homosexual theories, set during Molina's account of a Nazi propaganda film, is a *political* footnote, commenting on the 'real' reality behind the film's message (as opposed to the aesthetic beauty and heroism Molina derives from the film). Within this footnote we meet Werner, the Nazi officer who enamors the heroine of the film. Though we are never encouraged to equate Werner with Valentín in Molina's version of the story, by giving the reader (and not the characters) this additional information, we are set up to compare Valentín's political zeal with Werner's. He, like Valentín, has been swayed toward a cause. He, like Valentín, is fervently opposed to perceived threats to his countrymen's freedom. Both are political activists, both strive to rid their country and countrymen of contamination. Just because Werner upholds Nazi standards and Valentín Marxist propaganda does not mean the reader cannot make comparisons between the two. By including the footnote and introducing this comparison between Werner and Valentín, the implied narrator/author distances the reader from Valentín's Marxists goals. We are not meant to sympathize with Valentín's political activism, even if we sympathize with the plight of the common Argentine.   This footnote, coupled with Valentín's own spouting of indoctrinated Marxist propaganda, places the young revolutionary on the margins of society and we can sympathize with him, even if we do cannot sympathize with his doctrine.

[89] In the original Spanish, "El realismo integral del cine modeliza la utopía de una ausencia autoral sin refugios ni secretos que anule los limites del lenguaje personal y alcance la naturalidad de los lenguajes sociales" (Speranza 127).

[90] It is important to note that postmodern plurality is not the totalizing or universalist tendencies of the modernists, at least according to Jencks. He writes, "Post-Modernists, with their theories of pluralism, have produced a new form of compromise – sending different groups or taste cultures different messages – and not trying to resolve the implications for society as a whole" (Jencks 151).

[91] Uphaus agrees with the importance of the festival in the overall structure of the novel. He writes, "It is no accident that *Breakfast of Champions* builds toward a single day in Midland City when the arts are to be celebrated; nor is it an accident that we never see the festival occur. The festival is, as Vonnegut writes, 'postponed because of madness.'

Perhaps Vonnegut himself is now worrying about whether he is an author, a maker of art, or whether America, in the form of public relations and advertising, has made him just another commodity or source of amusement in the Age of Pop Everything. It is in this light that I understand the book's epigraph: 'When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.' Like Job, Vonnegut is engaged in a struggle, but the question is: are Vonnegut's books treated as art (one kind of gold) or as instant best-sellers (simply money in the pocket) – as "instant" and as dubiously nourishing, say, as Wheaties, the Breakfast of Champions? What makes this book especially important – and it may be more important for Vonnegut than for the reading public – is that" (Uphaus 173).

[92] It is interesting to note that there *is* a homosexual male in *Breakfast* – Dwayne's son Bunny, the first victim in Dwayne's attack. Homosexuality in this novel is not considered as dangerous as it is in *El beso*. We are not to consider Dwayne's attack on Bunny as society's condemnation of homosexuals, but instead need to see it as another symptom of Dwayne's madness. That kind of aberration, as long as it is kept quiet, is not considered a threat by the rest of the town. Dwayne, however, living in a new, illusory world of science fiction, can change society's rules and proclaim his son as anathema.

[93] He also sets himself up as an outcast by his actions following the discovery of his 'true' nature. Because he is now free to do anything he wants to, Dwayne decides to enjoy his freedom by desecrating that which frustrated him in the past, but is now obsolete. He attacks his son, hits a woman, attacks several bystanders, severely beats his lover, and bites the tip off of Kilgore Trout's finger. Throughout these acts, Dwayne laughs or chuckles with glee and through these acts he negates the moral underpinnings of the society he once represented. As our narrator explains, "Most of what he had done during the past three-quarters of an hour had been hideously unjust" (Vonnegut 274).

[94] Simpson does not agree with these statements. He writes, "Vonnegut would argue that the fatal, damning flaw that resides at the heart of science fiction in general, and Kilgore Trout's novels in particular, is that, as a genre, it all too often seeks to find answers outside the universe, outside the human condition, and outside the realms of human kindness. The answers to the mysteries of the human condition, he would argue, can be found not in space or in theory, but rather, in humanity itself" (Simpson 262). While on the surface such a claim seems reasonable, I would argue that Vonnegut's characters are so bounded by their ordinary lives, trapped in the commercialism of American culture, that without the introduction of something outside the universe, they would not be able to see humanity at all. We need only look to Kilgore Trout's own conversion; he needs the words of a minimalist painter to reveal the truth, the truth of a painting made up of a vertical stripe of dayglo orange reflecting tape on a green field.

[95] The novels Walker points to are Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Heinlein's *Time Enough for Love*, and Lewis's *Perelandra*.

[96] Specifically, I am thinking of Asimov's *I, Robot* and the series of books that follow, Dick's *A Scanner Darkly* and the novella *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, and

Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and *The Illustrated Man* (a collection of short stories). Gibson, as the father of cyberpunk, is best know for *Neuromancer*. Interestingly, almost all of these novels or stories have been made into films, some with better results than others.

[97] Broer notes that Vonnegut places himself in Trout's shoes. He writes, "It seems unmistakable that, through the example of poor Dwayne Hoover, Vonnegut is dramatizing his own fears about the negative spiritual repercussions of his work on his readers" (Broer 104).

[98]   Mustazza notices the importance of the narrator's own legacy of lunacy. He lists several instances where the author notes his own tendencies towards schizophrenia, his dependence on pills, and his psychiatrist. The critic then writes, "What we get […] are conflations of fact (the author's psychological disturbances) and fiction (the world of his own invention), and of situation, the godlike creator of worlds commenting on his own very human vulnerability" (Mustazza 126). Mustazza also states, "the author-god of this Universe is no more free than those over whom he boasts supremacy" (Mustazza 128).

[99] Though this could be limited to a simply ironic device, for me, this places *Breakfast* in the elite category of science fiction, being a novel that can not only hide its sf qualities, but can also identify the need for such subterfuge.

CHAPTER IV

[100] Marcus Faro de Castro and Maria Izabel Valladao de Carvalho, in their study "Globalization and Recent Political Transitions in Brazil," discuss the uncertainty of Brazilian democracy during the 1980s. They write, "In spite of the efforts of pro-democracy leaders in the 1980s, it could have happened that the comeback of democracy in 1985 could have been just another 'turn of the wheel,' another moment in a cyclical pattern in which civilian and military governments alternated in power while essentially keeping the same policy-making model" (Faro de Castro 471).

[101] If we do a literal translation of Abreu's text, the narrator is terrorized by the *idea* of liking another man. It is the idea, not the man, which scares him.

[102]   Our narrator knows, however, that Pedro and the happiness he brings with him cannot last. Our narrator compares the first time he saw Pedro to seeing a golden cloud with a purple center, which slowly dissolves and morphs into a new form. He writes, "se você piscar, num segundo ele já não está mais ali, e enquanto você se pergunta mas como? ou para onde foi? porque o roxo quase negro tomou toda a superfície do nuvem e, ela mesma, alem da nova cor, já ganhou também outra forma súbita e inteiramente diversa. Assim ele se tornaria. Por enquanto, não, por enquanto eu tinha apenas uma sensação de dourado" ["if you blink, it's gone in a second, and while you ask yourself what happened? or, where did it go? because the nearly black purple has taken over the entire

surface of the cloud, and the cloud itself, because the new color, has already assumed another shape, unexpected and completely different. That how he'd become. But for the time being, no, for the time being I just had a golden sensation"] (Abreu, *OADV* 114, *WHDV* 86). Pedro and all he represents is too ephemeral, too insubstantial to maintain the form he had to begin with. The bond they share cannot keep its integrity when bounded by contemporary society.

[103] For José Geraldo Couto, in his introduction to *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?*, the novel represents many of the important aspects of postmodern production. He notes that within Abreu's work, "the ironic cross-reference to the affective memory of cinema serves as a counter-point to the narrated plot and, furthermore, helps to question the objectivity and trustworthiness of the narrator, in the best modern literary tradition from Henry James and Machado de Assis" (Couto 6, my translation). In the original Portuguese, "a remissão irônica à memória afetiva do cinema serve como contraponto ao drama narrado e, mais que isso, ajuda a questionar a objetividade e a confiabilidade do narrador, na melhor tradição da literatura moderna desde Henry James e Machado de Assis" (Couto 6). Couto here cites modernist authors (though some would argue Machado de Assis, like Borges, is more postmodern than modern) and thus includes Abreu in a long line of literary tradition, yet by noting that the reader's distrust of the narrator stems from the inclusion of cinema and cinematic techniques into the narrative itself, especially with an added ironic twist, points directly to postmodern influences within the text. The novel's interaction with popular culture, then, allows it to appeal not only to the mass audience, but also to the intellectual academic.

[104] In the original Portuguese, "Ecoa o bordão dos velhos anos 80: tudo já foi dito, sô podemos falar de cinema ou de literatura. Mas o passado nunca volta tal qual ele foi, restam ruínas de cenários já usados em filmes A, citações que tiveram outros sentidos" (Lopes 224).

[105] We must, of course, admit that Abreu's world is postmodern in the widest sense of the term. Frizzi calls the novel, "very postmodern in its often campy and wide-ranging cultural references" and continues by noting, "another typically postmodern trait of *Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?* is the almost incessant dialogue in maintains with other texts" (Frizzi 188, 191). These wide-ranging references help to give the novel the edge it needs, placing the narrator into a very specific time and place, forcing him to be part of a mass culture society, even if he stands apart from it as a marginal entity.

[106] In the original Portuguese, "Há muito a cultura pop constitui nossos afetos e vivencias. Não há nada escandaloso, nem é simplesmente colonização do imaginário, é só cotidiano o cruzamento das fronteiras entre erudito, pop e popular. O que importa talvez seja o imperativo da alegria [...] o mundo de fatos jornalísticos, sem afeto, sem memória, imagens substituindo umas as outras, parecendo com outras, e o mundo da ilusão" (Lopes 229).

[107] Posso sees this self-criticism as schizophrenic. He writes, "The schizophrenic act of writing and dissecting what is written, not as a paranoid act of censorship, but as a means of furthering textual production between the exercises, does not conform to the constraints of repressive – logical and tidy – signification prescribed by the dominant social order. On the contrary, making the narrative 'stutter' in this way activates lines of continuous variation within grammatical, syntactic and semantic patterns: it becomes the narrator-protagonist's source of endless transformation, of 'outlaw' narrative desiring-production" (Posso 175).

[108] When the narrator sees the transvestite Saul for the first time he notes, "Não podíamos ver o rosto dela, apenas a cabeça, parte dos ombros e um braço" ["We couldn't see her face, just her head, part of her shoulders, and one arm"] (Abreu, *OADV* 168, *WHDV* 129). In a flashback, several pages later, he describes his last meeting with the real Dulce Veiga. He remembers, "*De onde estava, via apenas seus cabelos louros caídos, despenteados, parte do ombro direito e um braço nu estendido sobre o braço de veludo verde*" ["*From where I stood I could only see her blond hair hanging in disarray, part of her right shoulder, and a bare arm stretched across the green velvet*"] (120, 131).

[109] We need to also recognize that this gay pieta is also a re-creation of one the narrator saw earlier, in Dulce's husband's version of a Nelson Rodrigues play *O beijo no asfalto* [*Kiss on the Pavement*]. The gay pieta comes at the end of the play in a scene Dulce's husband has added, "a cena que Nelson Rodriques não se atreveu a escrever" ["the scene Nelson Rodrigues didn't dare write"] (Abreu, *OADV* 144, *WHDV* 109).

[110] At the end of his encounter with Dulce's former lover, the narrator decides to pay Saul's price for information about the missing singer. Saul wants what he once gave away returned to him: a kiss. And though the journalist decides to return that long ago kiss, he recoils at what he must do. He tells us, "pensei naquela espécie de beijo que não é deleite, mas reconciliação com a própria sombra. Piedade, reverso: empatia. Talvez eu também estivesse louco. [...] Ele fechou os olho quando aproximei mais o rosto. E eu também fechei os meus, para não ver meu espelho" ["I though about the kind of kiss that isn't pleasure, but reconciliation with one's own shadow. The flipside of pity: empathy. Maybe I was crazy too. […] He closed his eyes when I brought my face closer to his. And I closed my eyes too, to keep from seeing my mirror image"] (Abreu, *OADV* 212, *WHDV* 164). This kiss is not a kiss of passion or one of gratitude or even one spurred by guilt. Instead, the kiss represents the narrator's acceptance of his own madness, of the taint of lunacy that dwells inside of him as well as in Saul. Saul is his mirror image, distorted but still visible. Yet, the narrator cannot come to reconciliation with his shadow without closing his eyes, without trying, on some level, to repudiate his connection with such a monster. He cannot accept this man as a mediator, even if they share the same madness.

Though Frizzi calls the kiss a "sort of mark of Cain, both a curse and a sign of distinction, and ultimately a symbol of acceptance and redemption," I would argue that at least this specific kiss, because of the way in which the narrator enacts it, is a symbol of *weary* acceptance and *resentful* redemption (Frizzi 193). Yes, the kiss does bring about

the narrator's eventual reunion with Dulce Veiga and, yes, it does allow him to come to terms with his own homosexual urges. Yet, the narrator is begrudging with this kiss, does not give it away easily, as he does when he passes it on to his co-worker earlier in the novel. And Saul does not stay the narrator's mirror image for long. As the meeting between the two comes to an end, Saul breaks his connection with the narrator. He begins to become manic, yelling about wires and sparks, references to his torture at the hands of the old government. He tries to attack the narrator. Then he bangs into a dresser, destroying a mirror. The narrator remarks, "sete anos de azar, pensei ainda, mas não para mim, não tinha sido eu" ["seven years bad luck, I thought again, but not for me, I didn't do it"] (Abreu, *OADV* 214, *WHDV* 166). The symbolism of the mirror image is broken here – the two are not alike after all.

[111] In the original Portuguese, "As aparições camp de Dulce oscilam entre um recurso banal de filme policial e o sublime no cotidiano, o sublime no artificial" (Lopes 233).

[112] The English translation takes small liberties with Abreu's text, translating *seu cantor* (her singer) as *the singer of her praise*, which changes the poetics of the lines and the emphasis on the narrator's role as a creator and an artist. The English sets the narrator up as an obsessed fan, not as a troubled artist.

[113] In the original Portuguese, "A Dulce Veiga do romance é, em grande medida, uma aparição, um fantasma, uma projeção – tanto no sentido psicanalítico como no cinematográfico" (Couto 7).

[114] In the original Portuguese, "Ela atua como uma diva recolhida, afastada de seu publico, mas ainda assim uma diva. O filme continua também apesar do desejo de vida simples, historias simples, da experiência concreta" (Lopes 221-222).

[115] In the original Portuguese, "Ele se transformara nela. Agora, ele era uma estrela. Me ajoelho" (Lopes 242).

[116] In the original Portuguese, "O protagonista canta seu nome no final, mas não o diz. O escritor não o diz. (Lopes 242).

[117] The English translation of the Portuguese text here unfortunately loses some of the ambiguity of Abreu's words. When the narrator hears his name he states, "Parecia meu nome" and then says, "Bonito, era meu nome" (Abreu, *OADV* 238). Literally translated, these phrases say *It seemed to be my name* and *Beautiful, it was my name*. Frizzi's translation chooses to incorporate one of the connotations of the second phrase, abandoning others, including the hint of doubt that is in the original Portuguese. Had the comma not been in the original, Frizzi's translation would be spot on. But because of the comma, doubt creeps in. The narrator could simply have decided that he heard his name, making his hope a reality.

[118] The only time the narrator tries to come to terms with his madness, or even acknowledge his madness, occurs when he tries to solve a children's game, a maze with a tiny mercurial ball that needs to find its way to the center. The journalist writes,

> Colocar a gota inteira dentro do labirinto, sem que se dividisse em muitas outras, exigia concentração absoluta e quase total imobilidade. Esperei até chegar em casa, de repente tinha-se tornado questão de vida ou morte conseguir aquilo. De vida ou morte era exagero, mas de sanidade ou loucura, não.
>
> Chegar ao centro, sem partir-se em mil fragmentos pelo caminho. Completo, total. Sem deixar pedaço algum para trás (Abreu, *OADV* 202).
>
> [Getting the whole drop inside the maze without it breaking into many others required absolute concentration and almost complete immobility. I waited until I got home, suddenly succeeding in doing that had become a matter of life or death. Life or death was an exaggeration, but sanity or madness, no.
>
> To reach the center, without breaking up in a thousand fragments on the way. Complete, total. Without leaving any pieces behind (Abreu, *WHDV* 157).]

The narrator does finally finish the maze, getting the drop to the center in one piece. The drop, however, takes a strange form, appearing like the astronomical sign for Pluto.

[119] Gartman goes on to note, "In the 1980s, many cities that were devastated by plant closings and corporate flight desperately searched for a new strategy for renewal. Many tried to capture some of the new wealth by attracting the prosperous classes back downtown with consumption and entertainment spectacles. Convention centers, shopping malls, historic restorations, and restaurant districts were developed to encourage the yuppies not only to shop and eat but also to live downtown. Office buildings and corporate headquarters were also part of this renewal, but the whole package was generally wrapped in a style of decoration and diversity that was an intensification of the earlier consumer culture. Much of this new urban construction was consumption-oriented and sought to give people the diversity and excitement that their working lives lacked" (Gartman 134).

[120] Several critics decry the fact that the novel has no psychological underpinning for Bateman's madness. Terry Teachout, in his review of the novel, looks at Bateman's condo as an indication of Bateman's irreality as a real psychotic. Teachout writes, "A graduate of Exeter and Harvard, he displays a poster of Oliver North in his West Side apartment, and prefers not to blow away his girlfriends with Soviet-made automatic weapons. Anyone who knows anything about serial killers knows that all of this is perfect nonsense. They are weak, nondescript, maladjusted loners who kill women in order to satisfy their twisted sexual longings, not Masters of the Universe with a taste for human flesh" (Teachout 1).

[121] The controversy, because of the moral outcry, soon became entangled with questions concerning censorship. Norman Mailer, in a response to those who would ban the book,

tried to defend it. Eberly states, "Mailer argued that the book should be defended because talented authors have the right to create whatever they want" (Eberly 124). This argument was taken up by many others, who claimed that though Ellis's book was not, perhaps, pure literature, it is the author's right to create that must be defended. Thus, Ellis's book must be defended as well. Eberly also notes, however, that Mailer's article does not consider *American Psycho* "artful enough to warrant enduring its extreme violence" (124). Though on a rhetorical level *American Psycho* had to be defended, its artistry could be put in doubt. In Eberly's terms, "Mailer's primary criterion for judging the novel was his sense of the artistry of its author" (120). Mailer thus states, in Eberly words, "*American Psycho* rests squarely on the line between art and its opposite, whatever that is" (123). For Mailer, then, and for many other critics, the text is important because reader reactions to the novel raise questions about society and censorship, but its actual content, style, and tone do not allow it to be a book worth reading.

[122] Paul Dekker and Peter Ester, in their study "The Political Distinctiveness of Young Professionals: 'Yuppies' or 'New Class'?," define what the term yuppie connotes. They write, "Yuppies belong to the 'baby boom generation,' that is, the people born between 1946 and 1966. They are young, live in large towns and cities, work as professionals in better types of jobs; they have high incomes, are career conscious, combine working hard with a hedonistic lifestyle; reject ideological concepts and political or social involvement; place a strong emphasis on health and physical fitness; are materialistic and nonconformist; spend money freely on preferably exclusive products; are sensitive to status, prestige, power, money, and recognition; are preoccupied with their own material prosperity; are highly permissive in terms of attitudes and values; and are politically liberal but economically conservative" (Dekker 310).

[123] We can see this if we look at the one time Patrick comes close to being caught. While shooting a sidewalk saxophone player, Patrick is noticed by a police cruiser. A chase scene commences, with Patrick trying to flee the scene in a cab, the cops hot on his trail. When the cab driver refuses to flee, Patrick shoots him. The narration then suddenly changes to third person, with Patrick describing his actions as if he is someone else, a disinterested third party watching from a distance. He becomes the audience, watching a film of his own life. The change happens abruptly, without warning, in the middle of a sentence. Patrick watches the chase as if dreaming (which he very well could be doing), setting up the action like a scene from a movie, complete with gunfights, exploding cars and mistaken identities. We are told, "Patrick keeps thinking there should be music," a reference to Bateman's need for a soundtrack to his exploits (Ellis 349). He also mentions "guns flashing like in a movie" (350). Here, Patrick combines all he knows about how chase scenes should look and feel and works this knowledge into his account. James R. Giles, in his book *The Space of Violence*, recognizes this and writes that the incident "reads like a parody of chase scenes in innumerable urban cop movies" (Giles 170).

[124] John W. Aldridge, in his book *Talents and Technicians: Literary Chic and the New Assembly-line Fiction*, actually compares Ellis's novel with a slasher film. He writes, "It

is no more enlightening than *Nightmare on Elm Street*, and although it may be just as shocking, the shock lasts no longer and illuminates no deeper truth" (Aldridge 145).

[125] Aldridge complains, "Not only is he indistinguishable from the stagnant, object-cluttered medium through which he moves, he is exactly as vapid and, therefore, finally as meaningless. He may arouse horror and indignation, but not pity or understanding because no one ever learns what drives him, only that he is driven" (Aldridge 144). For Aldridge, Patrick can only be defined by his dissolution into the vapidity of consumerist culture. For this critic, he truly does fit in, which does not allow him to have any real psychology. This, in turn, leaves the novel as meaningless as Patrick's own life. I would argue, however, that though Patrick's need to fit is very real, his urge to be free from such a life, even if subtle and plagued by more plagiarism, gives him the semblance of depth. He cannot gain true depth because he cannot escape the pull of consumer society, but he is not totally subsumed by facelessness, as evidence by the unfocussed violence Aldridge abhors.

[126] After he kills Owen, he takes Paul's identity as well, adding it to his arsenal. He leaves a message on Paul's answering machine because "my voice sounds similar to Owen's," thus sending detectives looking for the missing man to London (Ellis 218). Later in the novel he also uses his similarity to Paul to sneak past the doorman at Paul's condo and kill several girls at Owen's home.

[127] Tanner notes that Bateman's explanations of his psychosis are "mere amalgamation[s] of stereotypes appropriated from bad movies and melodramatic novels" (Tanner 104). Even the psychoanalysis he tries to enact on himself is a form of plagiarism.

[128] Though "Sympathy for the Devil" is an iconic Rolling Stones song, U2 has become famous for covering it in their live shows. Bono usually inserts lines from the song into his own lyrics, sometimes going so far as to sing the chorus as an interlude between the end of the main set and his encore. In the early 90s, during the Zoo TV tour, Bono even donned a devil's costume and horns and sang part of each concert in the guise of Macphisto, an aging devil/rocker. He would march around the stage and spout dialogue as the character, even making phone calls to important personages, like President Bush, as the devil. Bateman must have attended the Joshua Tree tour in the late 80s and would not have seen such antics, but it is interesting to note that this connection with Bono and the devil are not as far fetched as one might think.

[129] Tanner believes that Patrick's spectatorship is a main component of his violent nature and is a key tool Ellis uses to make the reader uncomfortable. Tanner notes that the narrator uses passive voice to describe his own actions or frequently cannot remember the most gruesome aspects of his rampages. At times he can only later read the artifacts his sprees leave behind in order to understand what he has done. This remove between the narrator and his actions leads Tanner to conclude, "Bateman's portrayal of himself as a spectator of his own actions reveals the ease with which he moves from the role of character to narrator to reader of his own text" (Tanner 109). This creates a connection

between audience and narrator, for "the violence he enacts assumes a cinematic quality. What is entertainment or art or fiction to us is also entertainment or art or fiction to the psycho […]. By claiming our position as his own, the psycho closes the distance between reader and violator, exposing the act of watching as an integral part of the act of violation" (109).

WORKS CITED

Abel, Marco. *Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema and Critique After Representation.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007.

Abreu, Caio Fernando. *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?: um romance B.* 1990. Rio de Janeiro: Agir Editora Ltda., 2007.

_____. *Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?: A B-Novel.* Trans. Adria Frizzi. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000.

Adams, Robert Martin. *After Joyce: Studies in Fiction After Ulysses.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Adorno, Theodor W. and Max Horkheimer. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* 1944. Trans. John Cumming. New York: Continuum, 1997.

Aldridge, John W. *Talents and Technicians: Literary Chic and the New Assembly-line Fiction.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992.

Alford, C. Fred. "Mastery and Retreat: Psychological Sources of the Appeal of Ronald Reagan." *Political Psychology* 9.4 (1988): 571-589.

Allen, William Rodney. *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut.* Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991.

Altman, Rick. *Film/Genre.* London: British Film Institute, 1999.

Amícola, José. *Manuel Puig y la tela que atrapa al lector.* Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor Latinoamericano S.R.L., 1992.

Arenas, Fernando. *Utopias of Otherness: Nationhood and Subjectivity in Portugal and Brazil.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

_____. "Writing after Paradise and Before a Possible Dream: Brazil's Caio Fernando Abreu." *Luso-Brazilian Review* 36.2 (1999): 13-21.

Armstrong, Piers. *Third World Literary Fortunes: Brazilian Culture and its International Reception.* New Jersey: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1999.

Barchilon, José. "Introduction." *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason.* Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Vintage Books, 1988.

Barnett, Steve and JoAnn Magdoff. "Beyond Narcissism in American Culture of the 1980s." *Cultural Anthropology* 1.4 (1986): 413-424.

Bellamy, Joe David. *Literary Luxuries: American Writing at the E d of the Millennium.* Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1995.

Bloom, Harold. "Introduction." *Walker Percy.* New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986.

Boldy, Steven. "Review." *The Modern Language Review* 93.3 (1998): 872-873.

Bordwell, David. "The classical Hollywood style, 1917-1969." *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960.* David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

Borge, Jason. "Advances de Hollywood: introducción crítica." *Advances de Hollywood: Crítica cinematográfica en Latinoamérica, 1915-1945.* Rosario, Argentina: Beatriz Viterbo, 2005.

Broderick, Damien. *Reading by Starlight: Post-modern Science Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Broer, Lawrence R. *Sanity Plea: Schizophrenia in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1994.

Colás, Santiago. *Postmodernity in Latin America: The Argentine Paradigm*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994.

Couto, José Geraldo. "O cinema moderno de Caio F." *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?: um romance B*. Rio de Janeiro: Agir Editora Ltda., 2007.

Dauster, Frank. "The Wounded Vision: *Aura, Zona Sagrada,* and *Cumpleaños*." *A Critical Review: Carlos Fuentes*. Ed. Robert Brody and Charles Rossman. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982. 106-120.

Davis, Kimberly Chabot. *Postmodern Texts and Emotional Audiences*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2007.

Davis, Todd F. "Apocalyptic Grumbling: Postmodern Humanism in the Work of Kurt Vonnegut." *At Millennium's End: New Essays on the Work of Kurt Vonnegut*. Ed. Kevin Alexander Boon. New York: State University of New York Press, 2001.

Dekker, Paul and Peter Ester. "The Political Distinctiveness of Young Professionals: 'Yuppies' or 'New Class'?" *Political Psychology*. 11.2 (1990): 309-330.

Derrida, Jacques. "'To do Justice to Freud': The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis." Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault, Michael Naas. *Critical Inquiry* 20.2 (1994): 227-266.

Desmond, John F. *Walker Percy's Search for Community*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004.

Díaz, Nancy Gray. *Metamorphosis to Animal Form in Modern Latin American Narrative*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988.

Dupuy, Edward J. *Autobiography in Walker Percy: Repetition, Recovery, and Redemption*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996.

Eberly, Rosa A. *Citizen Critics: Literary Public Spheres*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000.

Eco, Umberto. *On Literature*. Trans. Martin McLaughlin. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2004.

Echevarria, Roberto Gonzalez. "Man Without a Life." *New York Times* 31 August 1997. 1 April 2008 <www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/31/reviews/970831.31gonz01.html - 23k>.

Eldridge, David: "The Generic American Psycho." Journal of American Studies 42.1 (2008): 19-33.

Ellis, Bret Easton. *American Psycho*. New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1991.

Faro de Castro, Marcus and Maria Izabel Valladao de Carvalho "Globalization and Recent Political Transitions in Brazil." *International Political Science Review* 24.4 (2003): 465-490.

Felman, Shoshana. "Madness and Philosophy or Literature's Reason." *Yale French Studies* 52 (1975): 206-228.

Fiedler, Leslie. *What Was Literature?: Class Culture and Mass Society*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.

_____. "The Divine Stupidity of Kurt Vonnegut." *Kurt Vonnegut: Images and Representations*. Ed. Marc Leeds and Peter J. Reed. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000.

Fiske, John. "The Cultural Economy of Fandom." *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. Ed. Lisa A. Lewis. London: Routledge, 1992. 30-50.

Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. 1965. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Vintage Books, 1988.

_____. "Madness, the Absence of Work." Trans. Peter Strastny, Deniz Sengel. *Critical Inquiry* 21.2 (1995): 290-298.

Franco, Jean. "Narrator, Author, Superstar: Latin American Narrative in the Age of Mass Culture." *Critical Passions: Selected Essays*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.

Frizzi, Adria. "Afterword: Of Cabbages and Kings." *Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?: A B-Novel*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000.

Fuentes, Carlos. *Zona Sagrada*. 1967. Mexico: siglo xxi editores, 2000.

_____. *Holy Place*. Trans. Suzanne Jill Levine. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972.

Gacría Canclini, Néstor. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity.* Trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

Galindo, Jorge Luis. *El cine mexicano en la novela mexicana reciente (1967-1990)*. Madrid: Editorial Pliegos, 2003.

Gartman, David. "Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Post-Fordism?" *The Sociological Quarterly* 39.1 (1998): 119-137.

Giles, David. *Illusions of Immortality: A Psychology of Fame and Celebrity*. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000.

Giles, James R. *The Space of Violence*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006.

Goldchluk, Graciela. "Una literatura rara." *La literatura es una película: revisiones sobre Manuel Puig*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1997.

Gómez-Lara, Rubén L. *Intertextualidad generativa en El beso de la mujer araña, de Manuel Puig*. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1996.

Gyurko, Lanin A. "The Myth of Ulysses in Fuentes' 'Zona Sagrada.'" *The Modern Language Review* 69.2 (1974): 316-324.

Hardy, John Edward. *The Fiction of Walker Percy*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

Harper, Phillip Brian. *Framing the Margins: The Social Logic of Postmodern Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Helmuth, Chalene. *The Postmodern Fuentes*. Lewisberg: Bucknell University Press, 1997.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Hyman, Stanley Edgar. "Moviegoing and Other Intimacies." Review. *Critical Essays on Walker Percy*. Ed. J. Donald Crowley and Sue Mitchell Crowley. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1989.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, Duke University Press, 1991.

Jencks, Charles. *The New Paradigm in Architecture: The Language of Post-Modernism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

Jenson, Joli. "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization." *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. Ed. Lisa A. Lewis. London: Routledge, 1992. 9-29.

Kazin, Alfred. "The Pilgrimage of Walker Percy." *Critical Essays on Walker Percy*. Ed. J. Donald Crowley and Sue Mitchell Crowley. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1989.

Larsen, Neil. "Latin America: The View from Comparative Literature," *Ideologies and Literature* 4.16 (1983): 144-148.

_____. *Reading North by South: On Latin American Literature, Culture and Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

Lavers. Norman. *Pop culture into Art: The Novels of Manuel Puig*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988.

Lawson, Lewis A. *Following Percy: Essays on Walker Percy's Work*. New York: Whitston Publishing Company, 1988.

_____. *Still Following Percy*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996.

Lehmann, Chris. *Revolt of the Masscult*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003

Lopes, Denilson. *O homem que amava rapazes e outro ensaios*. Rio de Janeiro: Aeroplano, 2002.

Lupack, Barbara Tepa. *Insanity as Redemption in Contemporary American Fiction: Inmates Running the Asylum*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1995.

Markoff, John and Silvio R. Duncan Baretta. "Economic Crisis and Regime Change in Brazil: The 1960s and the 1980s." *Comparative Politics* 22.4 (1990): 421-444.

Marshall, P. David. *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Martín Barbero, Jesús. "Experiencia audiovisual y desorden cultural." *Cultura, medios y sociedad*. Ed. Jesús Martín Barbero and Fabio López de la Roche. Colombia: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1998.

McFague, Sally. "The Parabolic in Faulkner, O'Connor, and Percy." *Critical Essays on Walker Percy*. Ed. J. Donald Crowley and Sue Mitchell Crowley. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1989.

Merrim, Stephanie. "Through the Film Darkly: Grade 'B' Movies and Dreamwork in 'Tres tristes tigres' and 'El beso de la mujer araña.'" *Modern Language Studies* 15.4 (1985): 300-312.

Morse, Donald E. *The Novels of Kurt Vonnegut: Imagining Being an American*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003.

Mowry, George E. and Blaine A. Brownell. *The Urban Nation: 1920-1980*. Revised Edition. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

Mustazza, Leonard. *Forever Pursuing Genesis: The Myth of Eden in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1990.

Nealon, Jeffrey T. "Exteriority and Appropriation: Foucault, Derrida, and the Discipline of Literary Criticism." *Cultural Critique* 21 (1992): 97-119.

Nel, Philip. *The Avant-garde and American Postmodernity: Small Incisive Shocks*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2002.

Ohmann, Richard. "The Shaping of a Canon: U.S. Fiction, 1960-1975." *Critical Inquiry* 10.1 (1983): 199-223.

Olster, Stacey. *The Trash Phenomenon: Contemporary Literature, Popular Culture, and the Making of the American Century*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003.

Percy, Walker. *The Moviegoer*. 1960. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.

Pindell, Richard. "Basking in the Eye of the Storm: The Esthetics of Loss in Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*." *Critical Essays on Walker Percy*. Ed. J. Donald Crowley and Sue Mitchell Crowley. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1989.

Posso, Karl. *Artful Seduction: Homosexuality and the Problematics of Exile*. Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2003.

Poteat, Patricia Lewis. *Walker Percy and the Old Modern Age: Reflections on Language, Argument, and the Telling of Stories*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985.

Puig, Manuel. *El beso de la mujer araña*. 1976. New York: Vintage Español, 1994.
_____. *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. Trans. Thomas Colchie. 1979. New York: Vintage International. 1991.

Ramírez Mattei, Aida Elsa. *La narrativa de Carlos Fuentes: Afán por la armonía en la multiplicidad antagónica del mundo*. Puerto Rico: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1983.

Reed, Peter J. "Hurting 'Til It Laughs: The Painful-Comic Science Fiction Stories of Kurt Vonnegut." *Kurt Vonnegut: Images and Representations*. Ed. Marc Leeds and Peter J. Reed. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000.

Rostagno, Irene. *Searching for Recognition: The Promotion of Latin American Literature in the United States*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997.

Schoene, Berthold. "Serial Masculinity: Psychopathology and Oedipal Violence in Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho." *Modern Fiction Studies* 54.2 (2008): 378-397.

Shaw, Patrick W. *The Modern American Novel of Violence*. Troy, NY: Whitson Publishing Group, 2000.

Simmons, Philip E. "Toward the Postmodern Historical Imagination: Mass Culture in Walker Percy's 'The Moviegoer' and Nicholson Baker's 'The Mezzanine.'" *Contemporary Literature* 33.4 (1992): 601-624.

Simpson, Josh. "'This Promising of Great Secrets': Literature, Ideas, and the (Re)Invention of Reality in Kurt Vonnegut's God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, Slaughterhouse-Five, and Breakfast of Champions Or 'Fantasies of an Impossibly Hospitable World': Science Fiction and Madness in Vonnegut's Troutean Trilogy." *Critique* 45:3 (2004): 261-271.

Speranza, Graciela. *Manuel Puig: Después del fin de la literatura*. Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2000.

Stabb, Martin S. *Borges Revisited*. Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1991.

Sweeny, Mary K. *Walker Percy and the Postmodern World*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1987.

Tamas, Benyei. "Leakings; Reappropriating Science Fiction – The Case of Kurt Vonnegut." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 11.4 (2001): 432-453.

Tanner, Laura E. *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University P, 1994.

Tanner, Tony. "*The Moviegoer* and American Fiction: Wonder and Alienation." *Walker Percy*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986.

Teachout, Terry. "American Psycho." *National Review*. June 24, 1991. Jan 05 2009. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1282/is_n11_v43/ai_10874375.

Unruh, Vicky. *Latin American Vanguards: The Art of Contentious Encounters*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994.

Uphaus, Robert W. "Expected Meaning in Vonnegut's Dead-End Fiction." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 8.2 (1975): 164-174.

Villalobos, José Pablo. "Review: Carols Fuentes: Caught in the Modern/Postmodern Crossfire." *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos* 16.2 (2000): 401-409.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Breakfast of Champions or Goodbye Blue Monday!*. 1973. New York: Dell, 1991.

Walker, Jeanne Murray. "Science Fiction: A Commentary on Itself as Lies." *Modern Language Studies* 8.3 (1978): 29-37.

Williams, Raymond L. "Fuentes the Modern: Fuentes the Postmodern." *Hispania* 85.2 (2002): 209-218.

Zamora, Lois Parkinson. "Clichés and Defamiliarization in the Fiction of Manuel Puig and Luis Rafael Sánchez." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 41.4 (1983): 421-436.